



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Jeni LeGon Papers

NMAH.AC.0829

Vanessa Broussard-Simmons

2002

Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
P.O. Box 37012  
Suite 1100, MRC 601  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012  
Business Number: Phone: 202-633-3270  
Fax Number: Fax: 202-786-2453  
archivescenter@si.edu  
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Jeni LeGon Papers
<b>Date:</b>	1930-2002, undated
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0829
<b>Creator:</b>	LeGon, Jeni, 1916- (Author)
<b>Extent:</b>	1 Cubic foot (3 boxes, includes photographs)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	Collection documents the career of Jeni LeGon as a dancer, dance instructor, and actress.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to the Archives Center by Jeni LeGon in 2002.

### Related Materials

Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program Collection (AC0808)  
Ernie Smith Jazz Film Collection (AC0491)  
Program in African American Culture Collection (AC0408)  
Frank Schiffman Apollo Theatre Collection (AC0540)

### Processing Information

Collection processed by Vanessa Broussard- Simmons, archivist, 2002.

### Preferred Citation

Jeni LeGon Papers, 1930s-2002, undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

### Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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## Biographical / Historical

Jeni LeGon was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1916. Her long, successful career as an African American dancer and actress began in musical theatre and vaudeville. In the 1930s she traveled across the southern United States performing first with the Whitman Sisters company and then with her half-sister, Willa Mae Lane, as the LeGon and Lane song-and-dance team. By 1935, LeGon was working under contract with Fox Studios, RKO Pictures, and MGM performing with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Waters and Al Jolson, and Fred Astaire. Throughout the years she performed on Broadway and in other theaters and clubs including the Apollo, Cafe de Paris, Howard, Paramount, and Lincoln. Beginning in the 1950s she offered dance instruction in Los Angeles, California at the Jeni LeGon Dance Studio and Drama and Dance Playhouse; and in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she taught tap and pointe. She died on December 7, 2012 at the age of ninety-six.

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## Scope and Contents

Collection documents LeGon's career as a dancer, dance instructor, and actress. Materials include biographical information, correspondence, photographs, early travel itineraries, schedules, personal calendars, printed advertisements, invitations to dance events, programs, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and awards. The collection is arranged into four series: Series 1, Biographical Information and Publicity, 1930s; Series 2, Theatre and Motion Picture Film, 1935-1945, undated; Series 3, Dance Instruction and Performances, 1953-2002, undated; and Series 4: Tributes and Awards, 1979-2002.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into four series:

Series 1, Biographical Information and Publicity

Series 2, Theatre and Motion Picture Film, 1935-1945

Series 3, Dance Instruction and Performances, 1953-2002, undated

Series 4, Tributes and Awards, 1979-2002

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Actresses
- African American women
- African American women entertainers
- Dance in motion pictures, television, etc.
- Dance, Black
- Dancers
- Tap dancing

Types of Materials:

- Advertisements -- 20th century

Clippings  
Itineraries  
Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.  
Photographs -- 20th century  
Programs -- 1930-2000

Names:

Robinson, Bill, 1878-1949

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical Information and Publicity, 1930s, undated

Scope and Contents: Primarily consists of magazine articles relating to her life and career. In addition, there are photographs of LeGon used for publicity purposes.

Box 1, Folder 1            Articles

Box 3, Folder 1            Articles

Box 1, Folder 2            Publicity photographs  
[Image\(s\): 1 2 Publicity photographs](#)

Box 3, Folder 9            Publicity photographs, undated

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## Series 2: Theatre and Motion Picture Film, 1935-1945, 1935-1945

Scope and Contents: Documents LeGon's early theatre and movie performances primarily in specialty dance scenes and occasionally in a credited or uncredited role. Materials are arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 4	Broadway Melody, 1935
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">Hooray for Love, 1935</a>
Box 3, Folder 3	Hooray for Love, 1935
Box 1, Folder 6	<a href="#">Dishonour Bright, 1936</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	Follow the Sun, 1936
Box 1, Folder 7	Ali Baba Goes to Town, 1937
Box 3, Folder 4	Ali Baba Goes to Town, 1937
Map-folder 1	Lincoln Theater, 1938
Box 1, Folder 8	Early to Bed, 1943
Box 3, Folder 4	Hi De Ho, 1945

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## Series 3: Dance Instruction and Performances, 1953-2002, undated

**Box 3**

Scope and Contents: Includes information relating to her dance instruction work with the Ballet Teens Dance Company, Urban Gateways school program, and Troupe One Youth Theater Group to name a few. Materials also relate to LeGon's dance performances at festivals and clubs. In addition, there is information relating to Jazz Caribe a touring troupe she founded. Of particular interest is correspondence with the Ed Sullivan Show relating to a possible show performance. Materials are arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 9	Ballet Teens Dance Company, Los Angeles, California, 1953
Box 1, Folder 10	<a href="#">Ed Sullivan Show, correspondence relating to possible show performance, 1960</a>
Box 1, Folder 11	<a href="#">Jazz Caribe, 1965</a>
Box 1, Folder 12	Calendar, 1966
Box 1, Folder 13	Calendar, 1967
Box 1, Folder 14	Urban Gateways school program, 1967-1968
Box 1, Folder 15	<a href="#">Jazz Caribe, 1968</a>
Box 1, Folder 16	<a href="#">Jazz Caribe, 1969</a>
Box 1, Folder 17	Jazz Caribe, 1972
Box 1, Folder 20	Troupe One Youth Theater Group, 1970s
Box 1, Folder 21	Troupe One Youth Theatre Group, 1976-1985
Box 1, Folder 18	Jazz Caribe, 1977
Box 1, Folder 22	Troupe One Youth Theatre Group, 1979
Box 1, Folder 23	<a href="#">Roots and All That Jazz, 1982</a>
Box 3, Folder 6	Pelican Players, 1982
Box 3, Folder 3	Troupe One, 1984
Box 3, Folder 5	Troupe One, circa 1984?
Box 1, Folder 24	Pelican Players, 1985
Box 1, Folder 25	Jazz Cinq, 1985-1988



Box 1, Folder 26	<a href="#">Roots and All That Jazz, 1986</a>
Box 1, Folder 27	All Tap Nightclub Review, 1989-1991
Box 1, Folder 28	National Tap Dance Festival, 1993
Box 2, Folder 3	African American Film Marketplace Honor, 1998
Box 1, Folder 29	New Orleans Jazz Dance Festival, 2001
Box 1, Folder 29	Festivals and Performances, 2002
Box 3, Folder 7	Masters of Tap, 2002
Box 1, Folder 19	Photographs, Jazz Caribe, undated
Box 3, Folder 8	Private club performances, undated

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## Series 4: Tributes and Awards, 1979-2002

Box 1, Folder 30	<a href="#">Leo Birthday week, 1979</a>
Box 1, Folder 31	Articles about achievement, 1984
Box 1, Folder 32	Articles about achievement, 1987
Box 1, Folder 33	<a href="#">Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, 1987</a>
Box 1, Folder 34	<a href="#">Articles about achievement, 1988</a>
Box 1, Folder 35	Articles about achievement, 1989
Box 1, Folder 36	Marla Gibbs "Choice Award," 1992
Box 2, Folder 1	Article relating to book, From Harlem to Hollywood, 1995
Box 2, Folder 2	Articles about achievement, 1997
Box 2, Folder 4	Articles about Living in a Great Big Way film, 1999
Box 2, Folder 5	<a href="#">Tributes, 2000</a>
Box 2, Folder 6	Flo-Bert Lifetime Achievement Awards, 2001
Box 2, Folder 7	<a href="#">Honorary Degree of Doctor of Performing Arts, Oklahoma City University, 2002</a>
Box 2, Folder 8	Beacon of Freedom Award, 2002
	Articles about achievement, 2002
Box 3, Folder 9	Tributes, 1999-2002 Notes: Consists of magazine articles relating to her achievements, recognition for her work, and numerous awards including the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, Marla Gibbs Choice Award, Beacon of Freedom Award, and Tap Dance Hall of Fame. LeGon was also a recipient of an honorary degree from Oklahoma City University. Materials are arranged in chronological order.

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