

Inventory of the Hadassah Papers, 1938-1988

(S)*MGZMD 135

Jerome Robbins Dance Division

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
New York, New York**

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Descriptive Summary

Title:	Hadassah Papers, 1938-1988
Collection ID:	(S)*MGZMD 135
Creator:	Hadassah
Extent:	10.49 linear feet (11 boxes)
Repository:	Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Abstract

Hadassah was a pioneer of Israeli and Indian (Hindu) dancing in America, and a choreographer of rare taste and artistic integrity.

Hadassah was also a well-admired instructor, who taught Israeli and Indian dance workshops across the United States and abroad. She was a faculty member, board member and chairwoman of the ethnic division at the New Dance Group Studio in Manhattan.

The collection is mainly clippings of Hadassah. There are also dance programs, photographs, and some correspondence.

Administrative Information

Access

Collection is open to the public. Photocopying prohibited. Advance notice may be required.

Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Preferred Citation

Hadassah Papers, (S)*MGZMD 135, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Custodial History

The Hadassah Papers were donated to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in 1995 by Milton Epstein.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in June 2004.

Biographical Note

Hadassah was an American, born in 1909 in Jerusalem. Her father was an American rabbi.

The question most asked is “How did a nice Jewish girl end up being the premiere Indian dancer of her time? The story most often told by Hadassah was that, as a young girl, riding in a horse-driven carriage from Jerusalem to Jaffa, her family heard chanting from off the road. Pulling over to investigate, her father discovered to his surprise that these men were not Hasidim reciting their cantorials, but Hindus in the service of the British Army. Her father’s curiosity was aroused, and the family visited with the soldiers as they sang more. Being a cantor himself, her father chanted some of the liturgical melodies of Hebrew prayer and was amazed at their similarity to the Indians’ hymns. Hadassah, too, was struck by these commonalities...“I came to the conclusion that if the chants of the Hindus and the Hasidic are similar, and if the music is the handmaiden of the dance, Indian dance must be similar to ancient Hebrew dance.”

Hadassah made her professional debut in 1938, with Japanese dancer Kenji Hinoke. She made her solo debut on January 11, 1945 in a program shared with Josephine Premice, and Pearl Primus. Hadassah and Company debuted at the YM/YWHA on June 4, 1950. During the 1950s and 60s she performed many times at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Massachusetts. She toured India and Israel in 1959.

She was a faculty member, board member and chairwoman of the ethnic division at the New Dance Group Studio in Manhattan.

Her best-known work was *Shuvi Hafshi (Return My Soul)*, based upon Psalm 116. “It is this dance that personifies Hadassah’s ingrained spirituality, her respect for the incorporeal as well as substance, instilled for life in that ancient city of religion.”¹

“*Broadway Hindu*, another popular dance, was a parody on the so-called Hindu dancing shown in American films, in costume, expression and choreography, it was deliciously realistic, in fact a chastened version.”²

Her *Tagore Suite*, commissioned by the Tagore Centenary Committee, was performed for the first time in 1961.

Hadassah was married to Milton Epstein soon after coming to the United States. She died of cancer Nov. 18, 1992, in Manhattan at the age of 83.

¹ “Hadassah: A Career Kissed by the Gods”, *Arabesque*, Sept/Oct. 1983, p. 6-8, 29.

² “Dance Recital by Hadassah”, *Times of India*, March 15, 1959.

Scope and Content Note

The Hadassah Papers consists of correspondence, newsletters, clippings from newspapers and dance-themed magazines, programs and playbills with Hadassah and other dancers and dance companies and photographs.

The collection spans the years of 1937-1988, with a heavy concentration on the years 1947-1961. There is some personal correspondence although this is limited. The majority of the collection is comprised of newspaper clippings and copies of dance magazines in which Hadassah is highlighted.

Organization

Series I : Correspondence

Sub-series 1: Hadassah

Sub-series 2: Tagore

Sub-series 3: Ted Shawn

Series II : Dance

Sub-series 1: Hadassah (solo & Company)

Sub-Series 2: Other Dancers & Dance Companies

Sib-Series 3: General

Series III : Clippings

Series IV : Programs/Playbills

Series V : Photographs

Series VI : Oversize Material

Series Descriptions

Series I : Correspondence, 1940-1983 [2 Boxes]

This series consists of correspondence to and from Hadassah. The correspondence is mainly in regards to dance performances, with very little personal correspondence. There are however some handwritten notes.

Arrangement: Alphabetical

Organization: Sub-series 1

Sub-series 2

Sub-series 3

Sub-series 1 – Hadassah [4 folders]

Arrangement:

This series consists of correspondence to and from Hadassah. Also included Chassidic Folkdances, notes written by Ira Weisburd, and press releases. One folder is material that her husband created. Included here are biographies of Hadassah, and articles her husband wrote for dance magazines.

Sub-series 2 – Tagore [4 folders]

Arrangement:

The Tagore folders contain material involving the Tagore Society of New York, the Tagore Centenary Committee, and miscellaneous material about exhibits, the Temple of Understanding, and a play of Tagore's life, *King of the Dark Chamber*.

Sub-series 3 – Ted Shawn [5 folders]

Arrangement:

The Ted Shawn materials consist mainly of Shawn's annual newsletter (1957-1972), with handwritten personal notes to Hadassah and her husband. Also included is correspondence concerning Hadassah performing at Jacob's Pillow, programs from Jacob's Pillow and correspondence to and from Ruth St. Denis.

Series II : Dance, 1938-1988 [3 Boxes]

Arrangement: Alphabetical

Organization: Sub-series 1: Hadassah (solo & Company)

Sub-series 2: Other Dancers and Dance Companies

Sub-series 3: General

This series consists of programs, posters, and brochures about dances Hadassah performed as a solo and with her company.

Sub-series 1 – Hadassah (solo and with company), 1938-1981 [6 folders]

Arrangement:

This sub-series consists of Hadassah's debut solo performance, and performances she did at the Henry Street Playhouse, Cooper Union, the YMHA on 92nd street, Folk Dancing (which was a later in life discovery), Museum of Natural History's Dance around the World program, and her working relationship with the New Dance Group.

Sub-series 2 – Other Dancers and Dance Companies, 1939-1988 [8 folders]

Arrangement:

This sub-series consists of material and correspondence with the famous ethnic dancer La Meri, Hadassah's first professional dance teacher, Kodrat. There are three folders of dance companies that were presented by the promoter S. Hurok. They include Dancers of Bali, Inbal, and Uday Shankar. There is one folder each of material about the dancers Shanta Rao, Ragini Devi, and Benjamin Zemach.

Sub-series 3 – General, 1943-1986 [7 folders]

Arrangement:

This sub-series consists of material concerning Hadassah's 1959 trip to India and Israel. There are also materials concerning programs involving Jewish organizations. Also included is information concerning education and dance. There is one folder of material about the "Consultation on the church and the arts."

Series III : Clippings, 1940-1986 [1 Box]

The Hadassah Papers

Arrangement: Newspapers clippings—Chronological
Magazines – Alphabetical and then chronological

This series consists of newspaper clippings and issues of dance magazines in which Hadassah was prominently featured. Some of the clippings and magazines have hand-written notes in the margins and on the covers. It is undetermined whether the handwriting is Hadassah's or her husband's.

Series IV : Programs/Playbills, 1946-1972 [1 Box]

Arrangement: Alphabetical by Folder, then Chronological

This series consists of Playbills and programs from many different dance company performances. They are broken into three categories: Hindu/Eastern/Ethnic, Jewish, and other.

Series V : Photographs, undated [1 Box]

Arrangement:

This series consists of 2 folders of photographs. One folder is 8 x 10 glossy prints of production stills. The second folder is smaller prints, mostly of performers, with a couple of personal photographs from Hadassah's childhood (?). Also included are a few candid shots of Hadassah at an after dance party.

Series VI : Oversized Material, 1959-1961 [3 Boxes]

Arrangement:

This series consists of Hebrew language newspapers that Hadassah brought back with her from the 1959 trip to Israel. There are two photo plates; one a full-length of Hadassah in costume, and one of Pearl Primus. The third box contains a large drawn caricature of Hadassah, and the mock-up of a brochure of Hadassah with career highlights. The brochure was used in press releases and performances.

Series I: Correspondence, 1940-1983

Sub-series 1: Hadassah, 1940-1983

Box 1

- F. 1 Correspondence, 1948-1970
- F. 2 Dance Notes and Press Releases, 1959
- F. 3 Notes, 1959-1974
- F. 4 Milton Epstein, 1940-1983

Sub-series 2: Tagore, 1961-1982

Box 2

- F. 1 Tagore Society Centenary Committee, 1961
- F. 2 Tagore General, 1961
- F. 3 Tagore Society of New York, 1962-1969
- F. 4 Tagore – Plays, Exhibits, Temple of Understanding, 1961-1982

Sub-series 3: Ted Shawn, 1951-1972

- F. 6 Correspondence, 1951-1971
- F. 7 Annual Newsletter, 1957-1966
- F. 8 Annual Newsletter, 1967-1972
- F. 9 Jacob's Pillow, 1954-1964
- F. 10 Ruth St. Denis, 1963-1964

Series II: Dance, 1938-1988

Sub-series 1: Hadassah & Company, 1938-1981

Box 3

- F. 1 Solo Debut, 1938
- F. 2 Henry Street Playhouse & Cooper Union, 1954-1970
- F. 3 YMHA, 1953-1976
- F. 4 Folk Dancing, 1974-1981
- F. 5 Museum of Natural History, 1948-1952
- F. 6 New Dance Group, 1940-1967

Sub-series 2: Other Dancers and Companies, 1939-1963

Box 4

- F. 1 La Meri, 1946-1978
- F. 2 Kodrat, 1939-1940
- F. 3 S. Hurok presents
 - F. 3 Dancers of Bali, 1957
 - F. 4 Inbal and others, 1958-1960
 - F. 5 Uday Shankar, 1949-1962
- F. 6 Shanta Rao, 1957-1963
- F. 7 Ragini Devi, 1945
- F. 8 Benjamin Zemach, 1941

Sub-series 3: General, 1943-1986

Box 5

- F. 1 Jewish originals, 1948-1986
- F. 2 India, 1959
- F. 3 Israel Tourism, 1959
- F. 4 Education, 1951-1969
- F. 5 General, 1943-1972
- F. 6 Religious Dance, 1948-1951

Series III : Clippings and Magazines, 1940-1986

Box 6

- F. 1 Newspaper Clippings, 1940-1986
- F. 2 Woodie Guthrie, 1966-1968
- Magazines, 1945-1992

- F. 3 Arabesque & Ballet International, 1983-1992
- F. 4 Dance & Dance Magazine & Dancing Times, 1945-1965
- F. 5 Dance News, 1948-1961
- F. 6 Dance Observer, 1945-1963

Series IV: Programs/Playbills, 1936-1972

Box 7

- F. 1 Hindu/Eastern/Ethnic, 1936-1972
- F. 2 Jewish, 1948-1964
- F. 3 Other, 1937- 1961

Series V : Photographs, undated

Box 8

- F. 1 8 x 10 Production stills and head-shots
- F. 2 Smaller production still and snapshots
- F. 3 Copies of Photographs

Series VI : Oversize Material, 1959-1961

Box 9

Photo Plates, 1961

Box 10

Hebrew Newspapers, 1959

Box 11

Mock-ups and Drawings, undated

- F. 1 Sketch of Hadassah
- F. 2 Brochure Mock-up #1
- F. 3 Brochure Mock-up #2
- F. 4 Tagore Sketch