

Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday*

Guides to Special Collections in the Music Division of the Library of Congress



**Music Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
1997**

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/perform.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2006560613>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/eadmus.mu016001>

Processed by the Music Division of the Library of Congress

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Music Division, 2015

Collection Summary

Title: Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday*

Span Dates: 1944-1960

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1945-1949)

Call No.: ML31.P34

Creator: Page, Ruth, 1899-1991

Extent: 148 items

Extent: 1 container

Extent: 0.5 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2006560613>

Summary: This collection consists primarily of the correspondence between American dancer-choreographer and company director Ruth Page or her first husband attorney Thomas Hart Fisher and composer Remi Gassmann, who was contracted to create the music score for Page's ballet *Billy Sunday* (1948). Other letters to Gassmann from this period and a small number of programs and press clippings related to Page's or Gassmann's careers round out the collection.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Denham, S. J.--Correspondence.

Du Pont, Paul, approximately 1906-1957--Correspondence.

Fisher, Thomas Hart--Correspondence.

Gassmann, Remi--Correspondence.

Gassmann, Remi.

Hanson, Howard, 1896-1981--Correspondence.

Kirstein, Lincoln, 1907-1996--Correspondence.

Page, Ruth, 1899-1991--Correspondence.

Page, Ruth, 1899-1991.

Page, Ruth, 1899-1991.

Stone, Bentley.

Strauss, Paul, 1920-2007--Correspondence.

Sunday, Billy, 1862-1935.

Weissberger, L. Arnold, 1907-1981--Correspondence.

Organizations

Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

Ballets des Champs-Élysées.

Subjects

Artistic collaboration.

Ballet--United States.

Ballet.

Choreographers--United States--Correspondence.

Composers--United States.

Dancers--United States.

Modern dance--United States.

Modern dance.

Women choreographers.

Titles

Bells (Choreographic work : Page)
Billy Sunday (Choreographic work : Page)
Frankie and Johnny (Choreographic work : Page and Stone, B)
Love song (Choreographic work : Page)
Ruth Page collection, 1944-1960

Form/Genre

Correspondence.
Programs (Documents)
Promotional materials.

Provenance

Purchase; Lion Heart Autographs, Inc.; 1995

Custodial History

The chain of custody of this collection is unknown; however, the contents of the collection, especially the letters, suggest that most and perhaps all of the items were saved by composer Remi Gassmann. Of the telegrams and signed letters, these are addressed to Gassmann. Letters or telegrams written by Gassmann are personal copies. Letters in the collection unrelated to either Ruth Page or *Billy Sunday* concern Gassmann's interests, such as performance of his music. Letters initiated by attorney L. Arnold Weissburger, who represented Gassmann in the dispute over the music score, are apparently carbon copies for Gassmann.

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Processing History

The Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday* was processed by Rodney Todd in 1997. The finding aid was revised and coded for EAD format by Libby Smigel in 2015.

Other Repositories

Related manuscript and audiovisual collections on Ruth Page are held in the Newberry Library, the Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and the Chicago Film Archives. The Remi Gassmann papers are held by the University of California, Irvine. Papers of William Ashley "Billy" Sunday, the historical figure whose sermons inspired Page's choreography, can be found at the library of Grace College and Theological Seminary, Indiana.

Related Material

The Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division (MBRS) of the Library of Congress received 129 videotapes and transcripts of interviews from Thea Flaum Productions Ltd. for its Ruth Page Archives in 1990. Photos of Ruth Page can be found in the Arnold Genthe Collection in the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division and in the Adolph Bolm Collection in the Library of Congress Music Division. A small amount of correspondence from or to Ruth Page is included among the Irving Berlin, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, Aaron Copland, and Alexandra Danilova collections in the Music Division.

Copyright Status

Materials from the Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday* are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

Access and Restrictions

The Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday* is open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Music Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Certain restrictions to use or copying of materials may apply.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item, date, container number], Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday*, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Choreographer **Ruth Page** was born March 22, 1899, in Indianapolis, Indiana. At age 12, she began to study ballet with local teachers. By the age of 20, she had toured South America with Anna Pavlova's ballet company, and thereafter she was engaged as a principal dancer for Adolph Bolm's Ballet Intime (1920) and Chicago Allied Arts (1924). An invitation to appear at the coronation ceremonies of Japan's Emperor Hirohito in 1928 took Page to Japan, where she extended her stay to tour throughout Southeast Asia and the Mideast (as well as parts of Europe), a cultural experience that would influence her future choreography. She was principal dancer or ballet mistress for notable companies such as the Chicago Opera Company, Ravinia Opera Company, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Les Ballets Américains, among others. While many of Page's dance works were based on classical themes and set to classical music (for example, *Chopin Mazurka*, 1922; *Beauty and the Beast* with music of Tchaikovsky, 1949), she became noteworthy for new ballets on American life and social themes with music by contemporary composers: *The Flapper and the Quarterback*, 1926, which used popular dance tunes such as "Too Much Mustard"; *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!*, 1934, with music by Aaron Copland; *Americans in Paris*, 1936, to George Gershwin's *An American in Paris*; and her most famous work *Frankie and Johnny*, 1936, co-choreographed with Bentley Stone and based on the African American ballad. *Billy Sunday* included spoken word within the ballet, as did other of her choreographic works dating from as early as 1926. In the 1950s, Page choreographed internationally at such companies as Les Ballets des Champs-Élysées, the London Festival Ballet, the Lyric Theatre, and the then-fledgling New York City Ballet, among others. In 1955 Page founded the Chicago Opera Ballet (called Ruth Page's International Ballet from 1966 to 1969), which toured internationally when not performing with Chicago's Lyric Opera. At Page's invitation in 1962, Rudolf Nureyev made his American debut dancing *Don Quixote* with the Chicago Opera Ballet. Page founded the Ruth Page Foundation for Dance in Chicago in 1971. She died April 7, 1991; her second husband, scene designer André Delfau, survived her.

Composer **Remi Gassmann** was born December 30, 1908, in Kansas. As early as age 10, he began to compose music. He received a master's degree in music in 1931 from the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, and he studied for six years with Paul Hindemith at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, Germany. In 1937, he married Marthe Loyson, a French citizen. Returning to the United States in 1939, Gassmann was appointed professor of music theory for the Chicago Symphony, for which his *Symphonic Overture in G* was commissioned for the 50th Jubilee season. In 1941, he was appointed assistant professor of music at the University of Chicago, where as director of the Composers' Concerts he hosted Stravinsky, Hindemith, Milhaud, Schoenberg, and others. In 1944, Gassmann became the director of the School of Music at Elmhurst College in Illinois. Gassmann has earned accolades as a composer for dance. One of his earliest compositions for ballet was the score commissioned by Chicago-based choreographer Ruth Page for her ballet *Billy Sunday*. Other notable examples include *Paeon* for Tatjana Gsovsky's 1960 ballet of the same title and the score for George Balanchine's *Electronics* (1961). These two scores along with his electronic soundtrack for Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds* (1963) exemplify Gassmann's avant-garde contributions to electronic music. Gassmann's later work focused almost exclusively on research and development for electronic sound. He died March 2, 1982, in Strasbourg, France.

Chicago attorney **Thomas Hart Fisher** married Ruth Page in 1925. For several decades, he contributed substantially to the management of Page's career, especially legal correspondence and contracts. Disbarred in the 1960s after mishandling clients' estates and trusts, Fisher died in November 1969.

Scope and Content Note

This one-box collection of almost 150 items primarily documents through letters and telegrams the creation and performance of choreographer Ruth Page's ballet *Billy Sunday, or the Devil Gets His Due*. Page's postcards and often hand-written letters document artistic concepts for design, music, casting, and costumes, as well as challenges when artistic collaborations (with Gassmann, Calder, and others) fell short. Page's correspondence, along with that of her husband and attorney Thomas Hart Fisher and composer Remi Gassmann, comprises the bulk of the collection. Letters from major artistic and administrative colleagues are represented: Sergei J. Denham, director of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo; Paul DuPont, set and costume designer; Paul Strauss, conductor of the Ballet Russe orchestra; Lincoln Kirstein, impresario and writer. Designers and performers consulted, considered, or involved in the *Billy Sunday* production mentioned among the letters include Alexander Calder (Sandy), Robert Edmund Jones (Bobby), J. Ray Hunt, John Bauer, George Bland, Helene Pons for costumes, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo ballerina Alexandra Danilova and premier danseur Frederic Franklin, Ballet Russe rehearsal pianist Rachel Chapman, Lew Christensen, Jerome Andrews, Bentley Stone, George Balanchine, Hans Lange, and Roger Englander. Other theatre and literary figures mentioned in letters include Boris Kochno, Charles Malherbe, Frederick Kiesler, Maria Tallchief, George Amberg, Robert Davison (Bob), Claudia Cassidy, Marc Chagall, Darius Milhaud, Isamu Noguchi, Lucia Chase, Sol Hurok, Virgil Thomson, Martha Graham, Gertrude Stein, Anatole Chujoy, John Martin, and Serge Lifar. Other Ruth Page choreographic works mentioned include *The Bells*, *Frankie and Johnny*, *Love Song*, and *Music in My Heart*. A small number of ancillary materials related to Ruth Page or Remi Gassmann (programs, photo, clippings, music catalog) are also included in this collection.

Organization of the Ruth Page Correspondence on *Billy Sunday*

The collection is organized as two series:

- [Correspondence, 1944-1960](#)
- [Miscellany, 1945-1951](#)

Description of Series

Container

BOX 1

Series

Correspondence 1944-1960

The bulk of this series includes telegrams and letters relating to the creation of *Billy Sunday*, most of them authored by Thomas Hunt Fisher, Ruth Page, or Remi Gassmann. The personal and theatrical anecdotes in many of the letters are rich with references to major artistic figures and productions.

Arranged alphabetically by surname of author, followed by a folder of legal correspondence.

BOX 1

Miscellany, 1945-1951

Small number of performance programs or playbills, press clippings, a studio photograph, and music publisher's catalog.

Arranged by format.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	<p>Correspondence 1944-1960</p> <p>The bulk of this series includes telegrams and letters relating to the creation of <i>Billy Sunday</i>, most of them authored by Thomas Hunt Fisher, Ruth Page, or Remi Gassmann. The personal and theatrical anecdotes in many of the letters are rich with references to major artistic figures and productions.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by surname of author, followed by a folder of legal correspondence.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/1	<p>Denham, S. J., 1947-1948</p> <p>Gassmann cable reply typed on verso of one of Denham's letters.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/2	<p>DuPont, Paul, 1947-1948</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/3	<p>Fisher, Thomas Hart, 1946-1949</p> <p>Contains: personal correspondence and letters of agreement.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/4	<p>Fisher, Thomas Hart and Ruth Page, 1946-1947, undated</p> <p>Includes 4-page typed letter from Fisher with marginal notes and longhand postscript from Page addressed to Gassmann, about <i>Billy Sunday</i> preparations and Lincoln Kirstein opinion of scenario.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/5	<p>Gassmann, Remi, 1944-1948, undated</p> <p>Letters chiefly on music score.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/6	<p>Hanson, Howard, 1944-1945, 1954</p> <p>Letters from Hanson and his designee about scores Gassmann submitted for public performance at his alma mater, the Eastman School of Music.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/7	<p>Kirstein, Lincoln, 1947</p> <p>Photostat of Kirstein's letter to Page, with handwritten note by Page to Gassmann.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/8	<p>Page, Ruth, 1945-1950, undated</p> <p>Predominantly holograph letters and notes to Remi Gassmann, many undated, which share creative ideas, conversations with other artistic collaborators, and specific exchanges about music edits and cues.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/9	<p>Roullier, Alice, 1945</p> <p>Handwritten postscript referencing Alexander Calder drawings.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/10	<p>Strauss, Paul, 1948</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/11	<p>Weissberger, L. Arnold, 1948</p> <p>Letters to Fisher on behalf of Gassmann on legal issues concerning the music score.</p>
BOX-FOLDER 1/12	<p>Legal correspondence, 1945-1948, 1960</p> <p>Contains: Drafts and signed contracts related to <i>Billy Sunday</i> and <i>The Bells</i>; contract for use of Gassmann's music by the Netherlands Ballet Company for restaging of Tatjana Gsovsky's 1960 ballet <i>Paean</i>.</p>
BOX 1	<p>Miscellany, 1945-1951</p> <p>Small number of performance programs or playbills, press clippings, a studio photograph, and music publisher's catalog.</p> <p>Arranged by format.</p>

Miscellany, 1945-1951

Container	Contents
BOX-FOLDER 1/13	Programs, 1946-1950 Contains: 1946 Chicago lecture-demonstration and 1948 Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo performance of <i>Billy Sunday</i> , 1950 program of Les Ballets Américains, typescript playbill and program note for 1946 Chicago Ballet Company performance of <i>The Bells</i> .
BOX-FOLDER 1/14	Clippings, 1945-1947, 1951, undated Contains: Reviews of Ruth Page choreography, including <i>Frankie and Johnny</i> , <i>The Bells</i> , and <i>Revanche [Revenge]</i> ; newspaper notice of Thomas Hunt Fisher's disbarment.
BOX-FOLDER 1/15	Photograph, undated Studio headshot with inscription on verso: Ruth Page as Frankie
BOX-FOLDER 1/16	Catalog, Associated Music Publishers, 1946 Lists two works of Remi Gassmann.