



Guide to the George Lee Papers

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Persistent URL for this finding aid: <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1dv26>

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Summary Information

Repository:	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator:	Lee, George
Contributor:	Lin, Jennifer
Title:	George Lee Papers
ID:	MS-01213
Date [inclusive]:	approximately 1925 to 2024
Physical Description:	2.03 Cubic Feet (2 boxes, 1 oversized box, 2 flat files)
Physical Description:	7.43 Linear Feet
Physical Description:	3 Digital Files (0.148 GB)
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The George Lee Papers (approximately 1925-2024) consist of materials documenting the life of professional ballet dancer and blackjack dealer George Lee. The materials include photographic prints, show programs and advertisements, newspaper articles about Lee's performances, scrapbooks, postcards, and correspondence. The photographs depict Lee's family and childhood; dance rehearsals; travel; professional headshots, and promotional stills of various performances, including <i>The Nutcracker</i> and <i>Flower Drum Song</i> . Also included in the collection are materials detailing the promotion and release of Jennifer Lin's 2024 film about George Lee titled <i>Ten Times Better</i> , including a photograph album, newspaper and magazine articles, and digital files of Lin's interviews with Lee.

Preferred Citation

George Lee Papers, approximately 1925-2024. MS-01213. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1dv26>

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Biographical Note

Chinese-American ballet dancer George R. Lee was born on February 10, 1935 in Hong Kong to Alexander and Stanislaw Li. Alexander Li was a Chinese acrobat and circus performer and Stanislaw Li was a Polish ballet dancer. The family moved to Shanghai, China in 1941 after Japan invaded Hong Kong during World War II.

George first learned how to dance from his mother, and he continued to take lessons from Russian teachers in Shanghai. As early as age 7, Lee was performing in nightclubs to help his family earn money. His father, Alexander, left the family in Shanghai to find work in western China, and was killed in an accident in 1945. Stanislaw and George stayed in Shanghai until 1949, when they left China and spent two years in Philippine refugee camps. They immigrated to the United States in 1951 after a friend of Alexander's sponsored them.

Lee resumed his dance training at the School of American Ballet in New York City after he and his mother arrived in the United States. There he met choreographer George Balanchine, who cast Lee in the role of the character "Tea" in the New York City Ballet production of *The Nutcracker*.

After *The Nutcracker* ended, Lee toured with the Andre Eglevsky Ballet and various other ballet companies. In 1958, he earned a role in Rodger and Hammerstein's musical *Flower Drum Song* on Broadway. This production marked a departure from ballet performance for George. He stayed with the show throughout its entire run on Broadway and remained with the production's touring company.

George changed the spelling of his surname from 'Li' to 'Lee' after his naturalization as a United States citizen in 1959. He continued to dance professionally throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. In his mid-forties, Lee began a career as a blackjack dealer at the Four Queens Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he would work for the next 40 years. In 2023, Lee was contacted by journalist Jennifer Lin, who subsequently made a documentary film about his life, titled *Ten Times Better*. The film showcases Lee's experience as an Asian ballet dancer in the mid-20th century. George Lee passed away at the age of 90 on April 19, 2025 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Sources:

George Lee oral history interview, 2024 February 29. OH-03437. Audio recording. Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1vf57>

Lin, Jennifer, dir. *Ten Times Better*. 2024.

Sandomir, Richard. "George Lee, Trailblazing Chinese Ballet Dancer, Dies at 90." *New York Times*, May 9, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/09/arts/dance/george-lee-dead.html>

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Scope and Contents Note

The George Lee Papers (approximately 1925-2024) consist of materials documenting the life of professional ballet dancer and blackjack dealer George Lee. The materials include photographic prints, show programs and advertisements, newspaper articles about Lee's performances, scrapbooks, postcards, and correspondence. The photographs depict Lee's family and childhood; dance rehearsals; travel; professional headshots, and promotional stills of various performances, including *The Nutcracker* and *Flower Drum Song*.

Also included in the collection are materials detailing the promotion and release of Jennifer Lin's 2024 film about George Lee titled *Ten Times Better*, including a photograph album, newspaper and magazine articles, and digital files of Lin's interviews with Lee.

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Arrangement

Materials are arranged by topic.

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Administrative Information

Access Note

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

This material is made available to facilitate private study, scholarship, or research. The donor, Jennifer Lin, transferred all right, title and interest they had in the George Lee Papers (MS-01213) to UNLV. However, some material may be protected by copyright, trademark, privacy, publicity rights, or other interests not owned by UNLV. Users are responsible for determining whether permissions are necessary from rights owners for any intended use and for obtaining all required permissions. Acknowledgement of the UNLV University Libraries is requested. For more information, please see the UNLV Special Collections policies on [reproductions and use](#) or contact us at special.collections@unlv.edu.

Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 2025 by Jennifer Lin; accession number 2025-064.

Appraisal Note

Acquired by Su Kim Chung, curator, as part of UNLV Special Collections and Archives holdings on entertainment and the Asian American-Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. 3 optical discs were securely disposed after files were fully transferred, processed, and preserved following UNLV Special Collections and Archives Digital Preservation guidelines.

Processing Note

In 2025, Landon Paljusaj arranged and described the materials, made access copies of digital files, and created the finding aid in ArchivesSpace.

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Related Materials

Related Collections

The following resource may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:

George Lee oral history interview, 2024 February 29. OH-03437. Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada. <http://n2t.net/ark:/62930/f1vf57>

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Names and Subjects

- Ballet dancers
- Entertainers
- Asian Americans
- Immigrants
- Card dealers
- Four Queens Hotel and Casino (Las Vegas, Nev.)

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Containers
Portraits, snapshots, and performance photographs of Stanislaw Li and Alexander Li, approximately 1925 to 1972 Physical Description: 2 Files	box 01
Childhood photographs of George Lee with his parents, approximately 1935 to 1950	box 01
Copper wood block printing plate with photo negative of George Lee, approximately 1940	box 02
Bound scrapbook and loose pages with George Lee's resume, portrait and performance photographs, and newspaper clippings, approximately 1938 to 1989 Physical Description: 2 Files	box 01 oversized box 03
Portraits and action shots from rehearsals and stage shows: photographic prints and negatives, approximately 1938 to 1980 Physical Description: 2 Files	box 01 box 02
Photographs of George Lee, friends, and fellow performers, approximately 1951 to 1989 Physical Description: 5 Files	box 01 box 02
Snapshot photograph album of George Lee, Stanislaw Li, and friends, approximately 1955 to 1971	box 02
Photographs of performers, friends, and family with inscriptions to George Lee, approximately 1961 to 2003	box 01
George Lee headshots: photographic negatives and contact sheets, approximately 1970 to 1979	box 01
George Lee teaching ballet: photographic prints, 1975	box 02
Postcards sent to George Lee and Stanislaw Li, 1938 to 1960	box 02
Newspaper clippings mentioning George Lee, 1941 to 1974	box 01
Show programs for performances by the Andre Eglevsky Ballet, Boston Ballet Company, Fair Lawn Ballet Company, and other performances including George Lee, 1954 to 1979	box 01
Show program for <i>The Nutcracker</i> , performed by the New York City Ballet, 1954	box 01
Show programs for the original Broadway performance of <i>Flower Drum Song</i> and a later performance in San Bernardino, California, 1958, 1973	box 01
Drawings and costume designs, typescript Russian poetry book from Tubabao, Phillipines, Russian traditional dance article, and various postcards, approximately 1949	box 01

Manhattan High School of Aviation Trades and Indiana Technical College certificates, diplomas, and correspondence, 1955 to 1956	box 01
Assorted correspondence, telegrams, and greeting cards sent to George Lee, 1956 to 1977	box 01
George Lee's United States citizenship certificate and correspondence, 1959 to 1980	box 01
Isako's Circus and Traveling Zoo program, Penang, approximately 1930 to 1935	box 01
Isako's Circus cast portrait, including Alexander and Stanislawa Li, China: panoramic photograph, 1935	flat file 04
Posters and advertisements for circus performances in Hong Kong, approximately 1930 to 1941	box 01
Photographs of unidentified individuals (possibly family members of Stanislawa Li), approximately 1925 to 1960	box 02
Photographs of unidentified performers, approximately 1925 to 1969	box 02
Photographic postcards of dancers, acrobats, clowns, and other performers, approximately 1925 to 1940 Physical Description: 2 Files	box 02
Scrapbook of postcards from India and Poland, approximately 1930 to 1949	oversized box 03
Postcards from the United States, Japan, Cambodia, Egypt, India, Korea, and other locations, approximately 1930 to 1969 Physical Description: 3 Files	box 02
Jennifer Lin's oral history interviews with George Lee, 2023 February (MS_01213_001-MS_01213_003) Physical Description: 3 Digital Files (0.148 GB) MP3	digital file 00
Personal copy of George Lee's oral history interview transcript for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Reflections project, 2024	box 02
<i>Ten Times Better</i> flier, articles, screening photographs, and Congressional certificate, 2024 Physical Description: 2 Files	box 02 oversized box 03
Photograph album of the <i>Ten Times Better</i> world premiere in New York City, from Jennifer Lin to George Lee, 2024 February	box 02
Poster of enlarged <i>New York Times</i> article about George Lee, signed by friends and former colleagues, 2024	flat file 05