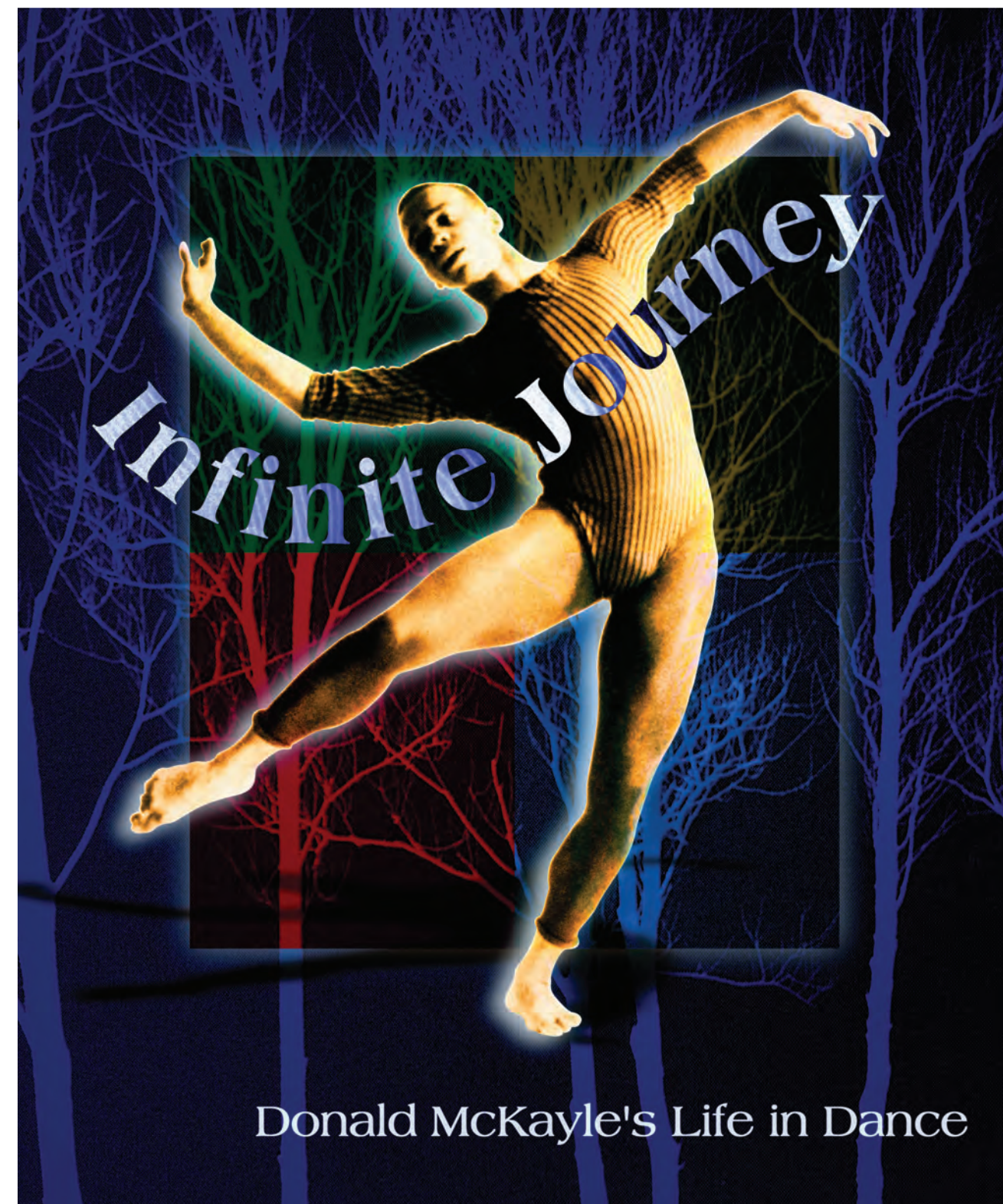




Infinite Journey

Donald
McKayle's
Life in Dance

An exhibit in the
Muriel Ansley Reynolds Gallery
UC Irvine Main Library
May - September 1998

Checklist prepared by Laura Clark Brown

The UCI Libraries
Irvine, California
1998

Infinite Journey

Donald
McKayle's
Life in Dance

Donald McKayle, performer, teacher and choreographer. His dances embody the deeply-felt passions of a true master. Rooted in the American experience, he has choreographed a body of work imbued with radiant optimism and poignancy. His appreciation of human wit and heroism in the face of pain and loss, and his faith in redemptive powers of love endow his dances with their originality and dramatic power. Donald McKayle has created a repertory of American dance that instructs the heart.

-Inscription on Samuel H. Scripps/American Dance Festival Award

World-renowned choreographer and UCI Professor of Dance Donald McKayle received the prestigious Samuel H. Scripps/American Dance Festival Award, “established to honor the great choreographers who have dedicated their lives and talent to the creation of our modern dance heritage,” in 1992. The “Sammy” was awarded to McKayle for a lifetime of performing, teaching and creating American modern dance, an “infinite journey” of both creativity and teaching. *Infinite Journey* is the title of a concert dance piece McKayle created in 1991 to honor the life of a former student; the title also befits McKayle's own life.

McKayle began his career in New York City, initially studying dance with the New Dance Group and later dancing professionally for noted choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Sophie Maslow, and Anna Sokolow. In 1951 he founded Donald McKayle and Company, and he created his landmark works, *Games*, *Rainbow*, *Round My Shoulder*, and *District Storyville* between 1950 and 1962.

Prelude

He continued to perform, teach and create on the West Coast as artistic director of the Los Angeles Inner City Repertory Dance Company in the early 1970's. McKayle has not directed his own company since 1973, but his creative life nevertheless continues to flourish, and his master works have entered the repertoires of major American dance companies.

Donald McKayle considers the theater his home, whether he is choreographing concert dance or directing a musical. His career has taken him to Broadway—where he choreographed *Golden Boy*, directed and choreographed *Raisin*, and conceived and choreographed *Sophisticated Ladies*—and beyond. McKayle has worked in film and television as well, choreographing dance sequences in *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* and *The Minstrel Man* and directing the first episodes of the television series *Good Times*.

Today Donald McKayle the artist and professor continues to direct musical theater, teach dance, and create new works for dance companies around the world, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and Limón Dance Company. He also has created works for the UCI Department of Dance, where he serves as artistic director. In 1997 McKayle became the first creative artist to receive the UC Irvine Distinguished Faculty Lectureship Award for Research.

This exhibit illustrates only threads of Donald McKayle's eclectic career and life in dance, emphasizing his early work in concert dance and theater. Most materials in the exhibit, including photographs, costume designs, posters and programs, are from the Donald McKayle archive in the UCI Libraries' Department of Special Collections. A number of items were generously loaned by Donald McKayle. *Infinite Journey* was curated by Laura Clark Brown, Manuscripts Librarian in the Department of Special Collections.

As McKayle's own words so eloquently describe his work and his passion for dance, quotations from his soon-to-be-published autobiography (indicated by italicized statements in quotes) have been used throughout the exhibit.

Donald McKayle was born in New York City on July 6, 1930. A first-generation American and the son of Jamaican parents, he grew up in Harlem. The McKayles, a tightly knit, loving family, were part of the New York West Indian community, which offered social interaction and cultural awareness to a young boy. McKayle first danced in public at a West Indian social activity, waltzing his mother across the Renaissance Ballroom dance floor.

He attended DeWitt Clinton High School, graduating in 1947. While in high school, McKayle showed a passion for both folk music and American and African-American history. As a member of a high school chapter of the Frederick Douglass Society, he “*discovered not only Frederick Douglass, but Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner ...*” He belonged to a youth group called Club L'Ouverture which held folk dances and “sings,” and on weekends he went to hootenannies and danced Latin at the Grand Plaza. His choreography later drew from these early experiences and interests.

McKayle's early years in New York City, including his growing interests in the performing arts and folk music, were a prelude to his dance career, which began in his senior year in high school when he won a scholarship to New York's New Dance Group. Donald McKayle's life in dance had begun.

1. ***I Will Dance With You*** by Donald McKayle.
Pages from manuscript autobiography, 1994.
2. **Donald McKayle's senior hat** 1947.
3. **DeWitt Clinton High School yearbook** 1947.
4. **Donald McKayle and mother**
Photograph, circa 1931.
5. **Donald McKayle with father and brother Phillip**
Photograph, circa 1938.

McKayle the Dancer

"Graham with Sophie Maslow ... Humphrey Weidman with Nona Shurman ... Ballet with Nina Golovina, Afro-Caribbean with Pearl Primus ... Haitian with Jean Leon Destine, Hindu with Hadassah ... My class schedule was over-ambitious and so was I, eager to experience everything, a sponge for learning."

After winning a scholarship to the New Dance Group, McKayle surrendered this life to dance. The Group was a *"large democratic artists' organization"* with first-generation disciples of modern dance pioneers Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm and Charles Weidman. He had the opportunity to study under established choreographers, including Sophie Maslow, Pearl Primus and Jean Erdman.

In McKayle's second year of formal dance training, the New Dance Group embarked on a concert season which thrust him into performance. He danced in Sophie Maslow's *Folksay* and *Champion* and in Jean Erdman's *Four-Four Time*.

The New York City dance world in the 1950's was fluid and McKayle moved within it easily, dancing with and for the masters, including Anna Sokolow, Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham. He won a scholarship to study at Graham's School of Contemporary Dance, and he toured Asia with her company from 1955 to 1956. He also performed on Broadway and television. *"My life as a professional dancer in New York City was beginning to find its eclectic shape. I moved with liquidity from one modern dance company to another. I performed in increasingly varied arenas: dance, opera, ballet, television, musical theatre."*

While developing a busy professional dance career, McKayle began to choreograph, first for himself and later for groups. In 1951 he founded Donald McKayle and Company and *"was suddenly the bright new light on the dance horizon, the subject of newspaper articles and magazine feature stories, the director of my own dance company, and a member of four other dance companies."*

6. **Portrait of Donald McKayle.**
Photograph, 1960.

Songs of the Forest

"Songs of the Forest ... grew out of my studies of Balinese dance with Hadassah, and the orchestral and pictorial depictions of the island culture by Colin McPhee and Miguel Covarrubias ... The colorful composer, Lou Harrison ... selected several melodies from the children's songs used in Games and developed them into little studies that shimmered with the sounds of Bali ... the result was a delightful triad. I designed [my] costume after the wonderful Covarrubias drawings and executed it with careful attention to the most minute detail. I was especially proud of the headdress with golden flowers mounted on springs that danced in a continuous vibration as I moved."

The original *Songs of the Forest* was a solo work created by McKayle for himself. At the New Dance Group he had studied Hindu and Balinese dance with Hadassah, and he performed this Balinese solo in 1950. He developed a group dance of the same title for Donald McKayle and Company in 1952.

Even in the thriving New York dance world, production funding was scarce and dancers were poor. McKayle often undertook work on the side, including teaching and costume design and assembling. It was *"a one-man operation costume construction sideline that I ran on pure self belief and need [to be] housed, clothed, and fed."* He also made the costumes for his early solo and company works.

- 7-10. **Four costume designs for *Songs of the Forest*.**
Drawn by Donald McKayle, 1952.

Repertory

Donald McKayle finds the whole composing process something like figuring out a combination lock. He starts with the theatrical frame of a piece and then works away at his 'loads of ideas.'

—Marcia Marks in *Dance Magazine* (February 1963)

Donald McKayle created the works that have remained the heart and soul of his repertory very early in his lengthy career, choreographing his seminal pieces *Games*, *Rainbow Round My Shoulder*, and *District Storyville* between 1950 and 1962. These works were created for Donald McKayle and Company, but they are now found in the repertories of major modern dance companies, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

11. **“The subject is people,”** by Marcia Marks.
In *Dance Magazine* (February 1963).

Games

“Although the dance reflected many aspects of childhood and was set in a specific genre indigenous to various regions of the United States, it was rooted in the universal truth that play is the serious business of being a child. The chants, play parties, ring games, shouts that were chosen to parallel the choreographic scenario were selected from my own childhood experiences, from field recordings of children’s game songs ... and from songs sung to me as a toddler by my mother.”

Games premiered in 1951 at the Hunter Playhouse at Hunter College. The movement depicted children’s street games and was set to a *capella* voices and shouts. It was McKayle’s first attempt at ensemble choreography, and it became his definitive work.

“I had no idea at the time, that the definitive work would emerge ... and would become a repertory staple in dance companies throughout the country, or that it would ... be designated a classic, or that it would be held to be a prime example of American heritage in dance. It was simply a work that came out of my observations and one that I needed to do at that time. It was a work that possessed a humanity and a genre that was specific and at the same time universal. It was a work true to its period and yet timeless and a work that never failed to find a receptive habitat with audiences everywhere.”

12. ***Games*, performed by the African-American Dance Ensemble at the American Dance Festival.**
Photograph, 1986.
13. **New Dance Group concert at Ziegfeld Theatre in New York City**
Flyer, 1952.
14. ***Games*, performed by Donald McKayle and Company.**
Photograph, 1955.

Vision

In my own work, I always demand a certain vibrancy, an inner vitality that communicates through the viscera, not the mind ... The senses must be reached before the mind. The reflection afterward, which is then basically a process of the mind, should ... once more awaken this sensory network. This is what I aim for in my dances.

—Donald McKayle in *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief* (1966)

Donald McKayle considers choreography and dance to be a form of communication. He seeks to express and to share his vision. His vision is theatrical, and he communicates with the audience through his choreography. As he wrote in his essay “The act of theater”, “Dance is my medium and theatre is my home.”

15. **“The Act of Theater,”** by Donald McKayle.
In *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*
(Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1966).

Her Name was Harriet

“It was a sprawling canvas of dance and drama with many details drawn from scenes in the life of Harriet Tubman, ex-slave and conductor on the Underground Railroad.”

Her Name Was Harriet, inspired by the life of Harriet Tubman, was an “epic dance-theatre work” created for Donald McKayle and Company in 1952. McKayle reworked the piece in 1953 and renamed it *They Called Her Moses*. He choreographed a solo for Alvin Ailey, who performed *They Called Her Moses* with the Company in 1953, and this solo inspired Ailey’s own masterwork *Revelations*.

16. ***Her Name Was Harriet***
Broadside, 1952.

Rainbow ‘Round my Shoulder

*I’ve got a rainbow, huh
Tied all around my shoulder, huh*
— Lyrics to “I Got a Rainbow”

Donald McKayle created his masterpiece *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder* in 1959. The piece explores the work and hope of prisoners on a chain gang, and it was set to prison and blues songs compiled by John and Alan Lomax.

“Rainbow was the prison slang for the tool used to break rock The pickaxes glistened as they were swung, sometimes creating their own fleeting rainbows ... reaching into space and quickly vanishing ... The movement was relentless and purposefully repetitive. Our bodies were being used as tools, and yet an ever-present defiance colored the movement with a sardonic and seething rage and a dangerous humanity ... The men collapsed on the ground for the midmorning break and their minds immediately filled with visions of freedom. Their varied musings were personified in the dream-figure of a woman, a composite of all their longings, all their fantasies, alluring, tender, nurturing and always just out of reach.”

The piece was an instant and unqualified success, and it remains a classic work in American modern dance.

17. **Donald McKayle and Carmen de Lavallade in *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder***
Photograph, 1964.
18. **Mary Hinkson in *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder***
Photograph, 1962.
19. **Chain gang in *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder***
Photograph, 1963.

Notation

Dance notation is a method of recording choreography similar to the musical expression documented in music scores, and Labanotation is the most common form of dance notation. In 1993 Mary Corey, chair of UCI's Department of Dance, compiled a Labanotation score for Donald McKayle's *Rainbow Round My Shoulder* as taught at the American Dance Festival that year. The score consists of the diagrams which characterize dance notation, as well as accompanying text to explain casting, lighting and other aspects of the production.

20. **Rainbow 'Round My Shoulders** Labanotation.
By Mary Corey, 1993.

Recognition

"I was the recipient of the 1963 Capezio Award. The honor which had been bestowed in former years on such notables as Martha Graham, Ruth St. Denis ... and Barbara Karinska was awarded to me at a luncheon at the St. Regis Hotel ... Mother and Dad, Aunt Alice and Uncle John sat beaming back teary eyed expressions of pride to me. Sydney Poitier presented the award in a delightful speech detailing our friendship and his appreciation for my art ..."

The Capezio award was one of the first major awards received by Donald McKayle, and he has continued to receive recognition for his art ever since. Other prestigious honors include the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award in 1992 and the Distinguished Faculty Lectureship Award for Research from the Academic Senate of the University of California, Irvine (1997). As the text of the Capezio award noted, "his translation of deeply rooted American folk materials ... into theatre dances" has earned him a place with other choreographic masters.

21. **Capezio award presented to Donald McKayle.**
Calligraphed certificate, 1963.

Daughters of the Garden

The movements are Lyric in nature and exist without regard to story, place or time. It celebrates the beauties of the human form, the awakening of the senses, and the joy in love.
—Program for the Harkness Ballet (1966)

Donald McKayle choreographed *Daughters of the Garden* for the inaugural season of the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel in 1964. He later mounted the piece for Harkness Ballet, Donald McKayle and Company, the Inner City Repertory Dance Company and the UCI Dance Department.

- 22-23. **Two costume designs for *Daughters of the Garden*.**
Drawn by Bernard Johnson, 1995.
24. **Albert Jones and Charlaine Katsuyoshi in UCI production of *Daughters of the Garden*.**
Photograph, 1995.

House of Tears

"Women ... their heads covered with white handkerchiefs and on their chests, pictures of their loved ones hung from strings around their necks ... marched silently, demanding information on ... those who had 'disappeared' ... during the military repression in Argentina ... The anguish and courage that had kept that vigil alive ... the demand and need for final closure in this terrible chapter of human history began to form into the germ of a choreographic presence."

Donald McKayle had seen this protest of post-Perón era tyranny and brutality during a trip to Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1992 he created the ballet *House of Tears* for the Cleveland Ballet, inspired by what he had seen.

25. **House of Tears**
Holograph notebook, 1992.

Music for *Burst of Fists*

Music and lyrics, particularly folk music, play an integral role in Donald McKayle's choreography. An avid fan of folk music as a young man, he "followed folk artists like Pete Seeger, Odetta, and blues singers like Leadbelly and Josh White," and he used folk songs in some of his major works. In *Games*, for example, he raided the Library of Congress' field recordings of children's songs, and his dancers, including himself, sang and shouted as the only musical accompaniment in the piece.

As a choreographer, McKayle prefers the collaborative process with living composers rather than using pre-recorded compositions. He has collaborated with several notable composers, including James Newton, C. Bernard Jackson, Dorothea Freitag, and Alan Terricciano to develop the music for many of his pieces. For *Burst of Fists* in 1966, McKayle worked with Howard Roberts to create an African-inspired music and choreography.

- 26. ***Burst of Fists.***
Music score by Howard Roberts, 1966.

District Storyville

"New Orleans, 19 and 03 ... District Storyville ... cradle of jazz ... out to the graveyard the brass bands mourned death ... coming back they screamed life ... Horn was king and the followers did mighty battle for the crown ... music from every corner of this demimonde ... 19 and 17 ... District Storyville closed forever ... but the music goes on everywhere."

*D*istrict Storyville was "a dance built around the birth of jazz in New Orleans." McKayle had become intrigued with jazz and its origins when he toured Asia with the Martha Graham Company in 1955; he heard jazz everywhere he went, and the American dancers were asked to perform "jazz dance." His search for the origins of jazz's popularity led him to "a marvelous colorful period" of early twentieth-century New Orleans which inspired his choreography. *District Storyville* is a comical dance theater piece about a New Orleans red-light-district house of ill repute and the jazz men who got their start there. It premiered in 1962.

- 27. ***District Storyville, performed by Donald McKayle and Company.***
Photograph, 1962.
- 28. **Inner City Repertory Dance Company performing "The Works of Donald McKayle" in Los Angeles, California.**
Flyer, 1973.
- 29. ***District Storyville, performed by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.***
Photograph, 1981.

Black New World

“Black New World was a full evening, composed of works that traced in chronology, selected aspects of the culture of the African Diaspora in the New World.”

McKayle produced and directed *Black New World* in 1967, a full-length production which included three of his earlier pieces, *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder*, *They Called Her Moses*, and *District Storyville*. *Black New World* premiered in New York City and then toured Europe. The ensemble included musicians and singers as well as the dancers.

- 30. **Black New World, directed by Donald McKayle and performed at Teatro Estivo in Italy**
Program, 1967.

Among Masters

His choreography radiates with genius, and his work continues to expand the heritage of American modern dance.
—Charles Reinhart at the 1992 Samuel Scripps Award Ceremony

Donald McKayle arrived in the New York City dance world in 1947 “*at the feet of masters*”, and he emerged a recognized master of modern dance less than two decades later. In his first years, he trained and danced with or for major figures and recognized modern masters. Ten years after he stepped into the world of dance, he joined two of these masters, José Limón and Anna Sokolow, as guest choreographers at the American Dance Theatre. Today, he is Resident Choreographer and Artistic Director for the Limón Dance Company.

Accolades for fifty years of creative activity continue to be showered on McKayle, but as the awards accumulate on his wall, he continues to create. The City of Denver declared three days as “Masterworks: A Tribute to Donald McKayle Days” in October 1997. As a master, he is never at a loss for work, and at nearly 68 years of age, he keeps a pace not unlike the one that he had as an energetic eighteen-year old entering a life in dance. McKayle gained a foothold in the dance world, and he has left an indelible mark.

- 31. **Proclamation presented to Donald McKayle by the City of Denver.**
Printed certificate, 1997.
- 32. **Donald McKayle, Anna Sokolow and José Limón.**
Photograph by Jack Mitchell, 1964.

Blood Memories

Blood Memories (is based) on the fact that humankind has always built civilizations around rivers because of their fecundity and the fact that they support life. The piece switches from traditional cultures to present-day cultures and the memory that exists in some of us. We're not here by spontaneous generation. We come from whole traditions.

— Donald McKayle in *The Phoenix Gazette* (July 28, 1994)

Donald McKayle choreographed the original *Blood Memories* in 1976 for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. The piece explored civilizations and life along three rivers, the Nile, the Mississippi and the Harlem estuary. In 1995 he re-staged the ballet for the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, abandoning the portion on the Harlem estuary. McKayle worked with composer Howard Roberts to develop a piece which varied in style from African drumming to American blues as the dancers moved from the Nile to the Mississippi. McKayle's wife Lea Vivante designed the costumes for the 1995 piece.

- 33-34. **Two costume designs for *Blood Memories***
Drawn by Lea Vivante, 1994.
- 35. ***Blood Memories*, performed by the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble in Denver, Colorado.**
Photograph, 1997.

Early Influences

I started in a very fertile time. Lots of things were happening. All of the big artists were in New York, and I was exposed to all of it.
—Donald McKayle in *New University* (December 2, 1991)

Martha Graham

McKayle had the opportunity to work with pioneer choreographer Martha Graham. She created a solo for him in her piece *Ardent Song*.

"[The solo was created] as an enticement to join the company and as an artistic challenge. That it was indeed. Martha's training was so all encompassing that she was able to allow company members to choreographically fill the gap in an unfinished dance work."

McKayle traveled with the Martha Graham Company on a State Department-sponsored tour of Near and Far East Asia in 1955, a tour comprised of both performances and lecture demonstrations by Graham. It was McKayle's first experience with world travel and foreign cultures, and it both impressed him and influenced his creative work.

- 36. **Martha Graham Company lecture/demonstration.**
Photograph, 1955.

Pearl Primus

“ ... The curtain opened on Pearl Primus. A beautiful vision, a carving in ebony was dancing ... The movements were powerful, yet sparse and etched in configuration. It was living sculpture on view ... A rush of pictures imprinted itself on my imagination ... ‘I want to dance like her!’ ”

Pearl Primus, a Trinidad-born dancer, choreographer and scholar of African studies, drew McKayle in to a life in dance. Seeing her powerful performances of pieces such as *African Ceremonial* and *Hard Time Blues* were watershed moments for a young McKayle. Primus, considered by many the “Mother of African-American Dance,” gave McKayle his first exposure to a dancer who “wedded African rhythms and themes to modern training.”

- 37. **Pearl Primus.**
Enlargement of undated postcard.
- 38. **Pearl Primus.**
In *Dancing Times* (November 1951).

Sophie Maslow

After seeing Primus dance, McKayle auditioned for the New Dance Group, where he won a scholarship and studied briefly under her. He also danced for Sophie Maslow, another major choreographer whom he considers both an influence and an inspiration. “*Being a part of the New Dance Group and working with Sophie was amazing.*” When he doubted his ability to forge a life in dance, Maslow reassured him “*I cannot tell you to become a dancer, but I can tell you if you want to be one, you will be one.*” It was precisely the affirmation he needed. McKayle danced in several of Maslow’s masterworks, including *Folksay*, *The Village I Knew*, and *Champion*. Folk themes saturated her choreography, and in the essay “Celebrating Sophie”, McKayle called her “one of the great humanitarian choreographers.”

The choreography and mentoring of Sophie Maslow and Pearl Primus had enormous influence on McKayle’s creative life. He adopted and adapted a similar approach to his own choreography, whereby he translated both folk and African-American themes in his choreography.

- 39. **Sophie Maslow in *Folksay*.**
“Celebrating Sophie,” in *Ballet Review* (Summer 1997).
- 40. **Mark Ryder, Donald McKayle and William Bales in *Champion***
Photograph, 1948.
- 41. **Sophie Maslow teaching *The Village I Knew* at UCI.**
Photograph, 1992.

On Broadway and Beyond

As Donald McKayle gained a solid reputation in the concert dance world as a choreographer, influential people in other theatrical realms took notice. The acclaim of his work drew the attention of Broadway producer Hillard Elkins, who invited McKayle to choreograph the dance sequences in his production of *Golden Boy*, which was to star Sammy Davis, Jr. Elkins enticed McKayle by telling him “Everyone’s talking about your jazz ballet.”

Golden Boy premiered on Broadway in 1964 and was a success; McKayle earned a Tony nomination for his choreography, and thus began another aspect of his career in the Broadway theater. In earlier years McKayle had danced on Broadway in *Bless You All*, *House of Flowers*, and *West Side Story*, and he had directed and choreographed musical theater off Broadway.

He later directed and choreographed a musical version of the hit play *Raisin in the Sun* titled simply *Raisin*. The production, starring newcomer Debbie Allen, became a success in its own right and won the Tony for best musical of 1974.

McKayle’s last endeavor on Broadway was the musical *Sophisticated Ladies* in 1981. He has also directed and choreographed numerous regional theater productions before and since his stint on Broadway; other credits include *Emperor Jones* in 1986 and *Evolution of the Blues* in 1978 and 1979. While his primary focus is dance, he enjoys working with all types of performing artists.

Hollywood also has enlisted McKayle’s talents. He choreographed dance for films, including *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, *The Great White Hope* and *The Jazz Singer*, and for television films and shows including *The Minstrel Man*, *Free to Be You and Me*, *The Strolling Twenties*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

I love the challenges intrinsic in the change from one medium to another. The creative act, whether in writing, directing or choreographing, always involves the filtering of your ideas through someone else’s talent.

—Donald McKayle in *Dance/USA Journal* (Summer 1994)

- 42. **Broadway production of *Golden Boy*.**
Souvenir program, 1964.
- 43. **Broadway production of *Raisin***
Poster, 1974.
- 44. **Debbie Allen and Joe Morton in the African dance sequence of the Broadway musical *Raisin*.**
Photograph, 1974.

Sophisticated Ladies

“Duke Ellington, along with Earl ‘Fatha’ Hines and Count Basie, comprised the royalty of the jazz world, but [Ellington’s] musical palette embraced areas that set him apart from the others ... All of this was to become part of the theatre work I would design as a ‘portrait of Duke Ellington—painted in music, dance, and song.’ ”

Donald McKayle conceived the Tony-nominated Broadway hit *Sophisticated Ladies* based on the life and writings of Duke Ellington. The show was originally titled “Duke” but was later given the “sexier” title *Sophisticated Ladies* before it opened.

“The evening will be constantly musical, always Duke Ellington — even to his use of language, which is as unique as his music, and as individual and singular. All spoken words will be built upon his writings.”

Sophisticated Ladies premiered on Broadway in 1981, starring Gregory Hines and Judith Jamison, the present director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. McKayle’s original concept and staging of musical numbers had undergone a plethora of changes, but the “choreo-musical” that he conceived in 1978 received numerous Tony nominations. He won the NAACP Image Award for writing and an Outer Critics Circle Award for choreography in 1981.

- 45. **Touring production of *Sophisticated Ladies***
Program, circa 1985.
- 46. **Gregg Burge, Mercedes Ellington and Hinton Battle in *Sophisticated Ladies***
Photograph by Martha Swope, 1981.
- 47. **Broadway production of *Sophisticated Ladies* at the Lunt Fontanne Theatre.**
Poster, circa 1981.
- 48. **Script for *Sophisticated Ladies*, 1980.**

Master Classes

“I embarked on one of the many joyful aspects of a multi-faceted professional life that was to remain with me and sustain me spiritually and monetarily. I began to teach and in doing so to constantly learn again.”

Teaching remains a vital part of Donald McKayle’s dance career. He has taught master classes for professional companies in Moscow, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Tel Aviv, Israel, and Köln, Germany and served on the faculty of numerous schools, including American Dance Festival, Bennington College and Juilliard School. He now serves as artistic director of the UCI Department of Dance.

I love the learning process, just seeing someone accomplishing something and moving forward with it, making it a part of themselves. It’s very exciting, I never get tired of it.

— Donald McKayle in *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 30, 1994)

- 49. **Class at International Sommerakademie des Tanz in Köln, Germany.** Photograph, circa 1976.
- 50. **Class at International Sommerakademie des Tanz in Köln, Germany.** Photograph, circa 1973.
- 51. **Donald McKayle and Company rehearsal, with Alvin Ailey pictured in the background.** Photograph, 1954.
- 52. **Class at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon.** Photograph, 1982.
- 53. **Teaching *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulders* in Moscow.** Photograph, 1993.
- 54. **Class at International Sommerakademie des Tanz in Köln, Germany.** Photograph, circa 1976.
- 55. **Class in Boston, Massachusetts.** Photograph, circa 1963.

UCI Libraries Exhibit Program Staff

Jackie Dooley, Exhibits Officer

Mary Ellen Goddard, Exhibits Preparator

Sylvia Nienhuis, Publications Designer

Design and Production:
Sylvia Nienhuis
Library Publications Office

Printed May 1998