Interview of Perry Bruskin
John O'Connor, Intrviewer
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PB: . . . goblins. Because of my friendship and work with Brendan Behan, they sent a guy here who was doing a study of Brendan Behan's work. This was before he died, of course, and they came and they sat right at this same round table, the same King Arthur table here, and we spent about three hours. This guy was doing a film as well as a radio program. They sent me a note and they said that they had done three radio

-Interruption-

JO: What are your strongest memories? You could see from your little note that you were ready to begin even then.

PB: (Laugh) Well, it's not only that I was ready to begin searching my memory. It's also that I'm excited about the whole idea that you people are working on because I think any and all of us who ever worked in Federal or on Federal Theatre at that time realize and appreciate that fantastic difference in theatre at that period, the transition that theatre in America was making at that time, its impact upon the total American theatrical scene, and the very disheartening sense of the present that nobody remembers us, you know. And it kind of hurts. Just the other day I was talking to the son of a friend of mine, an old neighborhood chum whose son, Dan Schiff is playing the lead in some kind of an off-Broadway play. And he asked me to come down and see it and tell him what I thought. I came down and I told him and he asked me what I thought about what he should do for the future. And I said, "The main thing that I can recommend is read." He said, "What about acting class? I said, "Take acting classes, too, but I find that dimension in a person is as important a contribution to his acting ability as anything he can learn in a class or in a performance." And I said, "For instance, now in the Group Theatre there was an actor."

And he said, "What?"

I said, "Group Theatre, you know, the famous Group Theatre of the thirties." He said, "Group Theatre?" And I knew immediately that he didn't know what I was talking about. And I knew immediately that I was shocked out of my mind, you know. How can anybody in the theatre, a man that's deeply involved in the theatre, look anybody straight in the eye and say they don't remember the Group Theatre. That, if anything, was one of the key points in the entire transition or whatever. It didn't change the whole scene, but it certainly made an enormous impact on changes in the American theatre, you know. And he didn't know so that when I---I think we all experience that, all of us who had been in the theatre, in the Project, experience that lack of information on a scene that is supposedly so highly involved in this cultural explosion of theatre and yet don't know some of the fundamental areas. And I must say I think we're all terribly frustrated about the blanket of silence on that period. Now that may have a real result of political feeling that we've just come out of in this country. Some of that covering may be based on that kind of thinking. But whatever the reaons are, it hurt to know that nobody knew. And I also felt that it was wrong and that's why, when I look at your copy of Stage Left over there that Jay Williams wrote, I must tell you that we were as happy as birds when, you know, the idea for Stage Left came twin Nick Ray, Nicholas Ray, film director. I'm sure you know him or you may even have spoken to him already.

JO: Haven't spoken to him yet.

PB: And a marvelous human being who was part of Federal Theatre and before that with the Theatre of Action that so many of us came from and were with. And how excited we all were: Ben Berenberg, Will Lee and myself. And the time we gave to Jay in helping to get that book started. And I must say, like Jay Williams, that book reads so fast. It has such a fast-moving feeling about it.

It reminds me of his personality, the way it was written. And I'm sorry to say that just recently it went out of print.

JO: Oh, I didn't know that.

PB: Yes. There happens to be—as a New Yorker, you'll find these kind of situations. One, A man works at--who are the people who did it? Scribner's. A man who works at Scribner's lives two floors down in this building, and he keeps me informed on the progress or lack of progress of the book there. We didn't even know we were living in the same building. I met him up there in the office, you know. That's a typical New Yorkese kind of a situation. So that long diatribe you just heard was an emotional outburst of how pleased we are. And I can say "we." There's no question about it. You know, I was talking to Earl Robinson last night and to Will Lee on the phone the other day. We all responded exactly the same way. Thank God and thank you. Now I have to start pulling on my memories?

JO: That's right. (Laugh)

PB: Well, I'll just start.

JO: If you want to move chronologically, that's fine, but don’t feel compelled to do it.

PB: No, I couldn't possibly move chronologically. For instance, you'll never and I could never have guessed what has just hit my memory just now as the first memory.
It's ridiculous, absolutely ludicrous. What I'm remembering about one of my own experiences in Federal Theatre was the Children's Theatre. I worked a good deal in the Children's Theatre as an actor, and I guess I remember because I've been using it as a kind of a joke on myself. I said, "One of the best performances that I remember as an actor was when I worked on the Federal Theatre. I played the rear end of a horse and I was very good at it." And it became interesting because I didn't realize it at the time that I played, and we used to travel in the parks. You know, the large trucks and we'd move into a park and open up. One side of the truck would come down and that was the stage, and it was all this kind of culture. It wasn't culture; it was entertainment and very new to people. People responded to it with--not only

their eyes were open. Their mouths were open, you know, looking at this, and they were very curious about the people involved in this. It's interesting how totally different audiences are now because the kind of people who are performing the street theatre things now and in the parks-- every place you go, there are little street groups now. Then we were totally unique, totally unusual, and the audience response was, I thought, kind of wonderful; and large audiences every place we went. 'There were enormous audiences in the parks. And put that together with the fact that what I remember is I used to lose like five pounds every performance. Did you ever work in an animal skin? I tell you! And the tricks that we did. You see, I was bent over and the only thing that I could see was through the belly of the horse. You had the little gauze there and you could see there. But other than that, you were blind because you could watch the hooves of the guy playing in front of you, you see. And the guy in front of me was Vito--I think he became a film actor and I lost track of him. Vito, I don't remember his name And we used to have such fun planning new tricks, you see. You know how a horse when he stands up on his hind legs, paws the air and stuff like that? Well, I had to lift him and we decided that while lifting him, I would turn him around, the whole horse would turn around. And the audience thought that was marvelous and so did I. (Laugh) It was a great thing. I remember that very, Very clearly.

JO: Was that Horse Play?

PB: No, that wasn't Horse Play. What was it? I don't know. It was the Children's Theatre. Yes, that's right. It was not Horse Eats Hat. Horse Eats Hat I think Orson Welles did.

JO: Yes.

PB: Yes, I think it was Horse Play as a matter of fact and we were probably the stars of the show and I didn't know it at the time, you know. Also, I'm remembering the wonderful vaudeville programs that we used to do in different

theatres. And when I say "vaudeville programs", I was probably the youngest person in the Children's Theatre company. I don't think my age was that enormously younger, but I was younger. And the reason I mention age at all is that we were working with these marvelous old vaudevillians. And I don't know that they were really a lot older except, you know, we knew at that time that vaudeville was dead, gone. These people had gone into other businesses and gone into a serious unemployment situation, and here they were back. And you'd see guys doing hat tricks that I never forgot, and the kids just loved them. You'd see a guy doing a kind of a zany character and he'd come out on stage and he'd tease the kids with his hat tricks. Like he started to throw it toward them and he says, "You want this? This is a funny hat." And the kids would all scream, YES!" And he would lift one out into the audience and it would be like--what do you call those Australian things that come back at you?

JO: Boomerang?

PB: Yes, boomerang. And the whole damned thing would come right--circle the audience and come back into his own hands. And he would look at them and say, "Well, you don't want it, huh?" And the kids would say, "YES. WE WANT IT."

Well, he would throw another one out, you see. And then his partner would came out, also with a hat, and he'd say, "What are you bothering these kids with that hat?"
He'd say, "I'm not bothering. I want to give it to them and they don't want it."
And they would scream from the audience again, you see. And they would start a little fight, a hat fight. And one of the simplest pieces of comedy you've ever seen in your life would happen. These two guys would just stand there, each with a hat in his hand, and they would start slowly hitting each other. And each hit brought on a retaliation from the other guy with this soft felt hat. And after a while, what you saw was two grown men hitting each other

with tremendous power on the head and constantly, just wham, wham, wham, wham! And they'd stop and look at each other and start again. And the kids would howl with delight. This was obviously such a piece of foolishness, you know, that you were totally disarmed. There was nothing you could do it was so absolutely foolish looking, and a whole series of vaudeville things. You'd see the guys on-what do you call them, the high sticks, walking on the--

JO: Stilts?

PB: Stilts, you see, doing all kinds of tricks on stilts. And I had never seen them myself, you know. I'd never seen much of vaudeville so I was just as entertained as the kids in the audience, you know. And one of the silliest--you know, there were also a lot of real strange, silly kind of things. There was a guy who would put on a pair of ice skates and they'd crease a piece of metal on the floor about four yards wide and two yards long or something like that. And he would come out and tap dance. He would tap dance in ice skates on a piece of metal. He was a pretty good tap dancer and for some reason that, too, it was unusual and I couldn't figure out why it was unusual, nor why you were interested in it at all. You know, if you thought about it for a few seconds, like your own reaction just now. (Laugh) You've laughed it's so silly. But he took it so seriously, and it certainly was unusual. It wasn't very good, but it was unusual, and there were a lot of those kind of things. I remember that those were probably some of the most enjoyable theatre performances that I ever participated in because there was such a mutual joy. There was no pretension on the stage. We weren't trying to educate with words. We were just having a festival of fun. We were just kind of enlivening the child's time and our own. Then there's another little side thought that comes- into my mind. I remember in later years about 1942-- this was, think, 1935 or 1936. You probably have the years down better than I do in your book. But in 1941 and

1942 I worked at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe and there, too, he used vaudeville, and he used a whole series. Of course, this was expert vaudeville. It had none of the simple charm that we had in our shows, you know, which were so completely unpretentious. Billy Rose had some pretty pretentious vaudeville, and there was a horse act in the Diamond Horseshoe. I never told anybody that I had worked in a horse act, you see. It was the Mayo Brothers; Virginia Mayo was discovered at the Diamond Horseshoe and this very voluptuous, chic blonde standing next to the horse and the horse--you could play all kinds of sexual implications--looking down at her and all, you know. It was a very well done horse act and the building of the horse itself, the eyes and the mouth, you know, and the ears would work. And boy, it was a fabulous horse, not like that little old horse that we had down there, you know. But for some reason, you know, you talk about the importance of the culture of the Federal Theatre and its contribution to the culture of our city and of our country and indeed it was remarkable from that point of view alone, extraordinarily remarkable. Still, my first memory is of the Children's Theatre and that kind of stuff.

JO: It was good then to have a young actor like yourself or John Randolph with the older actors? There wasn't a tension of age or competition?

PB: No, I think, we were all equalized by the $23.80 thing. I never felt much-- maybe I was just too naive at that point to notice. But I certainly had no reason to feel any ego conflict. I was just a beginner myself. I had just been introduced two years previous to Stanislavski and the complex world of acting, you know. And this was all joyful and exciting. Later on I was asked by a man by the name of Mannie Something, who was involved in another department. They were going to do a modern dress version of Coriolanus, and he had seen me act in the Theatre of Action productions. And he sent in a request for my transfer from the Children's

Theatre. He had asked me if I wanted to and certainly I was going to play it. The funniest things you remember. I was going to be the Third Citizen and I quickly went to Coriolanus and read it and saw there are some pretty darned good speeches for the Third Citizen--or was it the Second Citizen? And we went into rehearsal and it never got off the ground, but even rehearsal was very interesting it was so different from Children's Theatre. Then I remember a very interesting and unusual production of The Life and Death of an American. Do you have it listed some place? George Sklar?

JO: George Sklar.

PB: Right. Maltz? Did Maltz write it with him or—

JO: I think it was just Sklar himself--

PB: Just Sklar? Yes.

JO: But that was, I mean Howard Bay did the sets.

PB: Right.

JO: And Charles Freeman, I think.

PB: Right. Right. Charles Freeman directed it.

JO: You were the narrator?

PB: I was one of them. There were two narrators. There were two of us. There was a man who is now known as Jeff Corey. Why shouldn't I remember his name, he's such a dear old friend? Jeff Corey, tall, thin, angular-structured face, and short, stubby little Perry were the two narrators. And the leading actor in it was a man by the name of—here I go again.

JO: Kennedy.

PB: Kennedy, yes, John Arthur Kennedy at that time called, I think, Arthur Kennedy. And I remember him quite well from that time because he and I lived in the same neighborhood at that time and I would visit with him at home. But the play itself — we played at what was then called the Maxine Elliott Theatre, I

think. And it was a very touching, waxen statement. It was an "Our Town" before Our Town was written. It was a stylized, a semi-stylized production going from realism into narration and stylization, and into stylized scenes. And I remember that was my first kind of gentle singing experience on the stage and I'm not a singer at all; and I could prove it very easily by telling you that the song, one of the songs from that production stayed with me but I have a very inaccurate memory about melodies and notes. But I remember we stood behind the woman who was playing the mother in a rocking chair, I think left and right of her. And we helped her sing, "Sleep my baby, sleep my child. Sleep and have no fear. Mother's watching over you; Daddy's always near." (Sings) How do you like that? I'm actually amazed. I knew that I remembered some of it, but that was the whole song and I'm sure there were 14 wrong notes out of the 15 I sang. And then I've got to tell you very briefly a very funny personal experience I had. We were all, I must tell you, very dedicated to the play. We were all moved by it, all the actors in it. We felt that we were making a contribution. We enjoyed it. We were going to do a matinee and the night before that matinee, I got a terrible toothache. I went to a dentist early that next morning and he pulled two wisdom teeth. We had no understudies, not that we weren't preparing to have understudies. There were certainly plenty of people around in those days. But for some reason, we didn't. I didn't have an understudy, and we were keyed to the whole show. We were the moving along narrators. And I went to the theatre and played that performance, constantly under my breath asking Jeff whether any blood was showing on my lips, whether I was spitting blood or not. Because I. could feel as though there was blood floating around in my mouth while I was talking, And I was frightened stiff and, you know, we'd come right down on the edge of the apron there, right to the apron, and there were people sitting in the front row there. And I thought, "My God, what if I spit blood on them" I'll never forget that experience.

JO: I think that was running when the Project closed.

I think that was one of the major productions of the Project.

PB: Were we still running when it closed? Really?

JO: It had just started, I think, in May of 1939. So that was about six weeks.

PB: Oh, really?

JO: It would have gone longer.

PB: There's one other thing that I remember which I kind of paralleled in my memory to induction in the Army. Now, that sounds kind of, I don't know, as though nil going to make some kind of a political observation and it isn't. All it is is there was a similarity in a period or in a certain situation in Federal Theatre when you were not assigned. I think this happened the time I was being transferred from the Children's Theatre to this Coriolanus situation. The Provincetown Playhouse, that very small but interesting and terribly historic theatre that housed so many fantastically talented people, had become the sign-in place for Federal Theatre actors. And every day we would come there and sit around for, I don't know, four hours or something like that.

J0: Four hours.

PB: Was it four hours?

JO: Yes.

PB: We'd sign in and just sit and talk to each other and maintain our dignity as much as we could facing each other. It was easy for me to maintain my dignity. I had lost nothing. I wasn't an actor who had been in acting and then not an actor. This was practically my first professional engagement except that we had worked for a number of years at the Theatre of Action. And that certainly was a combination of professional and semi-professional activity. Do you know in your notes whether we went from Federal Theatre to The Young Go First?

JO: No, The Young Go First went first.

PB: That's right because then we were

established as professional actors. That's right because we were recognized as professional actors, and then we went to Federal Theatre. T see. But I remember that sitting around and even that was exciting to me, as I said, because I had lost nothing. But in retrospect, thinking about the oldtimers who had lost everything and there they were just sitting there, They were very pleased and very grateful that they were sitting, not on home relief, but if anybody wanted them to work, they were being recognized as artists, as people who were ready to work in their profession. I compare that to the Army because I remember when I was first—well, I had a very peculiar induction into the Army I won't go into because I was "cast" into the Army. I don't mean thrown. I mean literally cast as an actor. I was a civilian. You want that little piece of mine?

JO: Yes. (Laugh)

PB: Very quickly. I told you I had worked with the Diamond Horseshoe in 1941 and 1942. Billy Rose asked me to stay on and emcee the next show, knowing all the time that I was supposed to be ready to go into the Army soon, and I decided I Would stay on. And he asked me to continue with the characterization I was doing. I was doing a caricature of Mayor La Guardia at the time and they used to call me "the mayor" down there. Well, a friend of mine who was already in the Army and a playwright, had came up with a very novel idea for doing a very novel kind of play in which the protagonist was the antagonist. The leading actor was the enemy. As a matter of fact, the play was called This is Your Enemy, and the leading actor was a Nazi and he tied the whole play together. Well, they were looking for a Nazi. This guy came down to the Diamond Horseshoe with guys in full regalia, colonels and majors and everything. I just knew that they were there, but I didn't know what their purpose was. That hadn't been explained, The next day I got a

call from my friend, Al Geto, who
was the playwright, and he called me
down to Whitehall Street. I went
down there and he knew that I had been a student
of what was then a very new technique
called "improvisation." You know, of
course, that improvisation was a
completely new word as far as the American theatre
was concerned. There was a word that
dealt with that situation called "ad-libbing,"
but have you ever heard the word "ad-libbing"
recently? You hear "improvisation."
You don't hear "ad-libbing."
Well, since improvisation needs a more
trained technique, he knew that I was
part of that because we were
practically the only group theatre, we
and one or two other people who had
improvised. He called me down to Whitehall Street and
there was a long table and all these
uniformed guys there, majors sitting
there and all kinds of big, stuffy guys,
you know. Al was sitting at the end of
the table and he described what they
wanted from this guy, and they asked me
to improvise it. What they wanted was an
arrogant--don't look so knowing. (Laugh)
He was an arrogant, pugnacious,
smug Nazi addressing American troops.
And I don't know where it came from,
but I said things like, "Gentlemen of
the American Army, thank you very much
for your invitation to speak to you.
Though I am your prisoner, I am pleased
to address you at your own invitation.
I am also pleased to see that now you
are smiling this very knowing smile of
yours. This is very American and very
true and I like it because soon you
will be smiling out of the other side
of your face. You will no longer be
laughing; you will be crying. I am here
and I am in your power, but my friends are
there and you will soon be in their
power." And I tell you, -I don't know
where it came from. And in two weeks...
That's what I was comparing, that time
because I went without any basic
training right into performance. I was
not in the Army; I was just wearing
an Army uniform. And we took this show,
with that terrible Nazi, and you know,
they put me on a high platform, had the
cut hair, short-cropped hair, and they
blonded my hair. I'd get up there and

I tell you—you know that in some of the Army camps--I'm sorry to go into this point, but I can't help remembering this. We would go into so many Army camps, we played all the entire country, and we'd get into an Army camp that had just the hillbilly kids. And they had never seen--and I didn't know that they called it this—they had never seen round actors. They'd only seen flat actors and I understood later what they meant, which was movies. They'd never seen a live person, so they didn't believe that I was an actor. They didn't believe that a person would get up there and say those things. And they used to give me M.P.'s who would go back and forth from the barracks. It was a fantastic experience. Now, of course, this didn't happen every place. But listen, since this is recording history, let me tell you another thing that came from that that I found politically very interesting. Some of the oldtime sergeants on some of the old Army posts were oldtime anti-Semites. You know, that was a customary kind of thinking that many years ago that was--nobody thought anything of saying "kike" and "dirty Jew" and things like that, you know. You don't hear that nowadays, thank God, but then that was fairly common. But since we were fighting a mar that dealt so much with the Jewish problem and I coming from New York and being politically pretty aggressive, I remember that when some of these headquarter companies would come and you'd see one or two sergeants or T-sergeants and staff sergeants actually faced me with real nasty cracks, and I was pleased with myself. I didn't take it and all the guys in my company, the troops, supported me and they really helped in that situation. I remember one situation, one guy as he was passing me walking down, he says, "Oh, the Jews from New York here. They got the easy jobs. They're going out for the easy jobs and we have to fight a war for them." I had an apple in my hand and I threw it and thank God I hit htm right in the back of the head. And he turned on me and he

started yelling and I said, "What are you going to do now? What are you going to call me now, Sergeant?" Then we went in to lunch. They separated us and we went in to lunch and I took the tray of food I had, put it down on my table. We had little square tables. This was not a regular army mess hall, it was Headquarters Company. And I walked over to this guy and I laid him out! And one of the other sergeants, a big, heavy sergeant who was sitting next to him, kept saying, "You're going to be arrested if you don't cut this out, son." And I said, "What else are you going to tell me? What else?" I says, "I'll tell you what. You go change your uniform to the color that your ideas represent and then let's really talk about it. Why do you hide behind an American uniform?" I blasted him, you know, and to this day it's one of the better things in my life that I can remember. But anyway, that was how I was "cast" in the Army, you know. I had an agent and a playwright and I got a job in the Army, in a show.

JO: So you moved from Mayor La Guardia to a strict little Nazi? (Laugh)

PB: Right. It was a very interesting play. I wish I could have found a way to use that same technique in other theatre pieces. It was quite an interesting technique. You know Henry Lascoe, who became a very well-known actor, featured character man on Broadway, was in it, Eddie Kogan, a fine actor,was in it, Allan Hale, all pro people, professional company, Warren Hart, you know, a good singer. But back to Federal Theatre, back to Federal Theatre.

JO: Do you think Federal Theatre would have lasted if it had lasted through, say, another year, 1939-1940, and the start of the war if there'd been--I mean, that the Army in some ways was doing national theatre, the kind of thing you just spoke about, This Is Your Enemy. Was that transition or was Federal Theatre so tied with relief that its time came when--

PB: I would say that it's almost an impossible question to answer because though Federal Theatre was so

completely tied in with the Home Relief Act or Relief to Unemployed, still it had made the kind of reputation for itself so that people never thought of it as an unemployment device. The only people who discussed that were the people who had to discuss it in terms of assigning money to it, the political needs of the day. And I'm not going to be sarcastic about the politicians who raided Federal Theatre. They were reactionary, they were conservative, but they were indeed representing a great chunk of the American thinking of that period. They were afraid of Federal Theatre, there's no question about that. They were afraid of all of the arts because art has to be a little bit ahead of its time or otherwise--if you're going to say in an advertisement in a newspaper, "A new and exciting play," well, it has to say something new if it's going to be a new, exciting play. A new piece of art work, a new piece of music. You have to say new things, and whenever you're in an environment of presenting new things, you get a lot of things that are extremist. Some of the extremist things are terrible and in themselves quite reactionary and quite wrong and you have to be ready for them. I don't disagree with people who fight and get angry at that kind of thing. They should. It's that interaction of anger and statement that makes for whatever progress we have or can have. I am not a believer in my political opinions having complete sway nor do I believe that your opinions should have complete sway. But I think the Federal Theatre at that time was representing an enormous expression of enormous needs of the American people. And the political extremist statements--and I'm not Saying this: to accuse even the extremists--I feel that that was a need, too. There are extreme thoughts going on, but I think that that could have been a transition. (Interruption - telephone) What I wanted to say, since I find it very difficult to say things simply, even simple things, I did want to say that there was the possibility of making same kind of transition with Federal Theatre into a more permanent

kind of theatre. Because it did for a while look like it was becoming larger than its purpose, than its original purpose. think it would have been of enormous value to the country, to the arts generally, but we weren't able to fight it out. Now I must also tell you that I'm not a total proponent of many of the concepts of a national theatre. I think national arts funding, yes. We'd have to get into a whole new area there. But I must say that--what's that marvelous lady's name who was one of the heads of the Project?

JO: Nancy Hanks?

PB: No, no, I mean of the Federal Theatre.

JO: Hallie Flanagan?

PB: Hallie Flanagan. Incidentally, a former stage manager of mine who's just gotten her Master's, a girl by the name of Audrey Koren, has done a very thorough study of Hallie Flanagan in that period---it's not one of the books that has been written--and is involved, has material on Federal Theatre. I don't know whether she has anything different or new than you have.

JO: There is someone at our center that's starting a biography of Hallie Flanagan.

PB: Oh, really? Maybe they ought to get together.

JO: In a play like Life and Death of an American--or I guess my question is, how do you think Federal Theatre's relationship was with Broadway and Group Theatre and other theatre? In a play like Life and Death of an American, it was a class act. I mean, it was a Broadway play.

PB: I think that's a very interesting question and I'm thinking on it as you ask it. I think it again shows the stature of Federal Theatre because when it first started, there wasn't any nose on Broadway long enough to look down. Because naturally, these were just unemployed actors, you know, and what are you going to expect? Unemployed directors, you know. So what can you expect? But isn't it interesting the enormous stature that developed and reputation

that Federal Theatre developed as a productive organization? Nobody in their right mind sneered or looked down their nose at One-Third of a Nation or any of the Living Newspaper theatre productions. Nobody looked down at— what was that Elmer Rice thing? Was it Elmer Rice?
But there were numerous plays, and the Yiddish Theatre and the Lafayette Theatre, the black theatre. I mean, the Negro Theatre. … Still am not used to saying "black." Black at that time was kind of an insulting remark and we all said Negro. Because I remember working in one of those productions very briefly. And I also remember that as a result of my working in one of those productions, I was invited later after Federal Theatre died into some kind of a summer booking project that some of the Negro actors from that company got together. And they booked into the Catskill Mountains a new play and I was in it. And you know, that's an interesting thought. I was also playing a rotten man in that play. Maybe there's something about me that I don't know about. I played a rotten Southerner, a rotten Southern son of a plantation owner.. I'm sorry.

JO: Yes, there was not just the Lafayette. It wasn't just Welles and Houseman. Maurice Clark had --

PB: Maurice Clark. Have you ever found him?

JO: Yes, I saw him this summer. He's doing well though he's had a number of operations, I think for cancer, but he looks very well.

PB: Oh, really? What does he do?

JO: He had just finished a screen play that he's really pleased with.

PB: Has he been a writer primarily?

JO: No, he's been working--after the blacklist he worked with mosaics and has done the big mosaic for The Sands or someplace like that.

PB: Really? For the hotels, the lobbies of the hotels? Goodness sakes, isn't that

wild?

JO: He has a beautiful little house in Hollywood Hills and has a couple of big tile mosaics there. I haven't checked Haiti but you mentioned having worked partly
up in-

PB: Very briefly. ...don't even remember the name of the play. But going back to that interesting question you asked
about, the attitude of Broadway to
Federal Theatre. And it again goes back
to our other point about the enlarged
stature, the growing stature of
Federal Theatre. It could very easily
have been a nothing project. You know,
it could have been a leaning-on-a-shovel
project.
But the work that came out. If that
doesn't tell an awful lot about
people and dedication and the
desire to do constructive things.
Gee, it's just remarkable!

JO: You had gone from the Theatre of Action to, I think, it was the Experimental Theatre, The Miser and most of your group worked together.

PB: Oh, that's right, that's right. We came in as a unit, I think. That was the plot, you know. They wanted us on
Federal Theatre because they knew we
had done some very exciting
experimental things. And the idea was
that, since we
had no longer staying together, they
thought they'd get us on as a unit.
That's right.

JO: Do you remember what happened to it
though?

PB: It didn't work.

JO: It was The Miser and--

PB: It should never--we started doing--I think
the problem was we started doing things that
were a little out of our league. We were a
certain kind of theatre that dealt with
contemporary issues and that's what we should
have continued, or maybe we were afraid of
that, you know. We did The Miser and what was
it, The Queen, and the other play, Queen
Elizabeth? I forget. I remember Meta Rees did a
leading part in it. But it didn't last long at
all, as far as I know.
Do you remember?

JO: No, there was one Miser in that series of one-acts and it disbanded. And I wondered if you know why?

PB: Well, because it wasn't successful. It was as simple as all that. It's interesting, you know, that I hear myself saying that it wasn't successful and that's why it disbanded, and that's the way it should be. You know, it wasn't working effectively. Make a change, you know, go into other things. And it was better because all of these talents, rather than working in a frightened atmosphere, we didn't want to offend anybody because now we were getting government money. And we were afraid since the Red baiting was quite serious. We didn't want to challenge anybody who could point a finger back at us and say, "That's a Left Wing theatre to begin with," you see. So we wanted to go into broader aspects of "theatre" theatre, and it's a matter of choices. For many reasons, many people make wrong choices, and the right choices are the fewer ones. And I think we made wrong choices in material. We couldn't find a way of using our own unusual and kind of unique talents that we had developed. You know, our production of Newsboy. We should have done another kind of subject matter using the technique that we had developed in Newsboy, based on improvisation. We should have done those kinds of theatre pieces and we would have really and truly been an experimental thing. We just did--I think The Miser had a sliding pond in it. That we thought was experimental. An entrance was down a sliding pond. Now that's just a technical experiment, you know, a certain stylistic quality. But if we'd had the courage or hadn't been surrounded by fear, because I wasn't part of the meetings where these discussions were held, but I can just hear them. "Well, we'd better not. Let's do and, "you know. That's why I think it failed.

(Interruption - telephone)

JO: Let me ask kind of a follow-up question to that other one, especially when

you
were talking about not being a part of the discussions. If Theatre of
Action in a sense was collective, did that stay in the Experimental Theatre or
was Al Saxe a spokesman for you?

PB; Al Saxe was the head, I think. Ask Will Lee what the organizational level was

because I was not involved and most of us were not involved on an organizational
level at that time. Or if they were, they were, not me. I guess I was too young
or whatever,
you know. But when you're an outspoken collective, you have to be part of the
discussions. But you'll find a fantastic memory when you talk to
Will Lee, who is indeed a fantastic person. I wish I could translate that word
"fantastic" into
specifics and details, but he is one of the warmest, one of the most unusual
kinds of thinking people.
He thinks with the kind of perception that is very deceptive because his
language—you read
back what he says, if you do a literal transcript. And you'll find a very unusual
language there,
unless it's straightened out a good deal. But years
ago, you had to translate what he
was saying while he was talking, in
your own mind, because his use of
words was so unusual, so strange,
you know. As my mother would say in her English-Yiddish, "To college he didn't
go." (Laugh)

JO: When you left there, you went to the
Children's Theatre. One of the other big
Children's Theatre plays was Revolt of
the Beavers. What remembrance do you have
of that?

PB: Thank you. Oh, my God! "My favorite
instrument is the fife." (Sings) I
used to remember a lot more of that
song. I used to love to sing it, and
that was my first experience rollerskating,
doing roller-skating tricks.
Again, there's an animal skin for you. I
was dressed in this large beaver costume
and it was a skating beaver. And I used
to have the tails connected to a little
string in my hand and when I was happy,
I would pull the string and the tail
would wag, you know. Oh, it was a lot of
fun, and I was really
very happy to have to learn some skating
tricks. Because as a kid in the streets,
I tried to learn, you know, but other
kids were always a lot better
at skating tricks. I could go fast
forward pretty good, but I couldn't do
anything going backwards and turning

and all that sort of stuff. But I had to learn it here and I was very grateful for that. We played it in a theatre. I think it was the Adelphi, which is again like the Maxine Elliott, gone now. And I think that was one of the problems with that piece. You know, one of the greatest problems in life is success, and the Children's Theatre had been becoming successful and recognized in the city because of its. effectiveness. And because of that effectiveness and impact, we had all kind of matured and now we were going to wear ties when we wrote, you know, and acted; we were going to wear ties. And that same play done in a simpler atmosphere, in a non-competitive place--don't forget, we were competing with Broadway in a way because it was in a Broadway theatre. That play should not have been there, in my opinion. I didn't think so then; I didn't know that. I didn't care, I was so happy. I was pretty stupid, but I realized later on that we should not have been in a competitive atmosphere. We should have been just serving children out in the boondocks. Imagine doing that kind of play that was so nicely presented in other places. The whole question of its politicalization would have been down the drain. It was, you know, the word "revolt" was the only word that was upsetting to the people who discovered the lead leading the Communist plot in Revolt of the Beavers. This same kind of theme is in many little fairytales and stories.It's just that the people involved in doing it had a certain kind of political orientation. And therefore, naturally, you deducted that this was what they were trying to sell. But whether they were trying or not, it couldn't be accomplished. It was just a children's story. That's all it was.

JO: Well, there was quite a group of people in that.

PB: Oh, yes, Jules Dassin was my cohort--hey, there's another Children's Theatre thing that I was in.

JO: Emperor's New Clothes?

PB: Emperor's New Clothes.
That's right. You know all of
these things.

JO: You had a good part in that.

PB: Yes, I had a great part in that. I wasn't
as good as the original in it, I trust tell you. In most other areas, I
think I was a better actor than Sam
Bonnell in a lot of things. But we were
quite different, and Sam had a very
peculiar charm to this part that I
never captured. And I replaced him in
it, and he used to work with. Julie
Dassin. Then I began to work with Julie
Dassin. I don't know what happened to
Sam. I think he went to another play
some place. But that was a frustrating
experience because I knew I was not as
good as Sam. And I tried all kinds of--
I was a Stanislavski-trained actor. Why
couldn't I find something good, you
know, a better way to do it? And I
couldn't. He was--
he had such a natural cunning and
cuteness about him, you see. All I had,
being short and chunky, was kind of a
cuteness, but it was kind of a rugged
cuteness. But it didn't have the
devilish quality that the part
needed. He had it. That's right, that
was another play, another Children's
Theatre project. But Revolt of the
Beavers, who else did we have in
that? Of course, the writers are
quite something now. Did you get to
speak to Oscar?

JO: Yes, I've spoken to him, and that
leads to another play. I want to ask more about Revolt of the Beavers,
but that leads to Medicine Show that was
another one.

PB: Oh, well, I think I wrote something about
Medicine Show in the letter, didn't I?

JO: Right.

PB: Sure. I. was the big shot in Medicine Show,
in terms of having really started the whole thing.

JO: I think that's really a fine play.

I'm going to try and write an anthology of Living Newspapers and that's why I've been talking with Oscar Saul about what version or what text he used.

PB: You see, I don't know whether he remembers those old things, whether he knew anything about it from the beginning. But the Theatre of Action, we had done a one-act play called Plant in the Sun, which became an enormously successful one-act play on what at that time was the off-Broadway circuit.
The off-Broadway circuit, I think if you remember, at that time was weekends mostly, and we would play, some of us, in large theatres, but only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday kind of thing.
And that was off Broadway at that time. Plant in the Sun was very successful and a Broadway producer came down to -view it and for some reason, contacted me and began to talk.
I had permission from the company, from the Group, from Theatre of Action, to discuss it with her.
And I was the youngest in the company, and I was sent down to meet with Carly Wharton---her husband was John Wharton; they've since been divorced--a lovely woman. And she was the producer with.
Martin Gabel of Life With Father, and that, you know, at that time had been running like 27 years or something. It was a tremendous run. We were discussing bringing Plant In the Sun to Broadway.
Well, it didn't work out, for some reason. I think we needed another piece with it or something. It didn't work out.
Well, then I jumped back to Medicine Show and we started--you know, there was work going on at the time. And Jules Dassin was very excited about the fact that this was going to be probably his first directorial stint, I think, on Federal Theatre.

JO: That's right. One script we have in this collection has notes about Hartford.
Was it being tried out in Hartford, do you know or something like that?

PB: Not that I know' of, no.

JO: I can't make sense of it.

PB: I don't know anything about that. All I remember is that knowing Carly Wharton, I took the play and the director to Carly Wharton's office and we sat and discussed it. She said she'd met with Julie Dassin and the authors and that's the last administrative deal I had to do with it. And she offered me, gave me a letter of agreement, offering me two percent of all profits. I was so excited. You know, if you're going to Broadway, you have to make money. Right? Because we lost, closed in--what was it, two weeks?

JO: No, it ran five weeks.

PB: Five weeks, yes. Oh, what a

terrible part I had in it! It was terrible. What was I?

JO: You were one of the patients.
PB: I was a syphilitic patient, I think.

JO: You don't know which one?

PB: Stop laughing about it.

JO: Were you one of the ones that was going to die?

PB: Yes, I was going to die, I remember.

JO: But it seems to me that play was a good example of what Federal Theatre could do and what it couldn't do very well with a cast that size. The expansiveness of the Living Newspapers was something that could be done by Federal Theatre.

PB: It was certainly a worthwhile evening, but it couldn't compete on the kind of thin air that you had on Broadway. You could do or die in consequence.

JO: Kazan was the director, if I'm correct, in Revolt of the Beavers.

PB: No, he wasn't, was he? You're kidding.

JO: I think so.

PB: Kazan? No, I don't think so.

JO: Okay. (Laugh)

PB: No. I'd be surprised as hell.

JO: That's my question, I mean.

PB: No. Kazan's first directorial job was with our theatre, with the Theatre of Action. But I don't think The Revolt of the Beavers. Wow, what a statement! I've got to find that out. Now Julie. . .

JO: No, I haven't spoken to him yet.

PB: You will.

JO: Let me ask, because you were young and primarily an actor, tensions about pink slips, firing, labor unions, Workers' Alliance, coming out of Theatre of Action? Were you involved in union attempts?

PB: Well, I was involved and let me tell you that my memory and I can promise you that I would tell you everything that I remember, but I don't remember. I know I participated in any of the efforts of left-wing theatre people to accomplish anything. It was clear that we were totally right. I'm saying that tongue in cheek because I don't know that we were or not. Well, from the efforts and the effects that we had created, it seemed that we were right. We were part of the group of people who were doing good theatre. We were helping people eat. All of these things are very positive accomplishments, so how could I fault whatever we did at that time? What our international involvements were, I would say if there were any question about right or wrong, they could fall in that area, you see. But what our local accomplishments were, I would say that we reflected the needs of that period and were not extremists in our actions. There wasn't anything that any of us did that was--I would say that the most extremist thing that we did was to

have the nerve to talk at that time and to occasionally pass out leaflets or to help some new little union came alive and help the workers fight for rights, the sit-ins at the time, you know. Yes, we helped in all of those things, but there was no real union power base at the time. We weren't helping a powerful Teamsters' Union, you know, which would have been laughable at that time. We were helping people who were indeed working six full days a week and nine and 10 hours a day. They were very simple economic needs that we were dealing with and we were certainly pleased to see oldtime actors, even if they sat for four hours. I didn't fault them for that. I said, "Gee, that's fine. They're ready to work, they're here ready to work, you know. Their whole lives, their past, is right here. Let than work." But the fear of pink slips was constant, constant.

JO: What was your attitude towards the administration, the supervisors in the Children's Theatre, or Jack Rennick or Walter Hart or Phil Barber?

PB: Jack Rennick I remember. From his appearance I was suspicious of him because he looked a little bit like a stereotype that if I were to play a smoothie, I would use his makeup, you know, in a play. And actually, he's probably a very nice man. I don't know. I didn't really know him, even though I've met with him a number of times, in meetings, not in person. I had, no matter what specific actions were taken at specific times--I remember there was a whole time when we were picketing the administration. Basically, I felt and I think most of us felt that we were helping them by picketing them. It's like saying, "We insist that you do these things." And they in turn could say, "You see, this is what everybody's fighting for." I believed them, I thought they were working in an impossible situation, and I certainly couldn't have admired a Flanagan any more than I did and do. So I never felt that the--I never felt any factionalism or splits within the working atmosphere of the Federal Theatre, but maybe there was. Again, I

hide behind my defense of youth, you know.

JO; Was there a competition or a desire to be in certain units? You were in Children's Theatre and did you desire to get into the Living Newspapers--

PB: Yes, I think those were constant, yes. That kind of feeling was constant. I wish I could have been in Living Newspaper shows, At the very beginning, I was happy to be any place, but once you begin eating a little bit, you feel a little better about yourself and your ability to recognize, "Look at all those kids cheering for me. Why shouldn't I have other people cheering?" And then you'd go—they had a regular professional engagement kind of look. They played evenings. Wow! We only played afternoons and occasionally in parks we played in the evening. There was that kind of jealousy. It wasn't anything strident,though. It wasn't anything ugly certainly. I don't know how naive I'm being when I say I felt no ugliness in the whole period. I felt a striving to do better things.

JO: Yes, I think that was a natural ambition or striving to do that. I think most people sensed that.

PB: Right. I don't remember unpleasantness in that whole circumstance. Now again, t must be terribly naive and I wish you'd challenge Will Lee with that statement to see if he'd sense a lot more different things than I did. I'm sure he did. He was a much more aware and much more mature person at the time.

JO: Did you have a sense, in the units you were in or in Federal Theatre in general, of an aesthetic or political viewpoint? You know the Group Theatre had a--

PB: Yes. Oh, yes.

JO: --kind of feeling of the kinds of plays they were going to do. Theatre Union had a kind of feeling of the kinds of plays

they would do.

PB: I felt that quite strongly, but not in conflict with anything I was doing. Of course, we had already learned that these are techniques and helpful hints for harmful actors. Or helpful hints for helpless actors, you know. And that's what we had already learned, that a great deal of Stanislavski's work was in that direction and here was an opportunity to use it and under any circumstances to use when you needed it. The kinds of plays? Well, they were being done. Very interesting and challenging plays were being done all over the Federal Theatre, and all it did is whet your appetite for wanting more. But artistically, I would say the accomplishments were there. You wanted more. Politically, I felt Federal Theatre was doing things that way, too. I would say from a looking backward thing, I think one of the problems that could have been helped was to service the conservative mind and being the artists we were, trying to look forward and ahead and searching out the basic needs and dramatizing them because basic needs are more dramatic than other needs, so they're more easily dramatized. But where was our responsibility to the conservative mind, to the larger body of the slower-moving, settled American? I think more of that was necessary, I mean a conscious service. You know, just doing any kind of play is servicing a large audience or any ordinary play. I think it would have been hard to do. Don't forget there was a--just the fact that we were, so many of us, on the Federal Theatre and so aggressive, that we did influence programming, no question about it. I don't know whether it was conspiratorially programmed that way or not. I don't think it matters. We were reflecting a period, but I think we neglected a period, too. That's only in retrospect I feel that way. I don't know that anybody else would agree with me on that, but I just feel that we should have been much more aware of a broader base.

JO: Were you conscious of it as being a

national, federal organization? Or was it New York as far as the action was? Pia; You had to be aware of its national impact, you had to be because you always had reports. "Hey, look what they did out there. And look what they did out there. We could do this." There was such activity in Chicago, in L.A. You're less conscious of national theatre now or any time after that because all you're doing is you take a play from Broadway in New York and you send it out to Chicago. At that time you had things coming in from Chicago and you had things being created in Chicago. You had some pretty fine actors out there. What the hell's his name who has been in England for the rest of his life? He was a good actor then and his wife. Her last name's Shepherd, I think, Ann Shepherd and his name I forget. So the activity was, you were much more conscious of the national contribution of theatre, much more. The only thing I don't remember is dance.

JO: Then there was Anna Sokolow who was on Federal Theatre.

PB: Oh, well. She was the head of our concentration camp. You know why I say that?

JO: No. (Laugh)

PB: She used to teach dance in the Theatre of Action, and whenever she came in, we used to say to ourselves, "Oh, here comes the concentration camp warden here." Because she would make us do such tough things. You could kill her. (Laugh) But we loved her. She's a marvelous woman. But I thank you again for that question because again, it makes me aware, reminds me of the enormous activity of the Federal Theatre. It was really federal; it was all over the place, There were theatres in the South and theatres all over. Wow, came to think of it!

JO: Did you have a sense of other organizations? Did you know the playwrights or the playreaders and people like Norman

Rosten or Arthur Miller reading plays?

PB: Yes, but very peripherally, you know. I wasn't aware. I was too preoccupied with self and enjoying the new little room I had down in the Village and being asked to direct a little youth theatre thing because I was a professional actor now, you know. So that I was led into interest. Nobody was taking me by the hand, but I was very willingly going with any--if Will Lee said to me, "Let's go to a reading," and if I didn't have a date that night, I would go, no question about it, and be aware, And in reading the literature of the Federal Theatre, I would be aware

JO: How about directors?
PB: No, I don't know any of the directors of that period, not at all aware of them except Charlie Freeman. I must tell you, I don't remember who directed Revolt of the Beavers. I couldn't tell you who directed--

JO: I'll have to send you a note about that to let you know either one way or the other.

PB: Yes, please. I couldn't tell you who directed Emperor's New Clothes or Horse Play. I think Maurice Clark directed Emperor's New Clothes.

JO: Yes.

PB: Right?

JO: That's right.

PB: Nice, gentle man. I liked him. Was Brett Warren on the Federal Theatre?

JO: Yes.

PB: How is he now? Have you seen him or talked to him?

JO: No. I have a series of names I'm going to ask you in a minute. (Laugh) And that's one of them.

PB: He's not very well.

JO: Is he in the city?

PB: He lives in New Jersey, but in North Bergen somewhere. I don't know where. I'm sure you could find him. I wouldn't know how.

JO: Other accomplishments or other failures that you recall in the Federal Theatre?

PB: Beverly trying to walk out of the room on her toes, you know.

JO: Are there achievements or shortcomings of the Federal Theatre that we didn't mention that you remember or recall?

PB: Achievements or shortcomings? Well, I can only say that I wish I had done the kind of work that you seem to have done because you know more about my memory than I know.

JO: I know some of the facts. I don't know the memories. I don't know the labor you put on.

PB: That takes hard thinking and again, I'm sure that if a guy like Will Lee were here or Ben or Nick Ray--did you get a chance to talk to Al Saxe?

JO: No. I'm hoping you have his address.

PB: There must be a way to find him; I know that. He's in the South, Miami someplace.

JO: I have him in both Miami and Atlanta. That's part of our problem that--

PB: Atlanta? Then that's very new. I never knew he'd been in Atlanta.

JO: Earl Robinson thought maybe he was in Atlanta.

PB: Accomplishments? Federal Theatre accomplishments? I can only get flowery

-Interruption-

and ornate about what Federal Theatre did accomplish. I think the whole

arts projects, all of the projects left such a memorable mark on the culture of this country that, you know, it's hard to say what did Federal Theatre leave because once the actor leaves the stage, what's left except memory? If we'd had television then, maybe we could have recorded some of those experiences and I wish that would happen more frequently today, recording great theatre performances and things. But the only reason that I had for appealing to God to not let the former Federal Theatre actors die so quickly is that, please God, there should be somebody around to tell these stories. But now that you're doing this, you can do away with us, too, because I think this is enormously important. Every place you go in the country today there are geographical surveys, there are pamphlets on federally-distributed pamphlets--the history of a community. All of these marvelous things have been done by the Federal Theatre. And you read them and say, "My God, this is damned good writing, and it's interesting." There was more work done on our Bicentennial then for today's anniversary than we certainly did these days. Because all that material was available from that period, you know. So when you speak of accomplishment, I don't think you can separate Federal Theatre--

JO: Fran the other arts projects.

PB: --from the other arts. If you want to specify, you'd say that Federal Theatre had reacted very well to the change of thinking about economic needs, political needs of America, and had helped make an enormous change in the attitude toward theatre in America, enormous change. Plays that were able to be done matter-of-factly during and after Federal Theatre, could not have been done without Federal Theatre. Group Theatre, who initiated, our theatre, who initiated many things, would only have been in a little initiating situation yet, you know.

JO: How about Theatre of Action and the time

prior to Federal Theatre? The
things not mentioned in Stage Left or
things in Stage Left that you want to
expand upon, moments there that Jay
Williams doesn't talk about.

PB: Well, I would say that the main thing
that I would talk about would be the
life itself because looking back, it
was a remarkable experience, really,
truly remarkable, not reflected in
any other theatre community that I
can think of today, even though there are
many things that are, you know,
fairly close, some things that are fairly
close. But it can't be the same because
that was so unique. Nowadays these are kind
of romantic and interesting experiences,
but the reality of poverty isn't really
here today. Even though kids may be living
on five cents a day, the reality is not
there because you
can always get nowadays--still, for
another year or so. But then it really
was a question of poverty. We really were
a crowded little group of 15 people
living in five rooms. Those experiences of
that kind of living together at
that time in the history of our city or
of our country and what it reflected; and
not only reflected in relation to our
city and our country. This kind of thing
was reflected in--we were actually
reflecting or imitating the companies that
were developed in Germany at that time.
And it was again the radical thinking
that wasn't doing anything extremist
That's the thing that I keep coming up
with all the time whenever I compare.
The only thing extreme that was done was
in our talk. We were saying things that
we weren't allowed to say at that time,
and they weren't extremist statements.
They were basically based on a form of
humanitarianism. And in the depth of
that Depression, humanitarianism was a
pretty necessary point of discussion.
Humanitarianism, the progressive thinking
of an artist, all reflected in the
Theatre of Action on as poverty-stricken
a level as you can possibly imagine.
Yet, youth can handle those things. Do
you mind if I contradict myself?
I say, "Youth can handle those
things." What the hell am I talking

about, youth can handle those things?
Can I tell you stories about my
father and Mother who were not "youth," who
handled those kinds of things and
millions of other people? My folks
were of the progressive ilk. My mother,
and when I say "my mother" to other
former members of the Theatre of Action,
everybody smiles and remembers her. She
was a very marvelous, tall, dramatic
kind of woman, with a strength in every gesture, you
know, marvelously feminine strength. When
she was dying in Florida, naturally Miami,
in a hospital there and she was pleading
with me not to carry on with doctors. Leave
her alone, let her go away. She said,
"I've had a good life. I feel like I've done
things, like I've accomplished things." And
she said to me one time, I remember,
"Perry, you see this little mark in my
head there? You see? Here, push the hair
aside and see that little mark there?"
I said, "Yes."
She says, "That's where I got hit
for unemployment insurance." She
says, "If I didn't have that mark
there, you might not have unemployment
insurance today." I will never forget
that truism. She just rocked me with
that, and it's true. She fought like
a tiger for all of those things.
She's one of
those women—yes, she did an illegal
thing. She used to take evicted
people's furniture and put it back in
the house. And no cop dare tell her
not to because she used to stand up to
them and, you know, you weren't
dealing with
guys who would swing a club easily.
You know, you were dealing with
policemen who saw what was going on.
And they would argue, "You're not
allowed to do that," but allow them.
So when I say the Theatre of Action
was able to
handle the poverty of the times,
it's true we were because we were
young. But I shouldn't isolate it.
And that's, in my opinion, or my
memory, one of the most important
things. I don't mean the poverty
alone, but the creative atmosphere,
the working all day. We were a
schooling situation and an active

professional company at the very
same time. Well, I'm sure you know
the stories of playing in union halls
and all that.

JO: You sang in a couple, that lullaby and
little ditty. Do you remember the lines
from "I'm No Communist " from the days of
playing? "La Guardia's Got the Baloney?"

PB: Gee, we sang that about 15 or 20 years ago.
(Sings) I think that's about all
remember. But as I was singing just now,
I remembered. I played La Guardia
in that and then later at the Diamond
Horseshoe, I was again La Guardia. You
see, that's one of my problems in acting. I
could never play tall parts.
Oh, there was another cute little thing
that I was not in, but it was the one
that Children's Theatre had done once and
Will Lee was in it. It was teaching a
kid something and they'd say--these are the
only lines I remember from it.
"What is an island?" (Sings)
And the kid answered, "An island, an island?
Oh! An island is a pimple in
the ocean. Ah, ha, ha. Ho, ho, ho. Ho,
ha, ha, ho, ho, ho." (Laugh) Oh, songs,
I'm sure you--you'll get all the singing

JO: (Laugh) That's right.
you want from Earl.

-End of Interview-