

LIFE & TIMES OF MAMATA SHANKAR

If legendary dance maestros Uday Shankar and Amala Shankar are your parents, and phenomenal Sitar player Ravi Shankar your uncle, one cannot but live an extraordinary life. This is exactly how Mamata Shankar, herself an outstanding dancer and film actor, describes her life.

Growing up, Mamata remembers, playing and running around between rehearsing dance units, napping in green-rooms, travelling the world with Uday Shankar's dance troupe and generally taking the stage for granted. Her one sorrow, though, is that, to her Uday Shankar was always merely her 'Baba' and her interactions with him were never that of a Guru and his Shishshay, or teacher and student. It is her mother Amla Shankar who always played the role of a mentor and it is through her that she came to understand the magnitude of Uday Shankar's talent. However, the invaluable gift from her Baba was the gift of compassion. Therefore, it is quite natural that the Profile of Mamata's school, 'Udayan', states that, 'Children who enroll in "Udayan" not only learn dance, but are also groomed and nurtured to be a good human being in all respects, the society at large being the beneficiary in future.'

Mamata Shankar was recently in Dhaka to conduct both a dance workshop and dance exams. Her workshop, organized by Shadhona, one of the leading cultural organizations of Bangladesh, familiarized young dancers with the process through which Uday Shankar created the very first of the contemporary dances of modern India – a style rooted in tradition and history, but modern in its presentation. It was indeed a unique experience for the young ones to learn about the creation of Shankar's masterpieces, including 'Kalpana'. As a member of the West Bengal Dance Group Federation, Mamata and her colleagues conducted Dance Exams at Kolpotoru, Shadhona's dance academy. She was accompanied by her husband, Chandroday Ghosh, Director of both 'Udayan' and the 'Mamata Shankar

Dance Company'; her son, Ratul Shankar, an exceptional musician and music director; and three young dancers of her dance troupe.

For Mamata, having journeyed from childhood, in the realms of artistic experimentation, dance is a universal language that is created through spontaneous insight. Though trained in classical Bharatanatyam, Mamata chose to follow this very same path of improvisation and creativity that was carved by her famous

Baba, Mamata often states that dancing, for her, is always a combination of body, mind and soul. She says, "My aim, as was my father's dream, is to reach out to as many hearts as possible through a very simple form of dance. And by the grace of god, the troupe has got wide acceptance and encouraging audience-response at all our performances in India and abroad." Mamata explains that subjects chosen for each ballet performance almost invariably have a moral attached but such is the simplicity of this dance form that the audience never feels left out.

Mamata Shankar, has impeccable credentials as a Bangla actress on the silver screen, and has worked in films of Bengal's greatest film-makers - Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Rituparno Ghosh, Buddhadev Dasgupta and Gautam Ghosh. She speaks with ease and complacency about each of these astounding directors, amusing her fans with anecdotes about Mrinal Sen's ability to improvise and Ray's meticulous artistry, amongst other such particulars. Her award-winning role in Satyajit Ray's "Agantuk" is still cherished.

Mamata also speaks with love and awe about her incredibly talented brother, the Late Ananda Shankar, whose music is often used in her dances.

What is most interesting though, for her admirers in Dhaka, is to know how this very down-to-earth artiste balances her life of a dancer, film actor and Director of her institute. For Mamata Shankar, more than anything else, is the need for spiritual self-realization.

It is now Mamata's greatest goal in life to spread knowledge about Uday Shankar's thoughts on the arts, specifically dance and through it all, create a better world.

By Lubna Marium



father. She has received many accolades and won the hearts of her audiences for her own works such as, "Chandalika", "Horikhela", "Aajker Ekalabya", "Milap", "Shikar", "Vasantotsav", "Prakriti", "Kalmrigaya" & "Mother Earth", "Amritasya Putra".

A long-time devotee of Sri Sathya Sai