TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW
with SAIDA GERRARD

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SG: I didn't realize there was going to be anything else other than what we were just talking about.

KW: Well, when I interviewed Sue and Paula we sat there for about three hours with this and kind of went over and over just all kinds of things. But the purpose of taping you is more just to get your kind of individual story, as against, you know--I'm sure you'll repeat something--

SG: What everybody else has, of course.

KW: But that's fine. Why don't you--maybe you could tell me what your background and training was before you got into the Dance Project.

SG: Oh, all right.

KW: Briefly, if you don't want to (laugh)--

SG: You see, when I had gotten onto the Dance Project, I had came from Canada. I was born in Toronto and I had studied what was called interpretive dance and ballet and Dalcroze eurythmics and piano. And I had my light set, you know, to be a dancer from the age of nine, I think it was. When I came to New York I studied with Hanya Holm in the Wigman School, and then I went back to Toronto and I started a company there because I had to be back. My father had just died and my mother was ill and so I became the breadwinner and helped. Because my older brother was still in college and my younger sister was in high school. So I started the school and overnight I sort of became the Martha Graham of Toronto. It was really ridiculous.

But I was invited to dance with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra so I did a solo performance with them. And then overnight my studio was just flooded with, students. Everybody was unemployed and everybody that I knew was interested in the arts. It was like a big flowering thing and I think I had over 100 students very rapidly. And someone donated a beautiful studio

to me. It was the top of a building downtown that had been built for a Russian prince as a dance studio, and it had windows on three sides and overlooked Lake Ontario. It was just magnificent and the room must have been 60 x 60. It was huge. So I gave performances right in the studio, and I started to teach for the Toronto University.

The second year they invited me to do the opening concert and the closing concert for the symphony orchestra. So I did that, and they paid me enough money to come to New York to take a summer course, which I did. And then I decided I didn't want to stay in Toronto because I really hadn't had enough background. I wanted to go back and study with Martha Graham and other dancers. So I came back to New York and it was at the time--I guess the projects had been in existence for some time. And I got on that way, you see, and I was only on it, I think, for about a year and a half before it closed.

KW: Oh, you must have been on at the end. It began in 1935 and I think the Dance Project got of the ground in early 1936.

SG: Well, it was around there, then, because the first production I was in was Candide. So it can kind of be traced to when that was produced. Because I came in--it was already all set, but I just came in, sort of on the last--

KW: Did you have to go on relief and do all that business to get on?

SG: Well, I was one of that group where you

KW: Oh, the 10 percent?

SG: And they' said okay and that afternoon I was on the Project. In other words, they had opened it for more dancers and all my dancer friends told me about it and said, "You just come with us. Don't ask any questions." So I came and they said, No, I'm unemployed, and that was it. So that's how I got on.

Because I don't remember all this, you know, the kids were telling you about--kids! (Laugh) The ladies were telling you about how they fought to get all--

KW: To get started, yes. So you missed that?

SG: Yes, I missed that hassle.

KW: What about this union business that they were talking about, too? Did you know about that or--

SG: I only knew about the American Dance Association, the one that Tamiris was the Executive Director of or something. That was formed and I remember that's when practically all the dancers came and they would discuss the Problems of what the dancers had to cope with.

KW: Was that more like for concert dancers? I remember some kind of distinction between these different dance organizations. That obviously wasn't a WPA thing at all. Right? I mean, it was--

SG: I don't think it was totally WPA. I think it was open to anybody, but practically all the dancers I knew were on the WPA, you see. Because everybody that knew about it really tried very hard to get on because that was the only way you could get a job dancing instead of waiting on tables or whatever else might possibly be open to you. There were no openings for dancers anywhere. Remember, it was pre-television, which doesn't really employ very many dancers anyway. And the most dancers employed in a Broadway show would be 12, six men and six women. And how many shows were musicals that would employ dancers? So there really wasn't all that much outside of concert dance. And then nobody made any money out of concert dance. It took a long time to even get an AlMA (American Guild of Musical Artists) salary for one day's work, for the day of the performance. Rehearsals were not even considered and that, of course, was where you spent all your time. But then

nobody had jobs either so--

KW; This was more or less modern dance that you're speaking of?

SO; Yes. Well, ballet was in the same boat.

KW: Yes, I guess that's true.

SG: They were. The only other thing that may have been a little different would be the variety show thing, the nightclubs and that kind of thing, the touring companies of popular Broadway hits like Student Prince or something like that that seem to be perennials. And they were touring all over. The Shuberts booked them, you know, all over the country. It may have been that kind of thing. But other than that, there was nothing. Even, say, the touring companies that came in. Let's say Mary Wigman would come in. Well, she didn't even come with a company. Escudero would come in with two or three dancers. Shankar, I remember, came and performed and he was marvelous, with a very, very small company. And there were very few touring ballet companies. There was the Diaghilev Ballet had long been over and I think the new companies hadn't gotten started. And some very fine ballet dancers used to appear at Roxy's and Radio City. And you always hoped to get a job there, too, which was the chorus line. And that was anathema, too, if you even did get in. Two girls I know who did get into that got tuberculosis. They were indoors all the time and they did I don't know how many shows, five shows a day. Can you imagine what that's like? They didn't even take their makeup off. So that was the great, glorious picture.

KW: Well, what was the--I was curious about this yesterday and I never really got the whole picture, the modern dance scene in particular. I mean, to be a young dancer in New York City, a young modern dancer in New York City,

what did life consist of mostly? I mean, the description I've had so far, there were a lot of dance studios all over the area around Lincoln Center and what was it--

SG: And the Village, downtown, right. Well, there were many experimenters and innovators and pioneers in dance and everyone was trying to find an approach that would be original, that would have something to say in our own terms of our own time instead of the old war horses like Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty and the fairy tales which really weren't related to us, either as people or as dancers, and that there must be other things to dance about. And this was the period in which Martha Graham was getting her company going and Humphrey/Weidman had their companies, and Tamiris had a company. And many others had smaller companies like Gluck Sandor and, you know, they were all Various degrees and various concepts even. But they would do joint performances, big ones.

KW': So there was cooperation among these different groups?

SG: Yes, they would do joint concerts periodically, have a festival and maybe two or three companies appear on one program. And the only time we had a lot of that was during the war. This was after WPA when John Martin would arrange large concerts. We did them in the Brooklyn Museum, we did them at the Alvin Theatre where the various companies all performed and it would be to raise funds for the war. Some of it was for Russian war relief, some of it was for Spanish war relief. That was before the war, and, during the war it was for the people. You see, they were war relief things, and lots and lots of money was raised that way. And vast audiences came. These things were terrifically successful. You couldn't get in. People were standing in the aisles, you know, and they were exciting. They were exciting to do.

KW: I suppose that a dance audience was being created or had recently been created by all this activity.

SG: Right. And had been expanded by the WA because many, many people saw it for the first time.

KW: You would know about Humphrey/Weidman and people like that before you got into the WPA?

SG: Oh, yes.

Of: I mean, they had their reputations?

SG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And Wigman from Europe. And I had also, knew about Isadora Duncan and the Denishawns and had, you know, read about them. And I'd seen some Denishawn performances while I was still in Canada. They would cane through with movies and they would do a prologue before the film. Did you know about those?

KW: No, I didn't.

SG; That's how I first saw dance. The downtown movies would have what they called vaudeville and periodically it would be the Denishawn Company. And they did an hour's performance and then the film would go on. So I saw all of those things that way and they were touring all over the country that way. But they were not dance programs per se. I don't think I ever saw--I saw one ballet performance of same--I think it was Fokine brought a company to Toronto and I saw some dances there. Of course, I was absolutely charmed, entranced, and won over completely.

KW: I would think so.

SG: Oh, yes. They were just absolutely thrilling experiences. What a dance company.? My God, you dreamed about it for weeks when you knew it was earning. That's the kind of thing there was. And you see, I don't think dancers in

this country really earn a livelihood by dancing.' That included the Graham Company and the Humphrey-Weidman Company, which were always the two biggest,

and the Hanya Holm had a good company going. Because they would only get paid when they were performing, and the tours were very short. Therefore, you took classes all year round and daily and you rehearsed daily for which, of course, you were paid nothing. So that you had to try to earn a living

by teaching a little, modeling, waitressing, any kind of thing that you could do for two or three hours and then go in and take your class and come back and go to work.

KW: And although you got paid on the WPA, the same kind of schedule would prevail, I would imagine. Is that right? I mean, as far as work--

SG: No, because if you got paid on WPA, you didn't have to take other jobs. Not that you didn't--they weren't even available. But you didn't have to scrounge

to see. Maybe you could get a job on a Saturday to sell in Macy's, on a Saturday morning. They took on extra help. You got $2.00 for the day or something. Some perfume or something that didn't take too much brain power to do.

KW: But I meant more as far as the schedule of rehearsing and performing and practicing and that kind of excitement.

SG: Well, that was pretty good because the hours were in one chunk and I think we were--we had to be there for six hours and sometimes a little less. And then you'd go and take your own private classes after that.,

KW: Were there any provisions for any WPA dance classes that you could take or did you--I mean, you just had to kind of arrange whatever you wanted to on your own.

SG: You had to arrange that yourself. That was the strange thing that there

were no dance technique classes arranged through WPA.

KW: Yes, I'm surprised.

SG: Yes, it is surprising when I think about it now, but everybody studied outside. You see, you had to come in and you were a professional. But every professional company conducts its own technique classes. It was partly, I think, studio space was very poor and, you know, facilities were not very good. And the choreographers who did come on had other obligations. They had their own companies outside the WPA, so they weren't--they were engaged as choreographers and they were not going to teach.

KW: What do you remember in particular about Humphrey/Weidman or Gluck Sandor or any of the choreographers and name performers, I guess, that you worked with?

SG: Well, I never worked with Gluck Sandor. I worked only with Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman; I think I was in one Berta Ochsner performance; and Tamiris. And the experiences of working with those, they were all different to work with. But they were very serious and when they were there and conducting the rehearsals, I couldn't have been happier. You know, I just thought, "I'm doing what I want to do and knocking myself out to do it." And it was rewarding, you know. You really worked--the thing that was not good was the hours you spent waiting for the choreographers to came and after you learned the production, waiting for months for it, to get it on right,

KW: Did you ever hear any rumors or stories about why they weren't getting on, or speculate as to why?

SG: Oh, they'd say, "Yes, the theatre will be available at such and such a time." And then six weeks later, "No, it won't be available now until this time." And then whatever the production thing was, it had to come through Washington.

You know, all the bureaucratic red tape. And that's why delegations would go down and say, "We want to know" because, you see, the morale of the performers would go down because you weren't going to intensively and excitedly dance the same thing for eight months (laugh) until you got on with it. You could drop dead from that.

KW: I would think the morale would have to be low.

SG: Yes, it would have to be. But you know, there was such a good spirit amongst the dancers themselves. And when we weren't rehearsing, some of us would just work out by ourselves while we were waiting and some of them would sit around and discuss the problems. And as soon as the choreographer came in, we were all there, right on our toes. There was never a discipline problem about not being at the studio on time or about not rehearsing properly. I don't remember anybody ever being disciplined for something like that. It just didn't exist.

KW: If anything, maybe the discipline problem was that they were too involved, you know. Sane of them with the unions and that--

SG: Well, but it never interfered with the actual rehearsals.

KW: Oh, no.

SG: The minute rehearsals, were scheduled, everybody was there; or performances were scheduled, everybody was there. There was no such thing as not showing up to a rehearsal, and if you were sick, you called in. No, it's funny. I found that kind of thing here when I was working with the Theatre Arts program of Los Angeles. Lazy, they didn't want to do anything. They really-- I don't know how they got onto this particular project, but they certainly had none of the spirit—that's why I quit. But they had none of the spirit of the dancers. It was because they were not the right kind of people that

were selected to be on this thing. Because there are dancers available who would give their eyeteeth to work fulltime and be paid while they're doing it and look forward to performances. That would, be great.

KW: What do you remember about any of the particular productions? I know you said what, Fantasy 1939 and Candide and were you in With My Red Fires?

SG: Yes.

KW: I mean, anything that you recall about how the reaction was.

SG: You mean the audience reaction or the students?

KW: Yes.

SG: The audience reactions were always excited. You know, we always got tremendous applause and many, many curtain calls and it was never a dull performance where people just applauded, curtain, go home.

KW: And that's it.

SG: Yes. "Thank God it's over." No, there was always an enthusiasm engendered by a performance. I loved working With My Red Fires. I think that was the most exciting.

KW: Was that part of a larger--

SG: Performance?

KW: Performance. I remember seeing-maybe they were rotating because the playbill I remember seeing—maybe it's one I gave you—had it listed. You know, one was called The Race of Life.

SG: I was in that, too.

KW; I see.

SG: Maybe they all went on in one evening. There was To the Dance was the opening, I remember, and I was in that. And With My Red Fires and I think the Thurber, Race of Life was on the same program.

KW: Was that a problem to be in all three? Because I notice same other people weren't. I mean, quite a number.

SG: Well, some called for more dancers than others. Like To the Dance was a small group. With My Red Fires was a very large group. And the Thurber was a small group. I just felt that, you know, I would have liked then to have been in the Humphrey Weidman Company. You know, I wanted to set my lights--or into the Graham Company.

KW: Did they have their own separate companies that did not perform in WPA? I mean, were they,—

SG; Oh, yes.

KW: They were like consultants, really, then

SG: They were choreographers who had their own companies and they were called in to choreograph for WPA. Now they choreographed the same works that they had for their own company on the WPA company. And sometimes, some of the people who were in their company were also on WPA, like Eva Desca was on it, Lee Sherman was on it, I think Milton Feher, and Katy Litz.

our of their dancers that I know of were in the company, too. And of course, I• thought they were simply marvelous because they knew the things before we did. You know, everything was just set right, beautifully with them. And here we were struggling to learn the shapes.

KW: Haw about Berta Ochsner? I think she came in from Chicago. I don't associate her with New York as much.

SG: No. Well, she was the least interesting. She was a very nice person, you know. There was nothing—but her work was the least interesting to do. I felt it was not very exciting choreographically.

KW: And that, I think, was one of the last productions maybe. That and Adelante

would have been pretty near the end of the Project.

SG: I just don't seem to recall, you know, the sequence of--

KW: Fantasy 1939, of course, because the date is in it.

SG: That's right.

KW: And that was the end.

SG: I told you I was terrified when the curtain went up on that because of the velvet backdrop and the black velvet ladder. We were supposed to float down and the floating down wasn't what was scary. But sitting up in the flies before the curtain went up and looking down at this bottomless pit and not seeing anything, sort of feeling your way down, was pretty terrifying. I don't think that production ran very much. I don't think that it ran more than a few nights.

KW: It may not. That's one thing we're never sure of is how long any of them ran.

SG: Because there are no dates on--

KW: Yes, there really aren't.

SG: The program was published once and that was it.

KW: Something like Candide and How Long Brethren, you know it went back into repertory and played again. But how long was that triple feature with With My Red Fires and The Race of Life?

SG: I really don't know. I think Jose Limon danced in With My Red Fires, too.

KW: That's right.

SG: I remember that because I was injured during one of those performances by Jose. (Laugh)

KW: That would be something that would stand out.

SG: Well, there were levels on the stage and I remember I was on the top level

and so was Jose doing something. And he sort of shot his leg way out, didn't see me there or something and just rammed right into me. I went toppling down the stairs and you know, recovered somehow. But I was out for a while because I think I was kicked in the groin or something. (Laugh)

KW: The others yesterday - I can't remember if you said the same thing--were talking about how close they were to the people on the other arts projects, the writers and the musicians and the artists and all that. Was that true for you, too? I mean, did you have contact with the others?

SG: Yes. I knew a lot of the painters on the projects and I knew same of the actors and some of the musicians. And I'd known then, you know, before the Project, too. The people who were in the performing arts tended to know each other and meet at concerts or meet at performances or meet at Parties. So you got to know. There was a wide circle of young people and everybody was very dynamic.

KW: At that time in New York especially, I'm sure.

SG: Oh, it was buzzing. It was just humming all the time. And you'd meet in a restaurant and stay all night long at the Automat with one cup of coffee, that kind of thing. But talk, you know, a tremendous amount of discussion and evaluation and criticism and jealousies and rivalries and put-downs and everything. It was really marvelous. It was a really exciting time. And then new things that were being written like Marc Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock. Everybody went to see the opening of that and I remember when Blitzstein would do it at parties, just do it with the piano and go through it. And artists would come and they would do chalk talks, you know, and draw and talk about painting and drawing and they would be marvelous with it, very facile and very easy, tall and they always answered

questions. Everybody participated, you know, you just didn't pay your money and sit down and get entertained and walk out. You felt that you were really part of it. And it was all rather innovative, too.

KW: Oh, yes, it sounds like it.

SG: And it was very different from the kind of things we've had here, particularly in the late sixties. You know, the happenings. It was none of that self-indulgence.

KW: Yes, they sound more contrived than this.

SG: Very, and goofy. The more far-out you could be, the better. This had nothing to do with being far-out. This had to do with imagination about life, and you could relate to it rather than kind of escaping into what I call--you know, children's night in a camp when the counselors are the children and the children take over and they put on these improvisations. That's what these happenings were like as far as I was concerned. In fact, some of the things the kids did were much better than the so-called professional happenings that I went once or twice to see and gave up on.

KW: That period in the thirties must have engendered a real, I don't know, commitment or interest or concern in things that hasn't really happened in the same way since.

SG: No. The thing that came a little bit close to it was the disaffection during the Vietnam War, but even then you found it mostly amongst the people who were possible draftees. But this was so general because, as I said, everybody was unemployed, everybody lived from hand to mouth. I don't know how we did it, really. And everybody felt, "We are intelligent, we have training, we are educated, we have ideals. We feel everybody has a right to live decently and to have a job and to work in the field that they're trained for." So it was

universal. You just didn't feel that "I haven't got a job and there's something wrong with me." There's something wrong with society if I don't have a job. Let's put it where it belongs.

KW: That kind of philosophy, I think, must have been, as you said, in the works that were done. I mean, these dances, their aim, I guess, was--or message, was to

SG: Well, you know, when I think about it, for example, With My Red Fires is not a social message, if that's what you are implying.

KW: I was thinking of some of them. I mean, they probably all weren't, but--

SG: I'm just thinking right now of, say, the Humphrey Weidman things. To the Dance was pure dance. It was like a greeting to the audience in movement. Then we did With My Red Fires, which was really a psychological probing. The dance was about the mother, the daughter, the father, the family, the outside forces and the breaking up of lovers. So it really was not a thing about economics.

KW; Or society?

SG: Yes. It was not what you would say an agitprop kind of thing. Candide surely is a great social satire, but it's the universal satire and you can certainly make applications to your own time through a piece like Candide. But it would not fall into the category, say, of—like the Living Newspaper was really very timely because it took the current problems and the current needs and the current disasters and really placed them before you in a rather dramatic and imaginative way, so that you could identify with the people and realize that they are not being discriminated against because of their inadequacy but that there just isn't the place for them, that society is doing something to keep them down. There was some of that, but I

look at the plays that I remember the most like Horse Eats Hat, which was a play that--it's a French play---I've forgotten who the author was—that Orson Welles did. Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Faustus. They did great classics. The dance things that Tamiris did: Adelante was timely in the sense that it had to do with the Spanish War. And the other beautiful thing that she did was How Long Brethren? and I remember dancing Negro spirituals years before that and with a great deal of warmth about, you know, the sufferings of the black people, the Negro people, as they were called then. And what she did was solidify it into a ballet that was very moving and very touching.

But it wasn't an agitprop thing where they say, 'Well now, tomorrow you go out and line up in front of Washington, the White House, and say, 'We demand equal rights.' It really made you have a real empathy for the tragedy.

KW: I guess that's really the hallmark of some of those things. I mean, even the ones you said, "the great classics," they were done, you know, with an eye towards--

SG: Their relevancy to our time.

KW: Yes.

SG: And you know, in a way, when you revive a Greek play or a play that was written, you know, in a society that is not remotely like ours and a time span that's not like ours, the great ones have something to say to us today that's relevant. And those are the things, you slant them, the directors--

KW: So that they speak to you.

SG: So that they speak to you. Otherwise, why go to see them? They would be like museum pieces. So unless they have a relevance, you're not going to find them very moving or absorbing to see. You might as well go to a museum and look at the artifacts. And even then, you should try, you know--

there are implications, too. Because in the end, I don't know of any art, be it theatre or be it the plastic arts, graphic arts, that don't really reflect the spirit of the times in which they were created, whether they could be critical of those times or supportive of those times or satirical or defending the--you know, they were supportive of the society and you could.

SG: . . . be on that.

KW: I: showed you, or you have that memo.

SG: I don't have it, but I saw it.

KW; If you want it, make a copy for you.

SG: No, I don't really. I'm not a collector of memorabilia.

KW; You were already on the Dance Project and this was a separate group that was starting up?

SG: Yes. They said they were—somebody had asked if there could be a Young Choreographers' Group as well. And I had already been choreographing in Canada, as I explained to you. I was always interested in choreographing, so I asked if I could be on--I applied for that, and I guess I was selected to be on it. And I don't even remember whether we gave--we did do some performing. We did do something.

KW: I remember something in the Brooklyn Museum.

SG: Yes.

KW: In fact, I was going to ask you if your husband had been in part of that, too, because it seems to me I remember seeing his name as a composer—

SG: He probably wrote the music for me or accompanied me.

KW: That's right. I knew I had seen his name.

SG: But he was not on WPA at all. We rehearsed in the Brooklyn Museum, and we had a little cubbyhole to work in. We didn't have much studio space, but it was marvelous because you had the chance to have a place to work and work out an idea and present it and perform it. You know, that was the valuable part and I think any really comprehensive plan for, say,

development of dancers and choreographers needs a place like that because it's like a workshop. And you can present the works and get criticism and evaluations and then go on and do new work. And that didn't preclude you from being in other things, too. So that some of the time was taken up with the Young Choreographers and you might be in another production, too, but only for a certain number of hours.

KW: Were these performances run very often? I remember one or two programs, but r take it they were just kind of intermittent.

SG: They were run once. I don't think they--they didn't have a run like, say, at the end of a certain number of weeks, those who had works ready to perform and thought they were suitable, then you presented it. I think I did Sea Shanties or something.

KW: I think I remember that.

SG: A group of—based on sea songs, you know.

KW: What kind of audience would you get for something like that? I remember one was like 10:00 Saturday morning.

SG: We always had audiences. All these school people just came. I suppose

also people were not working and I guess if they were on a Saturday morning, you know, families would come. There was never a problem about an audience.

The performance was announced, the place was full, no question. And I don't even think they paid anything to go to the Brooklyn Museum.

KW: No, right. I don't think they do now, so--

SG: They didn't then either. Just like we have concerts at the Frick Museum and I don't know whether they have them at the Met.

KW: I don't know.

SG: But a lot were done even then, a lot of music was played by, you know, very famous professionals played at the Frick. So the Brooklyn Museum had a series of concerts and the performance didn't cost them anything. And we were on the Project, dying to do our things. So there we were. That was a really lovely experience to be able to do that.

KW: It must have been another forum for you.

SG: That's right, and it gave young people a chance to try out solos. You see, we didn't have little groups to work with. Each one worked alone. In other words, I didn't have three people to choreograph on or something. You know, a company should have that, have a certain period of time allotted for young people, or young dancers, or young choreographers. That's the only way you will develop them because you cannot write down choreography basically. You really have to do it on the people you're working with, and it's a live thing. I've always envied musicians. They just sit down and write it right.

KW: And later they can even read it. That's even more--

SG: That's even more important. (Laugh)

KW: What do you remember about the winding down or the ending of the Project?

SG: We saw the handwriting on the wall. We felt, first of all, I think the draft was already being talked about. I don't even know if it was in existence yet in 1939. Was there a draft in 1939?

KW: Probably not quite that early.

SG: But if it wasn't, everybody knew it was coming because Hitler had already

invaded Poland and Czechoslovakia was already sent down the drain. And there was this spirit that "we know that there is going to have to be something to put this devil, demon, out of the way." And then they cut the salaries, too, down to $19 something. Did you know that?

KW: No, I didn't know that.

SG: Yes. They were cut to $19. I remember it went down, and then you could see that they were putting--things were terminating. But then industry was opening up, jobs, I guess, for war materiel. And it was a very short transition before we went-

KW: Yes, and it was over. And I know I asked this before, but you didn't know about this investigation of the Theatre Project that was going on right then?

SG: Well, we all knew about the Dies Committee. Everybody knew about the Dies Committee, but I didn't know it was involved with--no, I thought they were investigating, I don't know, industries or--what would they want with dancers and actors (Laugh) and all of that?

KW: They wanted their visibility, I think. (Laugh)

SG: Probably, yes. And that was—everybody sort of fought against--the feeling about the Dies Committee was definitely very negative on everybody that I knew. Any decent person wouldn't want that kind of probing into people. But it was nothing that was, you know, particularly--in fact, I was rather shocked when you read some of the memos. I thought, "My God r' They really were trumping up the stuff hot and cold.

KW: Yes, they were.

SG: Hot and heavy. Right. And it was primarily, I suppose, guilt by association. You know, you knew somebody or somebody had seen you with somebody. And "What did you know about that person?" The person was probably just as--

had a right to his thoughts as much as you did. (Laugh)

KW: Yes. Innuendo was big.

SG: Yes, it sure was. Well, that's a sick, unhealthy, poisonous kind of thing.

KW: And then what did you do when the Project closed or when--you left, I guess, when it closed.

SG: I, together with. Nadia Chilkovsky--she had done Mother Goose on Parade.

And I had a script for a children's theatre, too. So I got some of the dancers who were interested in doing this with me and put it on. We performed it at the 92nd Street Y (Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association)

Then we were going to try to book it. There was an organization called Junior Programs Incorporated that booked productions for children throughout

the country. So we were making contact with Junior Programs. But in the meantime, I had all my sets and costumes and we had to put those in storage.

Then I didn't have the money to take the stuff out of storage. (Laugh) And then people began to disperse, but we lost our sets and costumes and all that. That's sane place in some big warehouse somewhere in New York sane place. I never even investigated it. They'd put me in jail for all the money I owe than. I'm sure they just, you know--

KW: They probably sold it.

SG: --appropriated, sure. They'd just sell it and do other things with it.

But that's where all the costumes went. Then what happened after that?

KW: Did you stay in New York or--

SG: Yes, I stayed in New York and I--oh, I went into some Broadway shows. Most of than flopped after a month. And then I went into Charles Weidman's company.

KW; Oh, I didn't know that.

SG: Yes, and then I became a soloist with Charles Weidman and I became his partner. You see, Doris Humphrey and Charles had split and I didn't even know that. I was involved in a show and I had had an injury. I had an Achilles tendon problem or something, and I was getting better. So I went in to take some classes with Charles Weidman, and he invited me to do this solo role in A House Divided, which was a ballet about Abraham Lincoln. And he danced the role of Abraham Lincoln. From there on, I became a member of his company and I toured with him for about five years until practically I came out to the Coast.

KW; What happened to him, just out of curiosity? I know he kept a school in New York for quite a while.

SG: Right. Well, the reason I left Charles was that I think he was becoming an alcoholic and the level of the company was beginning to go down.

KW; Was this in the fifties maybe or--

SG: In the late forties. I came out here in 1951 and I'd been out of town. I did oratorios in Chicago and in Detroit and in Canada.

KW: Choreographing?

SG: Yes, and dancing in them, too. I was brought out here really to choreograph for Brandeis Institute, and I just came out here supposedly for the summer and here I am. That's what happened to us.

KW: Well, did Weidman—he must have died rather recently or--

SG: It's only about three years, I think, that he died. He sort of went down in obscurity in a way, and it was sad.

KW; He must have.

SG: It was sad because in a way, Charles was a very unusual American genius. He developed this concept of kinetic pantomime, which was really dance and mime.

It's the kind of movement that only a dancer could do. A mime couldn't do it or an actor couldn't do it, only a dancer could do it. And he did straight choreographic dance, choreographed that, too. And even when he and Doris separated, when he finished a work she would always come in and we would show it to her. And I suppose they discussed it because the following week changes would be made.

KT: There would be changes?

SG: Oh, yes.

KW: There was no bad split between then or anything?

SG: No, it was friendly, and we stayed in the studio. It was the Humphrey-Weidman School, but Charles stayed in that studio and Doris went off to work with Jose Limon. And for a couple of years there, it was a very upcoming and peppery little company.

KW: I would think so.

SG: And it looked as though it had really terrific potential until that sort of set it and that's when I decided that I would leave. I also worked with him with the opera at City Center and danced. Oh, we did Aida and "Love of Three Oranges" and Traviata, I think and Turandot, a whole slew of, a whole season of operas with him. That was marvelous experience because I've always loved the theatre and I loved working in the opera. And Charles was always very interesting to work with and very, very creative and very imaginative. And he worked with the company beautifully. It's just that--and you see, I felt very sad about his last, you know, the last decade of his life really because I felt that somebody should have really helped him. I think the dance world or National Endowment should have--he was treated like as though sane little, young upstart, they maybe gave him a

pittance for one or two little things. And he functioned in a little studio with a painter who also did sets and things like that. He did little things and he toured and would go out and give master classes and so on.

KW: It probably didn't help as far as his drinking, like to have this situation.

SG: No, it didn't help at all because he really felt down. And he did get cured and he would go for long periods of time and really look as though he was emerging from it. And I think things were so bad for him that it just helped to push him back into this situation. I really honestly feel at this point that Charles Weidman has not been evaluated yet for the real contributions he gave to modern dance in this country. And I think that he will come into his own. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of talking to some people here at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) and discussing what could be done. And it's not a matter of reviving old works because there's something about that that it never comes off and one really doesn't renumber everything. You can perhaps approximate some of it, but to really evaluate his contribution and the works that he did do. There was a beautiful piece he did called Lynchtown, which was just marvelous.

KW: Yes, I've heard about it.

SG: And I was in that and toured it. I did the solo role in that. And then we did Concerto Grosso of Ernest Bloch that was a beautiful, satirical--he had marvelous sense of humor. And it was always that kind of delicate humor. It was never vulgar. It was never gross, never heavy. It always just had a zany charm to it and it was very unique. It was always very original and Very subtle and audiences got it immediately. Then this beautiful piece that he did, A House. Divided, I loved doing that piece. Then he did same light things like David and Goliath and what other works did he do? A lot of--

oh, the Thurber.

KW: Oh, yes.

SG: Yes.

KW: That seems like it would be a good vehicle for someone whose style--

SG: For him it was an absolutely wonderful vehicle, and I've never seen anybody--and I've seen many attempt to do Thurber just, you know, just--they can't touch him with that.

KW: Well, I hope he does come into his own.

SG: Yes, because he deserves it, you know. He deserves it because you see, Doris went on with Jose and Jose lived on for a long time and developed a company. Whereas Charles faded and began to be, you know, talked about as though he was nothing. And he really was a very vital force in American dance. And I personally owe a great deal to him in terms of my own growth as a dancer and choreographer. And I to this day periodically will do whole classes of Weidman things just to acquaint the young people with the kinds of things that he did. And they love them; they really do.

KW: Any concluding remarks you'd like to make?

SG: I think I'd better let you go. Oh, I just conclude that you have knocked yourself out listening to this stuff which must be coming out of your ears by now.

KW; It's coming out of yours, too.

SG: Haying heard it from everybody. Well, I've only had two days of it. (Laugh) That's not so terrible but you've had it for a long, long time. How you can keep your interest in it, I don't know. (Laugh)

KW; It's just fascinating to me, it really is. I mean, especially to hear about it from people who were there.

SG: Well, it was an interesting period in American history, really. And it wasn't just that everybody was so special. It was the times that created them, you know.

KW: The times were special.

SG: Yes, the times were special. And you know, the threat of even a kind of internal struggle because of this massive unemployment. This is the richest country in the world and this is what's happened to the people and it was totally widespread. And then the fear underneath it all, too, that sane kind of a Fascist takeover. You know, that it would become some kind of a horrible society and that everybody had to be alert and awake and make sure that that didn't happen and it couldn't happen and it wouldn't happen. So everybody had that kind of political thing, too. That was very much in the air and I think anybody that didn't must have been deaf, dumb and blind because what were the choices? And it wasn't that anybody wanted Violence or anything. There was no violence, there was no physical violence. The only kind of violence that was ever done was done by the police, you know. They'd come barging in with horses and people would get mad. But the marches that people went on, the picket lines, were extremely peaceful. People were singing and holding up slogans and that was where you met your friends. "I'll meet you on the picket line. When are you going to meet?" "See you tomorrow on the picket line." (Laugh) "We'll have lunch together." And you know, you took turns. So many would go off for an hour or so and have lunch and then the next group would go off. And you'd carry a little old—,

KW: Keep it rolling.

SG: Yes. And even some of those things were very exciting. The people who

came and watched us were very interesting really. (Laugh) We tried to educate them. "We're picketing because--" you know, "--such and such." There was a lot of camaraderie, you know, a lot of open things, and suddenly to feel that, like-that to be contrasted, let's say, by the Cold War and the—and suddenly nobody dares open their mouth or dares to say a word because you are subversive.

KW: That's right.

SG: You know, it hit me. I didn't realize it because living in New York you still were with all your old friends. But coming out here and as a stranger, people wouldn't talk to me. You know, I began to feel--

KW: Well, at that time especially.

SG: In the fifties, early fifties. It was just the height of that persecution.

KW: You might have been an infiltrator or something.

SG: Yes, that's right. People were very suspicious of you if they hadn't known you over any period of time. And then I guess they weren't as—bit by bit, it's like the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) now. I just got a notice--where did we get it from? No, we heard it on the air. UCLA is admitting that many of the professors were paid to keep track of people, students and fellow--you know, this business of being paid to spy on your student. It's the most revolting, you know.

KW: And ridiculous, in a way, when you think about it.

SG: It really is. It makes you want to shudder that, you know, somebody that you think is your friend is really keeping a dossier on you. (Laugh)

KW: Enough.

(End of Interview)