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Guide to the

Christopher Scott papers on the Ridiculous Theatrical Company

1960-2002

*T-Mss 2003-054

Processed by Elisabeth Elkind.

Summary

Creator: Scott, Christopher, 1945-2002

Title: Christopher Scott papers on the Ridiculous Theatrical Company

Date: 1960-2002

Size: 3 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: The Christopher Scott Papers on the Ridiculous Theatrical Company were given to the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts by Michael von Uchtrup in November 2003.

Abstract: Correspondence and writings of Christopher Scott and Charles Ludlam and publicity and other records of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company illuminate the underground theater scene in New York City, primarily from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Conditions Governing Access:

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Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

Christopher Scott helped found the Ridiculous Theatrical Company with actor/playwright Charles

Ludlam in 1967. Scott (1945-2002) met Ludlam at Harborfields High School in Greenlawn, Long Island in 1961 when he was a sophomore and Ludlam a senior. After Ludlam was expelled from the school's Drama Club, they founded the Student Repertory Theatre in a loft above a liquor store in Northport, Long Island with Scott's mother paying the \$25 a month rent.

Charles Ludlam (1943-1987), a satirist, wrote, staged and acted in 29 plays, inventing a completely new comic theater. His Ridiculous Theatrical Company emerged in the 1960s in a Greenwich Village basement breaking all the conventional rules of the stage. Campy and outrageous, with roots in vaudeville, old movies and gothic novels, and an openly gay sensibility, the theater was a dynamic force in 1970s and 80s New York. Successful works by Ludlam included *Bluebeard*, *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, and *Turds in Hell*. Ludlam, who usually appeared in his own plays, both as male characters and in drag, had probably his greatest acting success in the title role in *Camille*. A recipient of various fellowships and awards, he was also a character actor in film and television and taught and staged productions on college campuses. When he died of AIDS in May 1987, his obituary was on the front page of the *New York Times* and over a thousand people attended his memorial service. His partner and featured performer, Everett Quinton, kept the Ridiculous Theatrical Company going with new plays and Ludlam revivals until financial problems forced him to disband it in 1996.

Christopher Scott worked in various capacities at the theater, serving as an actor, business manager, publicist and patron during its formative years. As his background was in the fine arts, he designed sets and publicity for productions, and took publicity photos of the actors. From 1978-1981, he served as executive director of the company, but left after the failure of *Love's Tangled Web*. Aside from the theater, Scott's professional career was as an advisor and consultant to art and cultural agencies such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York City Commission of Cultural Affairs as well as to individual artists and designers.

Scope and Content Note

The collection contains correspondence, mainly personal letters by Ludlam to Scott, scripts and notebooks by Ludlam, writings by Scott including his memoirs of working with Ludlam, and records of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, primarily publicity such as mock-ups and art work by Scott for printed material and the programs and fliers themselves, as well as photographs and clippings and a small amount of correspondence, minutes and reports. There are also a few items from Playhouse of the Ridiculous, a predecessor to the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, and oversize material including posters for productions and biographical articles on Ludlam.

Arrangement: Series I: Personal correspondence Series II: Writings Sub-series 1- Scripts by Charles Ludlam Sub-series 2 - Notes and Notebooks by Charles Ludlam Sub-series 3 - Manuscripts by or about Christopher Scott Sub-series 4 - Manuscripts by Peter Golub Series III: Ridiculous Theatrical Company correspondence Series IV: Ridiculous Theatrical Company administrative records Series V: Ridiculous Theatrical Company publicity Sub-series 1- Mock-ups Sub-series 2 - Photographs Sub-series 3 - Printed publicity Series VI: Magazine articles and newspaper clippings Series VII: Playhouse of the Ridiculous Series VIII: Oversize materials

Key Terms

Subjects

Experimental theater -- New York (State) -- New York

Off-Broadway theater

Geographic Names

Greenwich Village (New York, N.Y.)

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Scripts

Names

Scott, Christopher, 1945-2002

Ludlam, Charles

Ridiculous Theatrical Company

Container List

Series I: Personal correspondence 1964-1989, n.d (5 folders)

Personal correspondence of Christopher Scott includes an interesting file of handwritten letters Ludlam wrote to him between 1964-1971 and possibly earlier, personal letters he received from others, photocopies of a letter he wrote to Ludlam and one he wrote to his parents, and letters to Scott on using his photographs.

By correspondent and chronological

- b. 1 f. 1 **Correspondence / Charles Ludlam** 1964-1971, n.d (1 folder)
Personal letters by Charles Ludlam to Christopher Scott
- b. 1 f. 2 **Correspondence / Christopher Scott** 1969 Jan. 28 (1 letter)
Personal letter (photocopy) by Christopher Scott to Charles Ludlam.
- b. 1 f. 3 **Correspondence / Christopher Scott** 1967-1980, n.d (1 folder)
Personal letters to Christopher Scott from others. Includes postcard from Black-Eyed Susan.
- b. 1 f. 4 **Correspondence / Christopher Scott** 1976 Mar. 3 (1 letter)
Letter (photocopy) by Christopher Scott to his parents.
- b. 1 f. 5 **Correspondence / Christopher Scott** 1989 (1 folder)
Letters to Scott on the rights to use his photographs.

Series II: Writings 1962-2002, n.d (12 folders)

Manuscripts are by Charles Ludlam, Christopher Scott and Peter Golub.

By author and alphabetical

Sub-series 1 - Scripts by Charles Ludlam 1971-1977, n.d (5 folders)

Mostly typescripts with handwritten revisions.

Alphabetical

- b. 1 f. 6 ***Bill the Bellhop*** n.d. (1 folder)
Various drafts, incomplete. No author stated, but probably by Ludlam.
- b. 1 f. 7 ***Corn by Charles Ludlam*** 1972 (1 folder)
Photocopied typescript with a few handwritten revisions.
- b. 1 f. 8 ***Eunuchs of the Forbidden City by Charles Ludlam*** 1971 (1 folder)
Photocopy of typed and handwritten script with a few revisions in pencil.
- b. 1 f. 9 ***Isle of the Hermaphrodites or The Murdered Minion by Charles Ludlam***
1976 (1 folder)
Photocopied typescript.
- b. 1 f. 10 ***Der Ring Gott Farblonjet by Charles Ludlam*** 1977 (1 folder)
Typescript with a few pencil revisions, inscribed "To Chris..."

Sub-series 2 - Notes and Notebooks by Charles Ludlam 1962-1966, n.d (3 folders)

Two notebooks by Charles Ludlam with photographs and headlines from newspapers, telegrams and other material pasted in along with his handwritten comments. Also partial scripts, notes, ideas and drawings by Ludlam.

Chronological

Series II: Writings (cont.)

Sub-series 2 - Notes and Notebooks by Charles Ludlam (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 11 **Manuscripts probably by Charles Ludlam** 1962, n.d (1 folder)
Includes partial scripts, both typed and handwritten, play synopses, notes, ideas, drawings and a typed one page essay by Ludlam.
- b. 1 f. 12 **Collage notebook by Charles Ludlam** 1966 (1 folder)
Marble composition book, inscribed "To Chris, the hero of the piece." Includes photos clipped from newspapers and magazines, telegrams to Ludlam, and handwritten text.
- b. 1 f. 13 **Collage notebook by Charles Ludlam** 1966 (1 folder)
"The Paul Verlaine Story"; includes photos and headlines clipped from newspapers and magazines and handwritten comments.

Sub-series 3 - Manuscripts by or about Christopher Scott 1981-2002, n.d (3 folders)

Various notes and memoirs of Christopher Scott, most pertaining to Charles Ludlam and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

- b. 1 f. 14 **Manuscripts by or about Christopher Scott** 1992, n.d (1 folder)
Includes Scott's memoirs of Ludlam and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, and biographical information and interviews with Scott.
- b. 1 f. 15 **I Ching study by Christopher Scott** 1981 (1 folder)
I Ching study of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.
- b. 1 f. 16 **Notes and ephemera of Christopher Scott** 1991-2002, n.d (1 folder)
Notes for biography of Charles Ludlam and miscellaneous ephemera probably kept by Christopher Scott.

Sub-series 4 - Manuscripts by Peter Golub n.d. (1 folder)

Resume, proposal for an opera and typed poems Golub intended to set to music.

- b. 1 f. 17 **Manuscripts by Peter Golub** n.d. (1 folder)
Contains biographical information.

Series III: Ridiculous Theatrical Company correspondence 1967-1987 (3 folders)

Professional correspondence of Christopher Scott and Charles Ludlam on matters at the Ridiculous Theatrical Company as well as general fundraising appeals.

- b. 1 f. 18 **Correspondence / Charles Ludlam** 1967 Oct. 20 (1 folder)
Copy of a certified letter to Charles Ludlam on stage production rights to his *Conquest of the Universe* from the lawyer of a producer granted exclusive rights.
- b. 1 f. 19 **Correspondence / Christopher Scott** 1981-1987 (1 folder)
Professional correspondence of Scott with the Ridiculous Theatrical Company includes his memo to Charles Ludlam on the title of their next production, a letter to him from Peter Golub authorizing him to sign checks for the theater and a letter from Scott to Steven Samuels, general manager of the Ridiculous on the memorial service for Ludlam and future work of the theater.
- b. 1 f. 20 **Correspondence** 1975-1981 (1 folder)
Fundraising correspondence.

Series IV: Ridiculous Theatrical Company administrative Records 1978-1988 (4 folders)

Consists of minutes from two meetings, an annual report with financial statements, a grant application and other administrative files such as phone numbers and patron lists primarily from the period when Christopher Scott was executive director of the Company.

Chronological

- b. 1 f. 21 **Board minutes** 1978 Mar. 13, n.d (1 folder)
From two meetings.
- b. 1 f. 22 **Annual report** 1980 (1 folder)
Financial statements and notes by Christopher Scott, executive director of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company at this time.

Series IV: Ridiculous Theatrical Company administrative Records (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 23 **Grant application 1981** (1 folder)
Grant application by Charles Ludlam to the NEA.
- b. 1 f. 24 **Administrative Records 1988, n.d** (1 folder)
Phone numbers, patron list and miscellaneous ephemera.

Series V: Ridiculous Theatrical Company publicity 1967-1992 (14 folders)

Consists of working files such as mock-ups for ads and programs, and photographic prints, contact sheets and negatives, as well as the final printed version of the publicity such as posters, fliers, programs and ads and listings clipped from newspapers.

By type

Sub-series 1 - Mock-ups 1981, n.d (6 folders)

Layouts for publicity for productions of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, primarily from the period 1978-1981 when Christopher Scott served as executive director of the Company.

- b. 2 f. 1 **Mock-ups n.d.** (1 folder)
General working files for the theater.
- b. 2 f. 1 ***Mock-ups for A Christmas Carol* n.d.** (1 folder)
Ad and program layouts.
- b. 2 f. 3 ***Mock-ups for Love's Tangled Web* 1981** (1 folder)
Photo and layout for publicity ads.
- b. 2 f. 4 ***Mock-ups for Reverse Psychology* n.d.** (1 folder)
Layout for ads and program.
- b. 2 f. 5 ***Mock-ups for Utopia Incorporated* n.d.** (1 folder)
Layout for ads.
- b. 2 f. 6 **Mock-ups for miscellaneous productions n.d.** (1 folder)
Includes *Cornand Eunuchs of the Forbidden City*.

Sub-series 2 - Photographs 1970-1981, n.d (5 folders)

Prints, negatives and contact sheets are of Charles Ludlam, Black-Eyed Susan and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company's productions of *Reverse Psychology* and *Love's Tangled Web*. Some, and perhaps all, were shot by Christopher Scott.

- b. 3 f. 7 **Portrait of Charles Ludlam 1970** (1 folder)
Negative photographs of the portrait of Charles Ludlam by Christopher Scott.
- b. 2 f. 8 **Photographs of Black-Eyed Susan n.d.** (1 folder)
Contact sheets and negatives.
- b. 2 f. 9 ***Photographs of Reverse Psychology* 1980 Sept. 8** (1 folder)
Prints, contact sheets and negatives.
- b. 2 f. 10 ***Photographs of Love's Tangled Web* 1981 May 8** (1 folder)
Prints, contact sheets and negatives.
- b. 2 f. 11 **Miscellaneous photographs n.d.** (1 folder)
Includes a young Charles Ludlam and unidentified production photographs.

Sub-series 3 - Printed publicity 1967-1992 (8 folders)

Printed publicity for the Ridiculous Theatrical Company consists of posters, fliers, programs, playbills, press releases, ads and listings in newspapers and a listing in a reference source.

- b. 2 f. 12 **Printed publicity 1967-1992** (1 folder)
Posters, fliers and programs.
- b. 2 f. 13 **Printed publicity n.d.** (1 folder)
Posters, fliers and programs. Called, "full set," though incomplete.
- b. 2 f. 14 ***Press release for Bluebeard* 1970** (1 folder)

Series V: Ridiculous Theatrical Company publicity (cont.)
Sub-series 3 - Printed publicity (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 15 **Playbills 1974-1985 (1 folder)**
Playbills from Ludlam's time as director of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. The set is incomplete.
- b. 3 f. 1 **Playbills 1987-1992 (1 folder)**
Playbills for the Ridiculous Theatrical Company after Ludlam's death. The set is incomplete.
- b. 3 f. 2 **Souvenir program 1992 (1 folder)**
Souvenir program for the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.
- b. 3 f. 3 **Ads and listings 1968-1981 (1 folder)**
Ads and listings for the Ridiculous Theatrical Company as they appeared in newspapers.
- b. 3 f. 4 **Listing in reference book 1979 (1 folder)**
Listing for the Ridiculous Theatrical Company in *Theatre Profiles 4*, a resource book of nonprofit professional theatres in the United States published by Theatre Communications Group, Inc., New York.

Series VI: Magazine articles and newspaper clippings 1967-1981 (6 folders)

Includes a profile of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, reviews of its productions, biographical information and photographs of Charles Ludlam from age 17 to his death, and miscellaneous clippings on the theater.

- b. 3 f. 5 **Article / Calvin Tomkins 1976 Nov. 15 (1 folder)**
New Yorker profile on the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.
- b. 3 f. 6 **Article 1983 Sept. (1 folder)**
Vanity Fair Nominates, "Our Candidates for Fame or Infamy" includes Charles Ludlam.
- b. 3 f. 7 **Clippings 1967-1981 (1 folder)**
Reviews of Ridiculous Theatrical Company productions.
- b. 3 f. 8 **Clippings ca. 1960-1983 (1 folder)**
Photographs of Charles Ludlam from newspapers and magazines. Includes Ludlam at age 17.
- b. 3 f. 9 **Clippings 1987-2000 (1 folder)**
Charles Ludlam's obituary from the *Village Voice* and an article on a symposium about him.
- b. 3 f. 10 **Clippings 1971-1980 (1 folder)**
Miscellaneous theater clippings.

Series VII: Playhouse of the Ridiculous 1966-1970 (2 folders)

Playhouse of the Ridiculous material consists of a few programs and press releases.

- b. 3 f. 11 **Programs and press releases 1966, n.d (1 folder)**
- b. 3 f. 12 **Program 1970 Jan. (1 folder)**
Program from AETA conference in which Charles Ludlam and the Playhouse of the Ridiculous staff participated.

Series VIII: Oversize materials 1967-1989 (7 folders)

Includes mock-ups and artwork by Christopher Scott for publicity for Ridiculous Theatrical Company productions, posters and two periodicals containing articles on Charles Ludlam and Christopher Scott.

Chronological

- b. 4 f. 1 **Mock-up 1967 (1 folder)**
Notes and poster layout for *Big Hotel* and *When Queens Collide*.
- b. 4 f. 2 **Mock-up 1968 (1 folder)**
Notes and poster layout for *Turds in Hell*. Design by Christopher Scott.
- b. 4 f. 3 **Mock-ups 1970 (1 folder)**
Artwork by Christopher Scott for *Bluebeard* and *Eunuchs of the Forbidden City*.

Series VIII: Oversize materials (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 4 **Mock-ups** 1975 (1 folder)
Design by Christopher Scott, text by Charles Ludlam for *Taboo Tableaus*.
- b. 4 f. 5 ***Bomb*** 1982 (1 folder)
Containing article: "Charles Ludlam and Christopher Scott," interviewed by Ted Castle.
- b. 4 f. 6 ***Interview*** 1989 Dec. (1 folder)
Containing article by David Kaufman: "From the Ridiculous to the Sublime," twelve friends and colleagues remember the late Charles Ludlam.
- b. 4 f. 7 **Posters** n.d. (1 folder)
Three posters for productions of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. Posters are for *Stage Blood*, *Utopia Incorporated* and *The Ventriloquist's Wife*.