TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW
with ZORAY ANDRUS

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for the

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ZA: Do you want to ask me questions?

KW: I would just start at the top. Tell me a little about your training and background before the Federal Theatre Project days.

ZA: Yes. Well, my background was that I graduated from California College of Arts and Crafts and had done some additional work at the University of California and Mills College. My first job in the theatre was with the San Francisco Community Playhouse where I designed costumes.

KW; Had your work in school been in the theatre?

ZA; No, I'd never been interested in the theatre. (Laugh) But I needed a job and--

KW: You had been in painting and dress design?

ZA: I'm a painter, yes. So I'd been substitute teaching and you know, anything to earn a living. Then this job came up on the Federal Theatre Project so I quit teaching and never did it again.

KW: How did you hear about the Federal Theatre? Had it opened here?

ZA: It had already opened in Oakland and here in San Francisco. They had had Helen Frank as costume designer, and she left for some reason. And David Scott who designed the sets was a good friend of mine and I knew most of the people, the supervisors on the Art projects, and so they thought that I would be good at this, having done interesting costumes for the Community Playhouse, So, that's how I came on.

KW; Did you have to go on relief and do all that?

ZA: No, I' didn't. I was on non-relief. I could very well be on relief now. (Laugh) But I: was one of the non-relief people and we didn't have enough openings ever to fill the places we needed. But I mean that was how people like Anita Johanson and Jack Burch and all were only there briefly because they came on as non-relief and they wouldn't keep them. They'd need an actor for something

special so they would let the other people go. But I was the head of that project so they kept me, and I designed all the costumes excepting I had Jack design some of them when he came on, because he was absolutely marvelous at things like ballet and far-out period things and I was better at clumsy things (laugh) like Battle Hymn. He later went on and did all the big musicals on Broadway.

KW: How do you spell his last name? You know, I was trying to think.

ZA: I'm trying to think whether it's--well, he was only on for one or two things so you probably wouldn't have any record of it. But I see him once in a while.

KW: It seems like you did an awful lot of productions for the short time you were there.

ZA: Yes, I worked hard, I worked very hard. I mean, we worked from early in the morning until late at night. We came on with the idea that we were going to develop into a national theatre and I thought that was a great idea. It was something that meant something to us. So we were young.

KW: Bow did the idea of the Federal Theatre go over with the audiences in San Francisco generally? Were you well received? I mean, was there an audience for the productions?

ZA: Not as much audience as we should have had. I mean, that was one of the great problems. I don't know whether we had enough publicity or whether people thought it was a relief thing so they didn't think it would be like the Geary or the Curran. And actually, some of our productions were better, I think.

KW: Oh, I'm sure. There were so many people on, and it wasn't as if they were professionals.

ZA: Yes, and we had time to rehearse more than a lot of professional people do and a lot of them had been very fine professionals.

KW: Were you well equipped as far as oh, a place to either rehearse and put on the productions? And technically, I man, did you have materials when you needed them?

ZA: Well, sometimes. I was very adept at Raking do. (Laugh) As a matter of fact, they told me that my productions, my costumes, cost less than any in the country. But I had had that experience of working with the Community Theatre where you made do with a lot and you used substitute materials. And I found that burlap and terry cloth and muslin were great if you had some because we had the people working. I mean, paying wages was not the problem. The problem was material so everything I did was dyed or painted.

KW: Was it easy to get these kinds of things done? I mean, *was* there a spirit of cooperation as far as your saying, "I need this dyed?"

ZA: That wasn't too bad because the woman who did the dyeing had worked in Vienna with the famous craftsman there---I've forgotten his name—Crystal Veth, and she was marvelous. She became a marvelous friend and she was Viennese and tun, We had a kitchen connected with the workrooms and so she had great big kettles and stirred like a witch all day long and we had fun with that. But there was one dye that blew all through the air, malachite blue, and it just wafts. And we had one old lady who was Earl Warren's wife's aunt. And I believe there was a limit on the age you could be on the projects, wasn't it 35?

Well anyway, she took up our non-relief position the whole time I was there and she was 70, And she had worked at I. Magnin's, so she wasn't really what we needed, because everything had to be worked to the last degree and perfect,

And it wasn't cost but beautiful workmanship. But anyway, nobody liked her because she was a rather cross old maid and this one day I came in and she was in tears, And I said, "What is the matter, Miss Sheerer?"

And she said, "When I blow my nose, it's blue!" (Laugh)

KW: She didn't like that, huh?

ZA: No.

KW: Still, if you got done what you needed to on the premises, if the cloth got dyed, I mean.

ZA: The costumes were more interesting than people would make with materials that are what they are because they had to project--I had learned that from a costumer on the Community Playhouse because he had studied with Reinhardt and he knew about how you used Kotex to make ermine (laugh) and that it projects better than real ermine does. So our painted things were rather interesting. And everybody who didn't fit in any place else on the project and who was on relief, apparently was given to me. And I had to make do and find something they could do and teach them to--

KW: You mean like cutting or sewing or something?

ZA: Well, they couldn't cut. No, you had to have good cutters. But I remember there was one dear old lady. Well, she probably wasn't that old but to me at that time she was, and her name was Clarisse *Vance.* And all of the other older people on the project seemed to respect her highly and she was "somebody" apparently, but she couldn't act any longer. She **was** a dear, dear person and I can remember she didn't know how to sew and I didn't know what to do with her. So there were several productions that we had that needed flowers so I put Clarisse to making flowers. And she happily sat there making flowers all the time. Well, later on after I bought an old brewery, defunct brewery, in 'Virginia City and moved into it as a studio and residence, there was a room that had a lot of old things in it, including phonograph records. And one of those great, thick phonograph records with one side only was Clarisse Vance

singing in a London music hall. So she'd been "somebody." (Laugh)

KW: Now you found out what she could do.

ZA: Yes. Then there was another case where they sent me a juggler. They had no use for him. (Laugh) Elizabeth Elson said, "You can use him. You can put him to pressing." (Laugh) So I had this juggler pressing out the costumes. Scared me to death. I thought he'd juggle the iron. (Laugh)

KW: That's so strange that they would have sent them to you. You must have been a sympathetic soul or something..

ZA: Well, I guess I was, or naive enough to take what—well, you see, the acting—they had to be able to act or they couldn't use them.

KW; Well, that was the theory.

ZA; And that's what they came on as, were actors, but some of them had been so far removed from it or had gotten so old or so sick they couldn't do it. So they would pass them on to me. However, most of the good seamstresses I had came from the Sewing Project. So I did have some of those and old Mr. James **was** quite good at cutting costumes. And then I had another woman who came from the Sewing Project who was very good at that.

KW: Well, it's good that there was that degree of, you know, it wasn't hard to get at least people you needed, even if you couldn't afford the best materials.

ZA: No, you didn't have very good people, which made it--

KW: But they were hands, willing hands.

ZA: Yes, they were willing. Some of them were very good and some of them were hopeless, which is one of the reasons I had to do a lot of the work myself. I mean, I didn't do the actual sewing but I did all the, a lot of the fitting. And my idea of plays was to make a coordinated thing on the stage rather than individual—and for the type of people we had to use, we had to us? coordination

because individually they weren't that good.

KW: Well, it would make the play stronger I would think, generally.

ZA: Yes. And I tried to use colors psychologically to bring out the moods of the plays.

KW: Did you work closely with like the lighting technique and that?

ZA: Oh, yes. When David Scott was alive, we worked very closely. I mean, we planned out everything together because he had marvelous lighting ideas which I've never seen anybody else use, to give a stage great dimension and depth. He would use a cyclorama or a black velvet curtain and then he would put his lights down so that they made pools of light and gave great space. And he hated footlights; he wouldn't use those. So there was a lot of dissension about that because the actors wanted to have their faces showing and not flattened out. But David had beautiful ideas in color and spacing and light. And that was another reason while he was there the sets weren't so terribly expensive because we didn't need such heavy equipment.

KW: Oh, that's one place to save.

ZA: Yes. Well, where do we go from here?

KW: Wherever you'd like. I mean, anything that comes to mind about--you mentioned Elizabeth Elson. Was it easy to work under her? Was she a good administrator?

ZA: Very, very. Excellent, excellent person. And I think it was once or twice a week we had production meetings with all of the supervisors. And we would sometimes get interesting suggestions from Hallie Flanagan through Elizabeth and she apparently must have been a marvelous person.

KW: Hallie Flanagan?

ZA: Yes.

KW: Yes, that's what I've heard.

ZA: I just think she must have been super.

KW: You mentioned that you would get, what, production bulletins or reports from New York. Was it suggested that you follow those in your productions?

ZA: No, but there were all-over ideas that pertained to all the projects all over the country.

KW: I see. And so you could borrow from those if you wanted to?

ZA: And they would send us photographs of what had been done in New York and sometimes what they'd used. But I always felt they looked kind of Mickey Mouse in their photographs. ("Laugh) I don't know.

KW: But you didn't have to adhere to those?

ZA; Oh, no, no. No, we created the whole thing over again in our own way.

KW: Well, I would think you'd have to,

ZA: Yes. It was always an original production. And I suppose Bill Watts was the strongest director we had, but Everett Glass was the nicest to get along with. He was a dear.

KW: I guess those two, maybe they interchanged. I don't remember a cutoff point.

ZA; Well, they did different--Bill Watts was always interested in political and social significance in his plays. And Everett Glass was more interested in a play that was a play and that entertained. So actually, Everett Glass's playa, I think, attracted more people probably because people did want to be entertained and especially then in the middle of the Depression. And then there were, of course, the vaudeville projects which I also costumed and hated.

KW: I would think they'd be more difficult.

ZA: Well they were difficult because Mr. Dill was a very difficult character.

KW: Oh, Max Dill?

ZA: I guess it was Max Dill,

KW: Max Dill and he had a daughter, Maxine?

ZA: Yes. One of those must still be alive.

KW: Maybe she is. I would think he--

ZA: But he was a difficult character to work with because I remember Elizabeth telling me, "When you work with him, you have to pretend it was his idea." (Laugh)

KW: Became a "yes" person.

ZA: Yes. And the vaudevillians weren't that great. I remember they had a ventriloquist and he brought his dummy in to be dressed. (Laugh)

KW: Had you ever done that before?

ZA: No, I had never been that close to a ventriloquist's whatever you call it. I've forgotten. But it was on the table and he came in and I said, "Is this your dummy?" and I thought he was going to kill me. "You don't call them dummies" I mean, it was as if it was an extension of himself, much more than a child would have been. Oh, there were lots of funny things like that. And then one night in the vaudeville show, the most horrible thing happened. We had an imitation Houdini and he was locked up in the safe. And of course, the safe had a back to it that he could walk out of or a bottom or something. He didn't come out and they finally put the curtain down. And he was dead!

KW: He had missed his place to get out.

ZA: He just had a heart attack in the thing. So there were lots of strange happenings but—

KW: I would think so.

ZA: So many of the people were really--being young, I thought they were old, but they had been so poor that they were in bad health. I mean, their teeth needed attention or they had other things.

KW: Had they been old show people?

ZA: They'd all been shay people excepting some of the young people, the young

actresses who weren' t good at all.

KW: But the older ones, I mean, they'd been around here and I don't know--

ZA: I guess. Well, for instance, all the old vaudevillians had been in the Orpheum circuit or something like that but the others had been in dramatic groups. I man, there had been a Ye Liberty Theatre in Oakland and a Columbia Theatre where we were. Here, I think, had its own company. And I remember that different but relatively famous actors would come to see some of them. Some of them had been quite w ell-known. Truex was very well known at one time. And I remeber once Francis X Bushman calm in to see them. They were all pals and he was wearing some old moth-eaten-looking white flannel pants which looked strange in San Francisco and very theatrical looking. I recall that my mother used to go to see him on the stage and I thought he was about 75 then, but I guess he wasn't.

KW: You just projected the age into-

ZA: Yes, they were all old. (Laugh)

KW; Did any of the big— I don' t know , it wouldn't have been too famous maybe --but some of the Federal Theatre administrators from, like Howard Miller or--

ZA; award Miller came and we certainly didn't like him.

KW: He was, I guess, based in Los Angeles. So I'm sure he had a whole different--

ZA: His whole approach was to destroy the project.

KW: He didn't give you any helpful...

ZA: Oh, Cod, no] I remember at one of our production meetings, Elizabeth Elson said Halite Flanagan said he was a $25,000-a-year man, which at that time was like a $250, 000 now. But I mean, he was just a—

KW; was he just not interested in what you were doing here?

ZA; I don't know, that he had anything to do with theatre. I mean--

KW: Oh, that's true.

ZA: I don't think he did.

KW: He NV as an administrative type.

ZA: I think he was a very ambitious young man on his way up, however he got there, probably like Haldeman and Erlichman type.

KW: That's true. I don't think he had much theatre background any. I think he was definitely an office kind of person.

ZA: Yes, he didn't know what we were about.

KW: So he would come up and kind of check over things?

ZA; I think he came a couple of times, but there was a lot of b ad politics going on in the Theatre Project, very bad,

KW: I knave in Los Angeles in particular—maybe it happened here, too-- there Iw as-- sometimes they'd hire WPA (Works Progress Administration) administrators, who, like Miller you say, didn't care a thing do out the theatre. In fact, in Los Angeles this one man, Alexander Leftwich, do you know that name?

ZA; No.

KW; He was actually later, I think, than you. But he was essentially hired to close it.

ZA: Well, I thought Howard Miller was, too, I mean to destroy it. That *was* our feeling.

KW; How about George Gerwing or Ole Ness? They were down there, too, but I don't know- if they ever--they didn't have as-

ZA: I think that project probably wasn't as interesting as ours because those people were more movie people, and I think they were mostly extras, I imagine. KW: Yours was such a mix. That's the interesting thing, of all the-ZA: I think it was Lucille Ball. Was she on it?

KW: You know, Peter mentioned that to me yesterday. I did not know. You mean down in Los Angeles?

ZA: Yes. I think they came up with a play just before I left and I think she was with them. But they weren't a different breed of people than the ones here. I think the ones here were quite human and very decent people.

KW: Well, and generally San Francisco has had a theatre commitment that you don't associate with Los Angeles, and probably that's true in the past, I would think.

ZA: II would think so.

KW: Because it sounds like there was a good deal of camaraderie in your group. Is that right?

ZA: Oh, yes, we young people were all pretty close and well, it became our life because we didn't have time for anything else. So after the production, we'd all go and have a drink together or eat something and then there were parties, too.

KW: Was there any kind of union trouble up here as far as being in the WPA union?

ZA: We had a WPA union and--

KW: Workers' Alliance?

ZA: I don't know what they were connected with, but that's where the vaudevillians came in. They came in with a different group or something and they were all for destroying the union, which was a union that wanted the project to go on and to become what ACT (American Conservatory Theatre) is now, I guess. And I remember when the vaudevillians--it couldn't have been Equity. Then Equity came and Gilbert, who was in charge of Equity, wanted--

KW: Oh, John Gilbert?

ZA: Not John.

KW: Walter?

ZA: I don't know. He was the president of Equity. But there were several meetings

with Equity and—which would have been the same old thing over again that had destroyed theatre in the United States. So there was a lot of union conflict but it was just warming up when I left so I wasn't into any of the picketing or anything like that.

KW: But they did do that, I understand.

ZA: Yes, they did. I mean, the people I knew, had worked with, all of these people who were directing and the good people on the project had belonged to that union. They were picketing after I left.

KW: Was there a lot of like writing to Washington and protesting cuts and all that? Not the basic things but just--

ZA: Oh, yes. The cuts were just beginning when I left. I got married and left. I remember a friend of mine who worked in the social service departments came to one of the productions. And there were tears in her eyes. She said, "Zoray, I hate to see you with all these ideals; you will never reach it carrying all this old dead wood along," which was what it actually was. I mean, as I say, these people were all, they'd been so poverty - stricken that they were either ill or--

KW: You mean the older people on relief?

ZA: Yes, all the people who were on relief, most of them. Same of them were okay and well, but I had a feeling that they really had been sort of beaten down. And we had no way of starting a national theatre with pulling all this dead wood along and no way to get young or more exciting people involved. And there wasn't any other theatre here excepting Theatre Union then. And those were all people who were working at other jobs. It wasn't like--the little theatres here now I think have sane marvelous actors and performers. It's just that sane of the things they do are sort of stupid.

KW: But it has really blossomed, I know.

ZA: I think it is. I think there's a great development of the theatre here now because I've seen some of them in short things and their body movement is marvelous. We never had anything like that then.

KW: Oh, there's so much more opportunity.

ZA: Well, they have the whole day to work. You see, the Theatre Project was the only thing that gave people a chance to work at theatre all day. And it was too bad that we couldn't have used it as a theatre that developed people rather than kept them alive.

KW: Yes, there was always that conflict about it, should it be good or should it just be, you know, kind of piecemeal?

ZA: Relief,

KW: Yes, that's it. I thought I'd ask you to look over this sheet. My costume vocabulary is very poor so this is just a general list that may not be different.

ZA: Well on the Theatre Project we had ample workers, as you know. I had a Miss Beveridge who was my research person. And Miss Beveridge was the niece of a famous: Senator Beveridge.

KW; Oh, Albert, yes, Albert Beveridge.

ZA: And she was a maiden lady (laugh) who was such a maiden lady, it was really very funny. Because she would come in with these strange questions and answers. She really worked very hard and if I needed something from the library, she would go and get it for rue and dig out the material. However, didn't need too much because I had an old costume book that had belonged to my aunt's grandmother who costumed for the Dresden Opera. It was all falling apart but if I ever needed period things, I could usually find things in that. I'd been trained in costume design at art school and how to do the

research for that which was usually, go to the library and then there are De Moda and several standard books you would use. And in the case of, I guess it was The Farmer's Wife, was it, which I decided would--that was my idea to costume it that way. I mean, it was a play that Everett Glass directed and he came in with the idea that we would just, you know, play it contemporary. And I said, "Why, Everett, we could do this in 1912 costumes and it would really be fun. So that proved to be rather difficult to find costume reference material on something that recent. I mean, you could find things on the 1890's So I think that I got Miss Beveridge to go and get some old Delineators and probably go down to the morgue of the papers and find old photographs from the newspapers and that sort of thing. So that was how I worked my 1912. But those relatively recent costumes are harder to find material on than the old ones. But you can find it if you have a library with the things from 50 years back or the newspaper files. But she did much of that for me. I didn't have to go out and get too much.

Well, for me the working experience helped what I'd had but my art school training was--

KW: It probably, I would think, go hand in hand, really.

ZA: I mean arts and crafts at that time--I think it probably still is--is a school where you have to do something of everything in the field. I mean, we had a costume design course. We had an interior decorating course, basketry, everything. So that costume design course that we had at art school is what taught me where to get my reference material and how to look that up. Then for other things, for the actual construction, my work in the theatre had helped. Of course, we'd had tailoring in art school, too and we had all of those things-

And I found, for me, well, I'd done a little dance, not professionally but just a little bit and to know how a body moves so that you don't kill a person with weight and tightness and that sort of thing, is important. And for me, the thing I had found the most useful, I've always been interested in.

. . . and all of the theory, different religious or philosophical theories on color and what it meant. I mean, that I think in the theatre is invaluable and I've noticed sane of the better theatre that I've seen, they utilize that idea,

KW: Makes sense.

ZA: Yes. But I think for a--if it's a young person going to learn to be a costumer, that they ought to learn to move their own bodies and to learn something about the psychology of color and to study painting.

(Reads list of questions). Do you keep a scrapbook? Never. (Laugh) Painters, do you turn to in designing costumes for period pieces? I didn't turn much to painters for anything like that. I used more the standard costume reference books or as I said, more the things which people would have, living experience which you get from the newspapers and magazines and that sort of thing. And the other thing that I found totally useless which you learn in a costume design class, is the scale of a figure. As you notice, mine are scaled to the shape of a real person rather than a nine-point high, any of these boxed things and those things are designed so that they're so long that they don't--no figure can ever really look like that. So I tried to do them the way they would--in drama you do that. I suppose in ballet you probably do use an extension of the figure because that's what you're aiming for but in theatre you want them to have a human relationship. I've never

seen any other costume designer who scaled their drawings to the human figure. (Reads) Do you buy your fabrics or do you design them yourself?

Well, the fabrics I usually would get a work order to the wholesale fabric places and buy the materials by the bolts and usually bolts of muslin and terry cloth and burlap, although the last play I did, I costumed an Inter Players play' for Leon Forbes. And I used burlap for the priests' robes. That I did use a painter. It was set in 12th century Southern France so I figured that I could get away with 12th century costumes from Italy. So I used Giotto and Martinas I think his name was, who did the more colorful things. So it turned out very beautifully and the critics' comment on the color, but they didn't realize that they were just steals from Giotto. So I used the burlap to get that heavy effect and dyed it. And just a few days before we went on the stage, the leading actor came to me and said he was allergic to burlap. (Laugh) We had to make him a whole new costume. I don't remember what we used. Yes, in a period thing like that I would go to a really fine painter like Giotto. It was a religious thing so that--

Well, the fabrics I always bought down at the wholesale places by the bolt and we bought the threads and needles and bindings also that way and then you have them and you can paint them up or dye them or whatever you want. Yes, it is important to have a good relationship with the seamstress, the wardrobe people, and the actors. The actors, you find, are very difficult because they're all egocentric people and same of them, you will find, are just marvelous to work with. The more professional ones are the easier ones to work with.

KW: Well, if they've been in a number of productions, there are things they have been used to,

ZA: Well, lots of these old people-that's probably one of the reasons they were on relief, too, was that they had sane problems in relating to other people. They wanted to stand out on the stage and not be part of the ensemble. But this--

KW: Sane of those questions I can't take any credit for right now.

ZA: No, I'll tell you about this Sabine Women. I was telling a friend yesterday. There we had--again I say "old," but these people are half my age now, I presume. But I was 26 so they were old to me. And I looked at these figures and supposed to make a lot of sexy-looking women. So I thought, "What in the world will I do? And what will I do so I don't hurt any of their feelings because most of them had breasts hanging around their waistlines. And sane of them were young and sane of them were old. So I decided the best thing to do, which you'll see in the pictures is put false boobies on all of them. So we had false boobies made for all of them. Well, one of them came in. She was absolutely irate. She said, "Why did you make these for me? I Was the understudy for Anna Held." (Laugh)

So then when they started on the stage, these young girls, who really, sane of them, I think, got in through politics and had not really been actresses, one of them was ready to go on the stage. And I looked at her and she had her breasts on her back! (Laugh) So I had to be there all the time to see that they went on with what they were supposed to wear and the way it was supposed to be worn. And I remember--you asked about people caning, the more important people coming to visit us. I guess it was that production. What was his name who was head of the Pasadena Playhouse?

KW: Oh, Gilmor Brown.

ZA: Gilmor Brown. He came to the dress rehearsal and he was a very nice man, a fine person. And he was very impressed because I was such a stickler for detail that, if they started on the stage with a diamond ring or a watch or

something, I'd grab them. But that's the sort of thing that you have to watch when you're working with people like those people.

KW: And they weren't used to consistency. You did have to be there.

ZA: Yes. Because I remember a play I did for the Community Playhouse which was called, Mrs. Connelly's Beggar on Horseback. It was a masked play and we had masks for waiters and masks for businessmen and masks for reporters and the reporters had long noses. This wasn't for the Theatre Project. But they had long noses and the waiters had pretty little faces and the businessmen, hadn't realized what I was doing until I saw at dress rehearsal they all looked like Herbert Hoover who happened to be one of the sponsors of this thing. (Laugh) But anyway, these boys who were the chorus were mostly homosexuals and they just loved their waiter's masks. (Laugh) So I had to stand behind the scenes and watch them go on because they would start out to be businessmen wearing their waiter's *masks.* I remember one night they started out like that and Nestor Pivor, who was in the play, handed me a hammer. He said, "Use this." (Laugh) But you had that sort of thing.

Then I did get--oh, what do they call them, the dresser, a couple of dressers who were quite competent. And so when you have completed the play and set with the costume rehearsal and the first night, if you have a good dresser, you can usually let her check those things. And she sees that the costumes are pressed and hung up and that sort of thing. She's very important and a wardrobe mistress. But there was some time before I discovered which one of these women would do that well. I mean, you have to work it all out. Relatively, I. think we had pretty good relationships with the actors. There were very few who caused any problems.

Well, I designed it for the character and the production, and then as I say--

this question was: Do you design a costume for the character as you see him in the production? Or do you also consider the actor who will be wearing the costume? Well, of course you have to consider the actor but you work with your director. You work out what ideas he wants to put over in the character and then you try to amplify that character with costume. One example of that was when we did The Jukes. That was the one-act play. Everett Glass directed it, and he saw it as a comedy and I saw it as a tragedy. So I went right along and did my way of seeing it. And the scene designer on that was Warren Hagey. He died a couple of years ago. And Warren and I worked closely together. I worked very well with Warren and with. David Scott. Scott had worked with me before. And he saw it more or less the way I did. So on dress rehearsal night, I saw this Marta Goldman and she was just a gorgeous older woman and had been a very fine actress in her day and was still. And I saw her as something out of Goya. I said I didn't use painters. (Laugh) But she sat in the middle of this stage like a Goya character and she played it that way. And Everett came to me with tears in his eyes and he said, "Zoray, I wish I had seen it the way you did in the beginning." But it worked out that way anyway.

KW: Wasn't it nice though that he could be flexible enough to--

ZA: Oh, he was very flexible.

KW: --adapt to another way?

ZA: Yes. But it worked out that way because she was so magnificent sitting there in these dark. Goya colors and the way she was. She was Mrs. Jukes.

Well, you have to consider the actor but the important thing is the character and what the director is trying to put over and the ensemble rather than the individual. And that's why most amateur productions just don't get that quality. I. man, they don't get **mass** feeling.

No, mine never looked like the sketch. (Laugh) The sketches were done after I did the costumes. I never made a preliminary sketch. I would tell the people what to do and work with them with the cloth and on the person, on the character if I could. Then we were supposed to send in some sketches so I would do something to send in, but I very rarely had a sketch beforehand. And I think that is one of the things that makes it very difficult for people is that they're trying to meet the sketch rather than a character and the actor, which is where I worked.

KW: Because the sketch could turn out to be a mistake once it's on the person.

ZA: Well, I recently saw a ballet where they'd had very great difficulties because the young man had done beautiful drawings and then to try to execute them was another thing because of your materials and so many young people have the idea, you know, that if you're using satin, you use satin. I just recently saw Jack Burch and he said, "You know, you've taught me that flannel would look like velvet." (Laugh)

KW: Sure, it can.

ZA: Yes, and it looks more like it. And one experience I had in The Farmer's Wife, too. There was this dramatic moment when she comes out all dressed up at the end and the farmer wants to marry her. And she just didn't look too interesting. And this ***man*** came who had worked at the Moscow Art Theatre and he was directing a Russian theatre here in San Francisco. They had a Russian theatre and a French theatre at that time. But there was practically no just straight American theatre. And he saw it and he said, "Well, for the dramatic moment, you just exaggerate everything." So I did put a magenta taffeta dress on her, with a big train, and it really did the whole thing. But there are times when you have to amplify a thing.

KW: Oh, that's good advice.

ZA: Yes, I thought that was one of the best things I ever was told that, for the real high moment, you amplify the vision.

(Reads) "Special problems?" (Laughs) I think I told you about my juggler to do the ironing. (Laugh) And Clarisse Vance to make...

And there were frequently problems where the other women would complain about one and there was one woman who came from the Theatre Project and she was, without a doubt, the best seamstress I ever had on the project. But she

didn't smell good and the other women all complained and wrote a petition to get rid of her. And that was one of the worst things I ever had to do was to tell her that she had to go back to the other project and she was furious. She just hated me for it, but she did smell bad.

KW: And well, the other pressure on you. I mean, the pressure from the other people.

ZA: Yes. Then there were times when some of them would be sick and have to stay out and they were so poor that I would arrange for them to work overtime another time to make it up.

(Reads) Well, I don't know how it would differ from commercial shows. I've never done real commercial shows but Jack would be able to answer that one

because he's worked with the—he did some Noel Cowards with Noel Coward in London.

And he did all of the big Broadway shows.

KW: Oh, I should talk to him. These were added by the woman who does our costume research.

ZA: (Reads) "Were costumes returned to stock?" Sometimes we made them over into other costumes.

KW: Do you know what happened to any of the Federal Theatre costumes here?

ZA: No. While I was there, they were returned to stock and I don't know. We didn't ever ship them any place else.

Well, I already answered the drawing thing. They had enough confidence in me to let me do it. (Laugh)

KW: Let you do what you wanted to do?

ZA: And I worked very closely with the directors always. I mean, that's the important thing.

Well, I had total freedom because as I say, they had confidence in me and the limitations were the limitations of the people who were performing in the play itself and what the director wanted, I mean what idea he had to put over. As far as the guidance, all I had was, as I said, they'd send out the production bulletin and photographs from New York. And they usually looked very amateurish, the things they sent out. I don't know.

I worked very closely with--that last question--I mean, you just don't do it without working closely and in harmony with those people.

KW: I don't see how you could, successfully anyway.

ZA: I didn't work as happily with Scott McLean because his ideas were more Hollywood than what our concepts were.

KW: I forgot he came on.

ZA: He's still living here, I think.

KW: I think he's down in Pasadena.

ZA: No, I have his address because he came up to see me. I've never seen him since the project. But he came up to see me and then once his wife came and I did meet her. She's charming.

KW: Someone else interviewed him for the projects.

ZA: Oh, they've already interviewed him?

KW: Yes.

ZA: I mean, after working with David who died and then Scott came to take his place, it was an awful letdown because Scott didn't know anything about lighting at all, and the Hollywood ideas and footlight ideas and that sort of thing.

KW: It must have been such a change after someone that you could work with well and enjoy.

ZA: Yes, that whole concept was different. But then I didn't do too many with him. So they were a different type of production.

KW: Well, do you have any concluding remarks about your experience with the Federal Theatre or would you like to see it again or--

ZA: Well, I think you have the Government now is sponsoring sane of these theatres, isn't it?

KW: To a certain extent. I mean, they're subsidized some.

ZA: Yes. They're subsidizing actors to a certain extent, aren't they, and sane of the other little theatres around here. And I would like to see larger subsidies for the little theatre groups, I think, because if they could devote all their time to working in the theatre instead of having to have other jobs that take up their energies, it would be marvelous. And I've seen the-- when I was in Mexico I saw the national theatre from France, Comedie Française. And my God, the way those actors were together and the whole thing was just superb. And there's no reason why a country as rich as ours can't support the arts a little better. I mean, they should start as small children, the way they do in the Moscow Art Theatre. I mean, this is ridiculous, that a person has to work at something else in order to be an actor. Because I've seen-- some of these people are just marvelous now. If they had the place to go with it.

KW: Yes, if they didn't have to worry about where their next job--

ZA: Well, and then the plays are not so good. I mean, who wants to go and see a play that takes place in a hospital bed? (Laugh) I mean, there were some great lines in that play that I saw but the acting was marvelous.

KW: Did your experience in the Federal Theatre--I don't know, would you say it was a plus in what happened in the rest of your life? I mean, is it a valuable experience to you now?

ZA: It's always something you look back on and laugh about. I mean, we had sane fun while we were working and sane bad times. Well, the bad times were the political things. Too many of our non-relief openings which we needed so badly for good actors because you couldn't put a play on without getting an outside good actor to cane in, those things were politically taken up frequently by relatives of the Mayor or Earl Warren or somebody like that. And there was one woman, I could never see what her point was. She was the Project Psychiatrist and she just sat there with this awful face, looked like an owl, never said a word and never did a thing, but came and sat every day.

KW: I never heard that. That is strange. (Laugh)

ZA: And she was taking up a good non-relief job, slot. And Miss Sheerer, who tried, God knows, to work but was not what we needed and didn't get along with any of the other women in my department, was related to Earl Warren. Then we had a young man who was related to the Mayor who was supposed to be in charge of the finances. Apparently he walked off with a lot of them. There were things like that that were very annoying. It was the politics was the bad part of it. I don't think any theatre should ever be looked on as a relief measure.

KW: No. That was a big problem with the IPA, a big problem.

ZA: I think that the Government should subsidize a national theatre and there are plenty of areas in the country where it could be done, I would think. And if

we can subsidize the munitions and war materials, it seems to me that some of that ought to be put into the arts. I remember when I was substitute teaching, I substituted for a Mrs. Sonshine in Piedmont. She was an art teacher and I thought she was a magnificent teacher, the best I ever substituted for—this was in art--because she had gotten the football funds to split with her so that she had the halls lined with fine reproductions for the kids to see. And I. think that this country should split same of this Little League money or other funds with the arts. If that happened, we could have a finer national theatre than France has because we've got the people.

KW: Oh, yes, lots of people.

ZA: And why not pay people to do interesting work instead of "make" work? I mean, they're there.

KW: I'm with_ you on that.

ZA; One of the other problems we had, too—you asked about union problems--was that whenever we put on a production, we had to hire men from the Stagehands' Union. And he was practically useless to us because we had it all worked out, but he had to be there. And the other thing was the Fire Department always came and almost shut us down because everything had to be fire-retarded. And there were things like that that were difficult.

And then for <u>It Can't Happen Here,</u> that was a very interesting experience because we were working on, I've forgotten whether it was <u>Chalk Dust</u> or <u>Battle Hymn</u> and we'd been working for months and really putting all of our effort into it. And we got this--you've probably heard this story.

KW; About <u>It Can't Happen Here?</u>

ZA; The directive from Washington to put it__

KW: Everyone was putting it on.

ZA: Every project in the country had to put it on and I think they had about three weeks to put it on. But it was to go on the week before the election.

KW: That's right. It was September or October, something.

ZA: But we liked, we as a young, idealistic group, liked putting that one on, even though it wasn't what we had chosen. And the uniforms, of course, I had to rent from Goldstein's because we didn't have time to make things like that. But we did make all the other costumes because the people didn't have suitable things to wear, although it was current. I remember Goldstein offered me a job after I had encountered him over that, which I didn't take because I was never really interested in being a costume designer.

KW: Well, that was an interesting sideline.

ZA: I was just a good one. (Laugh)

KW: Yes. Right. Well, thank you.

(End of interview)