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**Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham  
and Digital Methods for Dance  
Historical Inquiry, Repertory,  
1937-1962**

Harmony Bench  
*Ohio State University*

Kate Elswit  
*Royal Central School of Speech and Drama  
(Great Britain)*

User Guide

Inter-university Consortium for  
Political and Social Research  
P.O. Box 1248  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106  
[www.icpsr.umich.edu](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu)

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This User Guide is intended to accompany the Repertory Dataset, 1937-1962 from Dunham's Data: Katherine Dunham and Digital Methods for Dance Historical Inquiry, released September 2022.

The Dunham's Data project is funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC AH/R012989/1, 2018-2022), under the direction of Kate Elswit (PI, University of London, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama) and Harmony Bench (CI, The Ohio State University). Through this project, we explore the kinds of questions and problems that make the analysis and visualization of data meaningful for dance history. We do so through the case study of choreographer Katherine Dunham, manually cataloging a daily itinerary of Dunham's touring and travel from the 1930s-60s, the dancers, drummers, and singers in her employ during that time, and the repertory they performed. This series of curated datasets provide new means to understand the relationships between thousands of locations, and hundreds of performers and pieces across the decades of Dunham's career, and ultimately elaborate how movement moves.

This user guide explains the choices we made in collecting and structuring the data, column by column. Over her career, Dunham actively repurposed and recombined elements of her choreography. The Repertory Dataset, the third dataset in the [Dunham's Data series](#), is curated by Harmony Bench, Kate Elswit, and Tia-Monique Uzor based on programs and show patter, among other archival sources. It catalogs information including the various titles and indicative descriptions by which a piece might be known; casting choices including all of the dancers, drummers, and singers who were ever listed by name as performing in the work; the years in which we have documentation that the work was performed between 1937-62, as well as how many total pieces of evidence we have for a given work's performance; and the place inspiration associated with the given work.

The Repertory Dataset allows for variation of the choreographic "work" in multiple ways, including noting whether it appeared in concert venues, alternative venues like nightclubs, or both; and all documented casting. In addition, it tracks fluid relationships that programs represented among nearly 300 numbers identified in Dunham's repertory from the 1930s onwards by examining the various scales at which Dunham repurposed choreographic elements over time and for different performance venues, and therefore the alternative ways that works might connect individual performers. Rather than a more conventional appendix-style list of choreographic works, following these print materials in which Dunham framed her work for mid-century audiences, Dunham's Data has organized this dataset into a nested hierarchy that can be understood as a network: named evening-length shows, containers (normally a grouping of 2+ variable pieces under a shared title; also includes act-length dances with named components), pieces, mixed works, and named dances-in-dances. A sample program is diagrammed in ["A Nested Hierarchy of Katherine Dunham's Dance Company Repertory" \(2021\)](#). There is repurposing and repackaging across programs of units in this hierarchy, such that a piece may belong to more than one container, and the total number of pieces associated with a given container far outnumber the amount presented together on any single evening.

Because these overlapping configurations are derived from the representation of named choreographic entities in programs, key knowledge that might be passed down through embodied knowledge or oral history is not present if it was not named in print. For example, the act-length piece “Southland” is represented as containing pieces such as “Plantation Dances” because those pieces were subsequently reframed as “from the ballet Southland” on later programs. However, those named entities would not be understood from a dance history perspective as the core content of the work itself. At the same time, this data can also offer alternative approaches to dance history, for example, by reshaping understanding of different pieces’ relative importance in terms of performance frequency. For more on this dataset and analysis, see [“Visceral Data for Dance Histories: Katherine Dunham’s People, Places, and Pieces”](#) in The Drama Review (TDR). These overlapping configurations can be explored through the visualization [“Interactive Network of Dunham Company Repertory: Shows, Containers, Pieces, and Dances-in-Dances”](#).

This dataset was created and audited as follows: The initial 1947-60 repertory dataset was built by Kate Elswit and Harmony Bench, alongside the Everyday Itinerary and Personnel datasets, with the structure emerging through the process. The resulting structure was then given to Tia-Monique Uzor to build a dataset from scratch using the same archival information. Further nuance was added to the data structure as part of this second iteration. We then compared the information in both datasets, to manually compile a new, third dataset that reconciled the two. Throughout these steps, Bench, Elswit, and Uzor identified and removed duplicate programs, and also cross-referenced multiple project datasets to date a substantial number of previously-undated programs, reconcile performer AKAs, etc. Antonio Jiménez-Mavillard also developed a custom macro to expedite the data entry process for performer names. This reconciled dataset was subsequently expanded to include repertory material from 1937-1962, alongside an expanded draft of the Personnel Check-Ins. We then conducted a second process of auditing by programmatically extracting every archival reference present in the dataset into a list and then manually confirming the data against the archival material.

## **WORK**

This dataset is organized alphabetically by the most common name of a performance entity. The designation of a work as distinct sits in relation to the subsequent column (ALSO KNOWN AS). All works referenced in print appear here, including those that may never have been performed. For example, even though we have not found evidence that “Amazon” was ever completed or performed under that title, we list it here because there is evidence that it was at least rehearsed, and pieces appear in programs with the annotation “from the ballet Amazon” for several years. Because Dunham was creating work in an African diasporic framework in which multiple arts are interconnected, we catalog all distinct entities named in performances, rather than separating primarily movement or musically-based numbers from one another. We do not include generic titles, such as “Prelude” or “Finale.”

## **ALSO KNOWN AS**

Alternative titles, including both variations and translations into other languages. These are decided on the basis of contextual information, including program notes. For example, it might be immediately clear that “Barrelhouse” is the same as “Barrelhouse (Florida Swamp Shimmy)”; “Barrelhouse Shimmy”; and “Barrel House,” but more archival work is required to understand that what program notes call “Congo Fran” was colloquially referred to as “Congo Femme” in company documents. Where there are multiple distinct entities that share the same title, such as “Street Scene,” we add an additional clarification in square brackets. We hold as distinct any variations for which we do not have adequate archival evidence for consolidation. An example in this regard is the set of “Choros” dances, which evolved over time and are sometimes listed individually as “Choros 1,” “Choros 5,” etc., while at other times some number of them are lumped under the more generic name “Choro” or “Choros.” Decisions made in reconciling titles or not are included in NOTES. Translations of titles are also treated as AKAs, for example, “Haitian Roadside” is also presented in programs as “Sur les Routes D’Haïti,” “Nos Caminhos Do Haiti,” “En Los Caminos De Haiti,” and “Sulle Strade Di Haiti.”

### **YEARS PERFORMED**

These are the years between 1937-1962 in which we have evidence that a given work was performed. Each year is listed only once, no matter how many times a piece may have been performed. At times these years precede the premiere dates listed in “Stage Choreography by Katherine Dunham, 1937-1972,” compiled by Dunham, Jeanelle Stovall, and VèVè A. Clark, originally published by Ruth Beckford (1979) and revised and reprinted in VèVè A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson (2005); some suggested updates are noted in the NOTES column. This column may be taken as an indication of possible premiere date for works post-1938.

### **NUMBER OF EVENTS DOCUMENTED**

In this column we document the number of programs and other printed materials we have found that reference each performance of a given entity. (Duplicate programs are not counted.) We suggest that this number can be understood as a proxy for its frequency of performance relative to other pieces. This is an imperfect measure, for example since more comprehensive print materials were produced around concert performances than around nightclub appearances. Likewise, certain numbers may have been performed more frequently during periods where the archive is less comprehensive. However, we believe we have enough data to use this as a reasonable approximation. All relevant documentation can be found in the archives, boxes, and folders listed in the column SOURCE.

### **FEATURED PERFORMERS** (only for pieces and mixed works)

This column lists all of the performers who ever appeared by name in a given work, though not the specific casting of those works from show to show. These names can be cross-referenced with the supplementary dataset of public performer AKAs, which is part of the Personnel Check-In Dataset. We only collect performers for repertory at a “piece” level, not at “show” or “dances-in-dances.” This means, for example, that performers who appear as “company” but are not named for specific pieces are not included as individuals in the repertory data.

### **CATEGORY**

As elaborated in the introduction to this user guide, Dunham's Data has organized this dataset into a nested hierarchy following the data structure of Dunham's mid-century programs, with categories that we have labeled as: 1) named evening-length shows; 2) containers; 3) pieces; 4) named dances-in-dances; and 5) mix(ed works) — used for entities that fall into (2) and (3) at various times. The final category is 6) standalone, which describes that a piece sometimes or always stands outside of any mixed work or container.

Note on directionality: The directionality of 1-4 is: DANCES-IN-DANCES < PIECES < CONTAINERS < SHOWS. The CATEGORY column indicates directionality for the five columns that follow. For example, for an entity that is categorized as "piece," then entities in NAMED DANCES-IN-DANCES will have been documented as belonging to that piece at various times, but entities in MIXED WORKS, CONTAINERS, and/or SHOWS will have been documented as containing that piece. Most entities have entries in only some categories that follow, and some skip steps within the hierarchy, for example a PIECE may belong directly to a SHOW. These should be further understood in relation to information contained within the NOTES column.

### **NAMED DANCES-IN-DANCES**

Dances-in-dances primarily draw from African American vernacular and social dance forms and were often identified in programs and show patter for audiences as building blocks of pieces or mixed works. Directionality: This column contains any dances-in-dances that were ever listed in programs as belonging to the WORK in column A, if it is of the CATEGORY piece or mixed work.

### **PIECES**

Pieces may stand alone and/or be absorbed into other, larger entities. Pieces often appear in programs as part of a list of 2+ pieces that belong to an act-length container. Directionality: This column contains any pieces that were ever listed in programs as belonging to the WORK in column A, if it is of the CATEGORY container, mixed work, or show; or to which the WORK in column A belongs, if it is of the CATEGORY dances-in-dances.

### **MIXED WORKS**

Mixed works describe entities that are sometimes listed in programs as pieces (see above), and sometimes as containers (see below). Directionality: This column contains any mixed works that were ever listed in programs as belonging to the WORK in column A, if it is of the CATEGORY container or show; or to which the WORK in column A belongs, if it is of the CATEGORY pieces or dances-in-dances.

### **ACT-LENGTH CONTAINERS**

Containers are a loose category of varying size and structural integrity, normally a grouping of 2+ variable pieces under a shared title, or act-length dances with named components.

Directionality: This column contains any containers that were ever listed in programs as belonging to the WORK in column A, if it is of the CATEGORY show; or to which the WORK in column A belongs, if it is of the CATEGORY mixed works or pieces.

### **NAMED EVENING-LENGTH SHOWS**

As elaborated above, we only include shows with specific names and contents. Directionality: This column contains any shows that were ever listed in programs as holding the WORK in column A, if it is of the CATEGORY mixed works, containers, or pieces.

### **PROGRAM NOTES (INDICATIVE)**

The wording of program notes changed over time and was also adapted to different audiences. These are selected as representative of the most common notes that appeared in programs for each entity.

### **PLACE INSPIRATION**

Many of Dunham's works are associated with places in program notes. While these are sometimes anchored geographically (ie: "In Pernambuco, Brazil"), they are often more affective in description (eg: "the dusty roads of Haiti"). This column preserves Dunham's descriptive language.

### **COMPOSER**

Attribution is preserved as much as possible based on information in the programs, whether a named composer or arranger, or a vague description such as "indigenous melody." In select cases, onstage performers also receive attribution for the music associated with a given work.

### **VENUE TYPE**

The two variables in this column refer to whether we have evidence that a number appeared (c) on a concert stage, or (n) in a nightclub, including hotel and casino venues. This is relevant because of the different scales of casting, scenery, and stage size as well as audience. As noted in the User Guide for the Everyday Itinerary: "Where these categories are fuzzy, we have used the performance programs to guide us — for example, many venues at the time were current or former cinemas, but if Dunham's performances there followed the distinct format of a concert hall performance, that is how we categorize the venue." Because this dataset only represents repertory in stage contexts, we do not include the (s) for screen or other venue types that are found in the Everyday Itinerary.

### **NOTES**

In the notes column, we have provided explanatory notes to assist researchers as they go through the Repertory dataset. Such notes point out conflicts in the archives, and generally offer a synopsis of decision-making underlying each datapoint. For example, with "Sube Espuma" the notes clarify the relationship of that entity to "Washerwomen," which is related but distinct, despite having interchangeable program notes. We also include intertextual relationships to Dunham-related productions outside of her stage productions, such as the 1954 film *Mambo*, which featured Dunham and some of her performers, or published albums of music.

### **SOURCE**

This column indicates the sources for materials that provide evidence for information contained in a given row. Most are from the special collections at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIU), Missouri Historical Society (MHS), Library of Congress (LOC), and the New

York Public Library for the Performing Arts (NYPL). We have indicated both boxes and folders where we have found supporting evidence, both to document our own process and to aid future researchers.