



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury Papers

1930-2003

(S) *MGZMD 311

Compiled by Valerie Wingfield.

Summary

Creator: Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury, 1930-

Title: Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury Papers

Date: 1930-2003

Size: 3.19 linear feet (8 boxes)

Source: Donated by Shala F. Mattingly, 2005.

Abstract: The Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury collection contains a partial autobiography, family photographs, publicity, career related photographs, printed matter, and some correspondence relating to the life and career of Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury (1930-2003) an Indian folk dancer, choreographer, actor, writer and painter.

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Processing note: Compiled by Valerie Wingfield. Compiled by Valerie Wingfield.

Creator History

Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury (1930-2003) was an Indian folk dancer, choreographer, actor, writer and painter. Born in Madras, India (now Chennai, India), Chowdhury descended from Indian royalty. His parents were D.P. Roy Chowdhury, a renowned painter and sculptor, and Charulata Roy Chowdhury. Prior to establishing a career as a dancer, he briefly pursued boxing as a welterweight. As a folk dancer, Chowdhury specialized in several types of south Indian dance styles, the Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Kathak and Manipuri. In 1949, Chowdhury (sometimes referred to as Bhaskar, especially later in life) formed his own dance company and simultaneously pursued a film career.

In 1955, Chowdhury emigrated to the United States, to continue his successful career as a dancer and choreographer. In 1962, he formed Bhaskar-Dances of India. Chowdhury also continued his career as a

professional actor and appeared in several films and television shows.

Throughout his career as a dancer and choreographer, Chowdhury danced with many partners including Sasha, Candace Hibbard, Carolyn Kay, Janet Kaylo and Shala Mattingly. From 1965 to 1975, Chowdhury danced with Shala F. Mattingly. Chowdhury performed extensively in the United States and abroad. He built an international reputation as a premier dancer of Indian folk dances.

At the height of Chowdhury's career, disaster struck on October 25, 1977. During a lighting rehearsal, Chowdhury fell backwards twenty-six feet into a blacked out orchestra's pit at Purdue University. This near fatal accident broke his back in four places, and both arms and ankles. He was paralyzed, for life, from the waist down. While recuperating in St. Elizabeth's hospital, he received more bad news. His right arm was not healing properly and had to be broken again. After his release from St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Bhaskar received extensive rehabilitation at the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, NYU. His friends and Mark La Roche (d. 1991), his partner for thirty years, helped Bhaskar through those dark months.

For a time, Bhaskar continued to choreograph his dance company. With Bhaskar no longer on center stage, revenues fell and the company closed by 1980. In recognition of his contributions to the world of dance, Bhaskar received the prestigious Ruth St. Denis award, in 1979. Bhaskar refocused to become a fine arts painter and writer. His writings include children's stories notably "Fables of India," and numerous articles for a variety of publications. Bhaskar would periodically donate his paintings to charities so that the funds raised would go to support the disabled.

Chowdhury would become a naturalized American citizen. In 1957, he married Joan W. Harper (d. 1963). In 2003, Chowdhury died at the age of seventy-two in New York City.

Custodial History

The collection was donated by Shala F. Mattingly, a close friend and former dance partner of Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury.

Scope and Content Note

The collection which dates from 1930 to 2003, focuses on the personal and professional life of Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury (1930-2003), an Indian folk dancer, choreographer, actor, writer and fine arts painter. The files hold an incomplete handwritten autobiography, spanning his life from childhood to his paralyzing accident. Chowdhury's family life of wealth and privilege in Madras, India (now Chennai, India) is documented through family photographs. There are also several photographs of Chowdhury's return visits to his parents in India.

Chowdhury's dance career in India and the United States is documented through photographs, programs, and articles. Of his many dance partners, information is broadest on "Bhaskar and Shala" (Shala F. Mattingly). To a lesser extent, Bhaskar's film career is revealed in the photographs and reviews.

The latter part of the collection focuses on Bhaskar's post-dance career as a fine arts painter and author. There are extensive photographs of the paintings (many of the pictures were taken by Mattingly) and several black and white sketches. As an author, Bhaskar wrote on a variety of topics for newspapers and magazines. One notable article was "My Friend and I" written seven months after his

accident. This article was about a conversation that he had with his wheelchair that would now become part of his life. Bhaskar's other writings include "Fables of India," a series of children's stories. As a world renowned artist, whose dance career suddenly ended, many articles were written about him. The remainder of the collection includes a few letters relating to the accident, a tribute from La Meri on Bhaskar receiving the St. Denis award, and photographs of Bhaskar, mostly later in life, in his apartment in New York City

Arrangement: Arranged by subject.

Key Terms

Occupations

Actors
Choreographers
Dancers

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Autobiography
Clippings
Correspondence
Drawings
Ephemera
Photographs

Geographic Names

Chennai (India)
India -- Social life and customs -- 20th century

Subjects

Dance -- India -- Chennai
Dance -- United States

Names

Chowdhury, Devi Prosad Roy, 1899-1975

Container List

- Autobiography Circa 1978
- b. 1 f. 1-6 pp. 1-1195, Undated Pages (spiral notebooks)
 - b. 2 f. 1-6 Tours, Accident
 - b. 3 f. 1-13 Bhaskar from Infancy to Adulthood 1930-1973
- Photographs--Family 1930-2003
- b. 8 f. 1 Parents and Bhaskar 1950, undated
 - b. 4 f. 1-2 Dance Performances. India 1940s-1950s
 - b. 8 f. 2-3 Dance Performances. India
- Career. Dancer, Choreographer, and Actor 1950-1977
- b. 4 f. 3-7 Dance Performances. United States 1950s-1970s
 - b. 8 f. 2-3 Dance Performances. United States 1950s-1960s
The file contains several oversize images of Bhaskar, and a program featuring Bhaskar.
 - b. 4 f. 8 Tours. Abroad 1960s
The files holds some documentation on tours to Australia, the Caribbean and South America.
 - b. 4 f. 8-13 Bhaskar and Shala 1965-1975
Bhaskar and Shala F. Mattingly known as "Bhaskar and Shala" danced as a team for ten years and toured the United States and abroad. The files hold photographs, programs, reviews and Shala's recollections about their partnership.
 - b. 4 f. 14 Choreographed Programs 1960s-1970s
Documents the dance programs/features that Bhaskar choreographed.
 - b. 5 f. 1-4 Articles and Reviews about Bhaskar-Dances of India (dance company) 1950s-1970s
 - b. 5 f. 5 Articles about Bhaskar 1990s
 - b. 5 f. 6 Biography of an Artist. Walter Sorell 1979
Bhaskar was mentioned on page 125
 - b. 5 f. 7 AwF'ily Nice 1964
Off-Broadway Play
 - b. 5 f. 8 Christine 1960
Broadway Musical
 - b. 5 f. 9 Creation of Woman 1964
Short Film
 - b. 8 f. 4 I Drink Your Blood 1971
Film
 - b. 5 f. 10 Instant Love 1971
Film
 - b. 5 f. 11 Kindly Monkeys 1965
Play
 - b. 5 f. 12-13 King of Dark Chamber 1961
Play
 - b. 5 f. 14 We're Civilized?" 1962
Off-Broadway Musical Comedy
 - b. 5 f. 15 Unidentified skit undated
 - b. 5 f. 16 Modeling, Publicity Photographs 1970s
 - b. 8 f. 5 Modeling, Publicity Photographs 1970s

Career. Dancer, Choreographer, and Actor (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 17 Nightclub Act--Photographs 1970s, 1990s
- b. 6 f. 1 Correspondence 1977, 1990s
- b. 6 f. 2 La Meri Tribute to Bhaskar 1970s
- b. 6 f. 3 Photographs of Bhaskar at Home 1980s-2000s
- Post-Dance Career. Artist and Writer 1978-2000s
- b. 6 f. 4-6 Photographs of Bhaskar's Paintings 1980s
- b. 6 f. 7-8 Articles about Chowdhury 1970s-1990s
- b. 6 f. 9 Article. My Friend and I 1978
This article was written about seven months after the accident.
- b. 6 f. 10 Article. A Tribute to a True Devotee of Indian Dance 1999
This article was written as a tribute to Raja (born Joseph Levine).
- b. 6 f. 11 Story. The Great Queen of Chowdhury 1996-1997
- b. 6 f. 12 The Wayward Ramblings of Bhaskar undated
- b. 7 f. 1-6 Childrens Story. Fables of India 1985, undated
- b. 7 f. 7-10 Original Art Work undated
- b. 7 f. 11 Other. Moon Lady by Allison Assante
This book was dedicated to Bhaskar
- b. 8 f. 6 Black and White Drawings
- b. 8 f. 7 Watercolor