

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW
with HOWARD BAY
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JO: What I'd like first, in general, are your impressions, thoughts, remembrances of the Federal Theatre and then more specific questions about the individual productions.

HB: Well, ask me questions. (Laugh)

JO: Why don't we start with what was supposed to be the most famous one, that is, the One-Third of a Nation where you did both the Vassar summer design and later the one in the city.

HB: You've heard the whole bit about the summer thing? Right.

JO: That's right.

HB: The conferences and the etcetera and etcetera. And I found it a more interesting show except that we had a very good director in New York, Lem Ward, and Dam wanted to do it the way we did it. So we did it that way. I suppose in a way it was more theatrical, you know, and it wasn't basically a literal set. The critics get all confused about those things. It was not a very literal set. It was a compilation of this, that and the other thing. And a lot of real things aren't tenements, you know. (Langdon) Post was the Housing Authority for the city of New York which is what they called it in those days. And he was quite friendly with us and with Eleanor Roosevelt and Hallie etcetera, and he allowed BE to go around when tenements were subject to demolition. And we had quite a bit of time so that I said I wanted that balustrade or that tin cornice or, you know, whatever. So when they demolished it, they set it aside and deloused it and (laugh)... sent it over. And we patched it onto the structure. The structure was the first use, I believe, of patented pipe scaffolding on the stage. So we erected that and the guy who was head of -- I noticed going in a cab out to La Guardia on 21st Street, Long Island City -- he was head of Cheesebro -Whitman. And I noticed the building is still there and I don't know whether they're still in business or not. And then Safeway became the big deal. He was head and he was kind of stagestruck, and he did all the engineering kind of things for Ski jumps at the Garden plus the outside scaffolding. . . for, or -- and he got intrigued with the whole project and helped me work it out as far as the stock units and non-stock units.

It was awful cheap in those days. He gave us this tremendous amount of ironwork for \$75.00 a week rental.

JO: I have a picture just of the scaffolding used. It must have used a tremendous amount of metal.

HB: Yes. It was 40 feet high at least, as I remember it, and we had guy lines. We had guy wires for rigidity... on the piece that came out to form the fire escape. And that was only four feet wide and it extended out about 22 feet, free standing. And we had guy lines for rigidity at the top, but we never had to use them because they were just that rigid. We had to lay sleepers on the floor, (Looks at photograph) I think that's me; yes, it is. That's Moe Hack who did the lighting. That's a pretty good photo. That's About two-thirds of the set, you know. There was a whole wall that goes down the perspective, textured wall on this side. But, you know, all this junk, even the linoleum, I got from tenements and a lot of the balusters and newels and so forth and the sink, I believe, and things like that. And it was funny when the steelworkers put it up... and they had to have standby stagehands. The stagehands lined up in a semi-circle on the apron and watched with their mouths open. These guys carried the iron vertically and then they'd drop it into the flanges. They put it up in about seven hours or so, this whole bloody thing. And then I used it afterwards. I used it in private industry about a year later. I used exposed part scaffolding for this Joe Losey show about the tobacco barns, shade-grown tobacco in Connecticut, about child labor on the tobacco fields. It was written by Francis Faragoh, and Joe Losey directed it. Sidney Lumet was one of the kids in it, 12 years old at the time, Carl Reid and so forth.

JO: But you still, looking back, liked the Poughkeepsie -- Do you think it had a lot to do with the audience and do you think the one was more, the Poughkeepsie audience was -- HS.; Well, it was more for ourselves after all. That's what we were there for, to get -- Well, in Hallie's wonderfully devious mind, you know, it was for political purposes, too, to unite the nation because a lot of the regions were very conservative or very separated from the center, and it was to get more unanimity in discussion throughout the nation, which it did. There was a wild assortment of people and it was a great idea. Tamiris did a very good job because it was more choreographed, more formal in Pough-

keepsie than it ended up being which was, I thought, more interesting. That was only one-half the show. the first half, and the second half had yet to be written. I think Arthur learned a lot, too, and also being away from the pressures of... city ran in a newspaper that he had to run in New York. And it gave him sort of leisure and perspective and so forth. I think it was very valuable to Arthur. And you know, looking down your list of Living Newspaper scripts, Arthur (Arent) was the only one that could write 'em. Everyone thought they were easy. You'd have some projections, you'd have a loud speaker, you'd go to research and you'd dig up sane junk and so forth and you'd string it together. But Arthur had a facility of getting just the proper dramatic gimmick for each episode... and twisting it... Everybody else wrote rather dull stuff.

JO: It's interesting that the others both have to rely more on fictional characters and development of character and don't have that, you know, whatever you want to call it, dramatic metaphor or whatever. Each play has that touchstone where you find asimilar --

HB: The little man in Power and the ventriloquist bit with Wilkie and all those gimmicks were building blocks. You'd think of concrete things that would -- or a little burlesque bit that you'd do. No one else had that facility.

JO: Were you able to choose plays to work on or were you assigned plays? Did you choose Chalk Dust or choose Battle Hymn?

HB: No. When I went on the Project, I had been on the CWA (Civil Works Administration), the forerunner thing and I'd been down on East 35th Street turning out the truck shows, designing the truck shows. You know how we designed those? Somebody gave the Government a lot of bed ticking, (Laugh) a tremendous amount of bed ticking. I don't know how many thousands of yards of bed ticking. And you sat at a drawing board and you laid it out in 7 1/2 foot heights, which is what the traveling trucks took, and you always laid it out the same way. And then you'd make these sketches... elevation renderings. And you'd paint furniture and all the props on it. And scenic artists -- and there were some very good scenic artists down there -- they developed a way to work because it all folded up. And they'd work a starch technique with dye and so it was very elegant. And you just sat

down at the drawing board and batted out this stuff. Then the scenic artist would take it and paint it on ticking and that little striping would always come through... That was fun. They had the costume shop down there and they had the puppet department, which was a big deal under Remo Bufano... Then when we moved over, when the Federal Theatre was established, we got a little fancier. No, I was assigned to the Experimental Theatre Project. Max (Mordecai Gorelik) was kind of instrumental in getting me there. So the first show Jimmy Light directed -- he was not in good shape any more -- was Chalk Dust, which I designed. I liked the play too in its kind of simplicitic muck-raking way. It was a rather nice show.

JO: I Have a picture of it. I've seen in other pictures that I was wondering, was the middle part of that stage revolving?

HB: Oh, my, no. No, it was just these panels that moved. They were on spotlines and they moved up and down with these lips. So it had like a dusty, erased, worked-over blackboard look. And you could raise the panels at different trims. You could have a whole corridor or you could have a big arch or you could have a doorway.. And it was very well done by the shop. The shop was then down between 35th and 36th Streets on Tenth Avenue.

JO: (Looks at photograph) And that slid?

HB: Oh, yeah, it was very neatly made. These were panels about 3' 3" or 3' 6" wide and they would fall or trim up, you see. So this is just one little aperture to them, and the spotlines had to be perfect and the grooves and . . . the panels, because of the spotlines, could bind if they weren't perfectly made and they were. Throckmorton was then head of the shop... on 35th Street, and he took an interest in it. And so each panel, they trim differently. This happened to be this way and they'd all go way up and you'd expose a hall with a great big plastic bell. Or you could bring 'em up and that would make a normal door, two panels worth. It all had this dusty chalk, graphite kind of look to it. It worked very well. So I was on the Experimental Theatre for that, which was the opening bill at Daly's on 63rd Street, the old Daly's which they got from the Shuberts and dusted off and... put in shape again. And then I did Battle Hymn there which was the John Brown show, kind

of a silly script, I must say. But Vincent Sherman directed it and he did some rewriting that took the curse off. And he cast it well, too. He had some very good people in it. The guy who played John Brown was fantastic. That was Grover Burgess, and he was one of the second-string Group Theatre people and they never gave him decent parts because he wasn't the inner circle of the group. He did a fantastic job and Vincent did a great job of directing. I remember opening night the Group Theatre people came around his dressing room and they were a little condescending. They said, "A little two-dimensional," you know, such type remarks. Joe Pevney, who directs most of Star Trek, was one of the boys. And that's Grover (looking at photograph). It was a good show except for the stupid script, and somehow or other it propelled Vincent, who directed it -- well, he directed *It Can't Happen Here*, the New York production. Then he went on to Hollywood, Warner's.

JO: Lorraine net him, Lorraine Brown met him out in -- he's working -- she saw him during a break. He is looking for a location for a TV show for Universal Studios.

HB: Grover was fantastic, that I remember vividly. And Joe was a young actor, and there were some other good actors in it.

JO: I think there were a lot of set changes in that. Were those sliding units?

HB: No, they were all castored units that went off and on. That was a hard one though. It was a good theme but the writing was kind of pedestrian.

JO: I've also got here what I think must be the projections for *Power*. I want to know if that's what that is.

HB: Yes, these are all projections. I made these cartoon-y things and they were used as negatives. I tinted the negatives and we used an arc lamp up on that second -- it's not really second balcony; it's a shelf on the Ritz. And we used them quite arbitrarily and just simply. They were always negatives. I did them black and white like that and then... tinted the negatives. And a lot of them broke so we... printed up a lot of duplicates. The nice effect was we used for the first act finale when TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) was established -- we used the front gauze and a pro-

jection screen and a movie that went through the gauze, over the people, the water, the waterfall, and then on to drop the second We had three layers of projection, of activity, which was a very simple thing but it worked very well for the TVA song, was which a nice... old mountain kind of song. The projections --I just got an arc projector and we got the right lenses to project the slides, like a 100-amp. arc put up there. And Fritz Lang came and saw the show along the run and he said they were better quality projections than they had in Germany, which is hard to believe. But that's what he said. But in a sense Power is more the classic newspaper script even than One-Third of a Nation, I think. Brett Warren directed it. Norman Lloyd was awful good when we could get him to play the little --

JO: Buttonkooper.

JO: How did you work up the set, particularly for Power, since that is --

HB: Oh, you know, Arthur, Brett and I would sit down. And Arthur, if he hadn't already thought of how to do it, would sit down and talk about how to do it. And then we'd piece it together so that it was very open; there was no basic set, you know, just face and gauzes and blacks. So whatever we wanted we just did, so that it was quite eclectic and there was no tie-up--no style.

JO: Was that intentional or was it lack of funds and part of it --

HB: No, no... -- it wasn't a lack of funds. We just did what we wanted to do for each scene and we went to the next one. Or we worked out certain funny transitions or -- because you jumped from a vaudeville or a burlesque bit to... this kind of a scene, and a couple of early realistic vignettes and so forth. But they were all in space and just whatever you needed for a scene you had. So economics had nothing to do with it. You were always conscious on Federal Theatre of material costs, just the opposite from the commercial theatre. Labor was nothing and material costs were very important which we're getting back to that a little because even in the commercial theatre material costs now are becoming important. No, there were no economic stipulations. Actually, One-Third of a Nation didn't cost too much... They were

old flats you could anchor with S-hooks to the pipe structure. It wasn't expensive.

JO: How about lighting, particularly in Living Newspapers? Was there a lot of it available or again was that by design, by choice?

HB: Well, for a while we were limited. I remember in Experimental Theatre we were limited to -- and I don't know where they came from or why or what the purchasing system was, but you had a lot of 500-watt funnies. But ultimately we had some good 1500-watt cannons and pretty good equipment. The maintenance of the equipment and the whole procurement procedure of requisitions and approvals and estimates, which were standard U.S. Government stuff, used to take a long time. So you had to kind of anticipate. You figure that you might blow out 30 bulbs a year from now, you'd better order than because you couldn't do anything fast. There was no petty cash to go zooming out and people would lay out their own money out of our \$23.86 a week. But certain things were grand, like the help, and certain things were skimpy, like the materials. I remember down on 35th Street we were waiting for some lumber to arrive for Chalk Dust because it had to be good 1 1/8" stuff so there was no warping for those panels. And we were waiting impatiently for the arrival of the lumber and a load of hay drove out, They'd got 'em mixed up somewhere on the line. (Laugh) This was supposed to go to Jersey and the lumber was -- that's the way it went.

JO: Did you work with Abe Feder or Jean Rosenthal?

HB: Well, Abe, sure. Abe did the lighting for One-Third in Poughkeepsie, did a nice job, very nice job. And Abe did Native Ground on the Experimental Theatre. And Fresnels were coming in strong at that time and he somehow purchased a couple of hundred of them. (Laugh). And we had effects that we never used in the show. We had tremendous effects, you know. We had the gauze and the back gauze and the cyc and my plastic ground row. We could have shadows go across it. We could do anything we wanted to. We used about half the effects in the show. That was a lovely lit show. Then Abe went exclusively to 891... Jack and Orson's thing. I saw Abe about a month ago. Have you interviewed him yet?

JO: No, I've talked to him and I'll probably see him tomorrow. He's busy until March 2nd; he's can't even talk on the phone. After that he'll --

HB: No, because Abe's a very talkative fellow, too, and a great ego. But I think his reminiscences would be fairly accurate.

JO: The fights between him and Welles, I guess are legendary.

HB: That was a very big surprise, you know. You know they did DT. Faustus just to give Abe a chance to light. (Laugh) That's why they did the bloody show, and it was a beautiful lighting job, it really was. It was stupid in some respects. Like Helen of Troy was kind of anticlimactic and things, but the lighting was beautiful. Then when the Mercury was formed, the assumption was that Abe would be the lighting guy... That was the natural assumption, but all of a sudden his assistant, Jeanie because she was more agreeable to work with I guess or whatever. Jeannie was ... Abe's assistant up to that point when the Mercury was founded. You know The Cradle was a big struggle. I'm directing Cradle (Will Rock) at a school.

JO: How is that as a revival?

HB: It's, I think, great music and a wonderful sharp thing. And I liked Marc (Blitzstein) very much. The problem is, of course, no one's excited by organizing the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) in 1976, are they? (Laugh) The CIO were in favor of the Vietnam War. . . . and that's a toughie. So you have to take it purely on its satirical, negative grounds and the sharpness of the score, which is beautiful. We're just playing it on the piano like that famous opening night, which was one of the most exciting evenings in the theatre when we tromped up Seventh Avenue... to the Venice Theatre. And I saw a dress rehearsal of the original production which was awful, just awful. They had all these mechanical things, these wagons with glass floors and lights coming up and the swings coming down. And the whole thing got out of hand. It was sort of fortunate, you know. It was fortunate on the basis that that was sort of the impetus that propelled the formation of the Mercury. So that was a good idea. (Laugh)

JO: How about the set for Life and Death of an American?

HB: Do you want to see the sketches?

JO: Oh, I really would. I haven't seen the...

JO: How did the idea for that come?

HB: I don't remember. Lem, whom I thought was an awful good director -- he died prematurely -- I did all of his shows he ever did, you know, both on the Project and off the Project. And we worked together so closely that I can't really separate it out in my mind how it arose. After the Project, after One-Third and that, we did Maxwell Anderson's Eve of St. Mark and Brooklyn U.S.A. and Uncle Harry. And then we started preparing Sidney Kingsley's The Patriots. And when Lem came in to The Patriots, Sidney had written it as if Hamilton was kind of the hero. (Laugh) Lem worked on rewrites with. Sidney, which is no fun, and then he died of a heart attack just before rehearsal started which was a real shame. We were going to Fox together after Patriots opened because Abe Lastfogel of William Morris thought that Lem was the greatest thing ever. And so when Lem died he looked around for somebody to replace Lem and he clamped on Kazan. That's how Kazan got that whole thing started in films.

JO: The shows that he designed were in a number of different theatres. There was the Ritz for Power and --

HB: Yeah. First it was Daly's, Daly's for Chalk Dust and Battle Hymn, the Ritz for Power, the Adelphi which became the Abbott --it's now demolished -- for One-Third.

JO: The Adelphi was the second time that Power was put on?

HB: No, no, I don't think so. No, we always stayed in the Ritz. But One-Third was in the Adelphi and Native Ground was in the Venice. And Life and Death was in the Maxine Elliott.

JO: Did that have any significant effect on design or were you conscious. were you able to design for a theatre, I guess is what I'm asking or were you designing --

HB: Well, Daly was a neat, small theatre and it was good for Chalk Dust, it was good for Battle Hymn. Adelphi was large and maybe that's one of the reasons that Lem decided that we better do a big, fat structure on the stage. Because it was a terrific barn; it went on forever and the balcony went on forever and it needed the scale. It did. Probably if you transplanted more or less what we did at Poughkeepsie, even blown up, it would have been small there. They did dance dramas there and they did one pretty good one. Auden and Isherwood's

JO: Dance of Death?

HB: Yes, right, And that was pretty good. It was a little phoney and a little symbolic and a little vague but it filled the place. It was a successful show. The first time I worked with Lem Ward was off the Project. That was for the Theatre Union. That was Marching Song which was in the Nora Bayes, which was on top of the 44th Street Theatre on 44th Street and Tony Brown was the original director and then he got sick and faded and they got in Lem to do it. That was an intimate house and that show worked. It was a little bit didactic in its writing but it was a successful dramatic thing. Lem did a very good job at it. But I had designed it and it was all built and painted before Lem came on the show.

JO: So there was some difference in the Maxine Elliott?

HB: Oh, yeah. The Maxine Elliott was not a large house. And for mechanics we didn't need much offstage because we just had a wagon or two on the sides and brought on a little interior. So that wasn't any big problem. We brought out the ramp over the orchestra pit. And we filled up the orchestra pit in One-Third, too, step down. The formal scenes took place on the apron and it had a completely different lighting setup for them, too, like the grass mat scene and when /the screen came down.

JO: How about the St. James? I just looked down and you did the Trojan Incident.

HB: Oh, yeah, right.

JO: This isn't a very good photo.

HB: Well, that was a dance drama that Tamiris put together and Harold Bolton directed the non-dancing part. And it had a nice score by Wallingford Reigger. What I did . . . was a cove that went into a velour cyc so there was no break between the cyc and the ground cloth and this big bell you can just kinds see which they walked on... with. this Troj an horse's head with a spear. And it was a lighting show primarily and I had on the either side two towers a lot of back light, a lot of cross light but it was easy to set up in the sense that we could follow action from the towers. (Looks at photograph). That's Joe Kram, I believe. That's his wife. Joe Kramm later wrote *The Shrike*, which I did. He was an actor at that time and that was his wife who was the *Shrike*. And she ended up playing in the show, too. She didn't play the *Shrike*; she played the analyst which is all very ironic I suppose.

JO: Then some of you would do the lighting and others it would be -- well, there was always a lighting --

HB: I kind of always did except with Feder. We had Moe Hack who usually got credit but he was sort of a super stage manager and Lem and I would light it really and Moe would focus it and follow through.

JO: You did, besides *Marching Song*, *Little Foxes* during that time? How would that happen? Would you be able to go off the Project and do a different show?

HB: Yeah. I didn't domany shows during the Project. I did *Marching Song*. I did this tobacco thing, *Sunup to Sundown*, *Francis Faragoh*, and *Little Foxes* and something else in there but I've forgotten what it was. I think *Fifth Column* was after the Project closed.. Oh, I did three operas for the National Orchestral Association under Barzin at Carnegie Hall, four of them. Then I got a Guggenheim in 1940.

JO: Did you go abroad then?

HB: Yes. No, quite the opposite. In 1939 I did a big job for the World's Fair. The petroleum industry all got together, except for Shell--every oil company in the world. And Joseph Losey made a big fat prospectus, the slickest prospectus I've ever read, to do a technicolor stop notion puppet film and that's what we did. None of us had had any

experience with film, no one connected with it, no one. And so we did this film with a lot of trials and tribulations and it was very good. Hants Eisler wrote the score and Oscar Levant wrote the pop tune for the finale. Joe directed it and I designed the puppets and the sets the whole works. The lead puppets became the forerunner of those stop-motion puppet films. They still use it without giving any royalty. They used those in the ads. I think the first use of latex, seamless latex, was for the characters. And we had a bum puppeteer and we had to replace him and we got a guy who was one of the original animators in 3-D from England who was an old Cockney who had done some of the stuff in 1912, 1913. We found him and brought him over and he did the animation. And he specified the internal construction of the puppets and it worked out very well. It was on the basis of that that I went to Europe. (Laugh)

JO: You mentioned Losey a couple of times, and the bit that is in Arena sounds like he and Hallie Flanagan simply didn't get along or that she respected him but was a little distressed by him.

HB: I think so. But then he had other fish to fry, too . . . after Triple-A (Plowed Under). Nick Ray was his stage manager and he had other things to do. He went off and did Little 01' Boy for Johnny Hammond and Al Bein and our tobacco thing and a couple of other things. So he had other things to do. He went away from the Project really. I don't think they loved each other, but I don't think that was basic. He was a talented fellow anyway. Hallie was not prejudiced about talent, she really wasn't.

JO: Did she have much influence in something as specific to a particular production as design and was she operating at all at that level?

HB: No. She took an interest up in Poughkeepsie because there we were but no. She'd like to see the models and "Oh that's lovely" and so forth but not really. She had opinions afterwards. She never liked the New York "one-third . . ." But no, she never interfered in productions. She interfered in choice of scripts and policy somewhat... but not as much as you'd expect because she'd go out on a limb for something she knew we would get clobbered by retrogressive elements. (Laugh)

JO: That's one of the things people seem to speak most about her is that she was supportive.

HB: Oh, yes, And if they wanted to send out Dearest Enemy, she would say, "All right, go ahead." (Laugh)

JO: How again was design competition between Broadway and Federal Theatre since you were doing some commercial theatre?

HB: Well,-- the working with Lem was very good both places. It's a basic thing of having time in Federal Theatre. You'd work out a concept and polish it off and discuss it backwards and forwards. And it would take shape and then you'd have the struggle of getting it done. But you always had a lot of time for tech rehearsals, dress rehearsals.

JO: Yes, that's one thing that strikes me as the time. The other one is that the idea that it's not as it'd be freedom, I mean the idea that it's not as directly tied to the commercial theatre.

HB: Sure . Of course, the economics weren't as fierce as they are now. You didn't have... the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission), to worry about. Managers could get money; they could hide Mafia money. They could rig their books, you know. It was a different milieu And if somebody, a producer, had one hit and he'd send out three road companies so he could have a couple of flops.

JO: Was there much personnel in the technical side of -- when the various employment cuts would come, would the technicians be hit more than the actors?

HB: No, they wouldn't be hit more. It was across the / board/. But somehow or other, you were able to hold onto the good old scenic artists. The carpentry, you had a couple of good carpenters in the shops. The help you got in the theatres was pretty sad. The corps of scenic artists continued even with the cut up near the end so that - and after all, when you have time and you can build something and if they didn't build it quite right, you can say, "Just change that." So it isn't like a commercial show where the technician does it perfectly and it goes to the theatre and that's when you know it works or it doesn't work, and it's

kind of late. So you'd build things up on the stage if you had a lot of platforms and junk. The lumber would arrive and they'd pile it up and nail it together and so forth. So that the quality of the technical help -- luckily, there were a lot of old scenic artists, you know, that were out of work. We didn't have great electricians. We didn't have great production carpenters in the theatre. You didn't have great property men in the theatre, but there were all these kids who could run around and find things. And it got patched together that way.

JO: Was it all done in house or was any of it farmed out?

HB: You mean to commercial shops?

JO: Yes.

HB: We had our own shop.

JO: I've seen pictures of rows of seamstresses.

HB: Well, we had those. We had a good costume shop and there were a lot of unemployed seamstresses and wardrobe people that were available and on the project. I don't remember any farming out of contracts.

JO: Was the mood of the technicians more or less militant than the other groups? I know one of the things that people always talk about is the various protests and pickets and -
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HB: No.

JO: Problems of either real or imagined Communist infiltration. BB; No. Usually the most vociferous people were the actors and they were the core of protests and so forth-- They were the rank and file of Equity. . . No, the stagehands were stagehands on or off the Project; they were always the same. Scenic artists were always the same. A couple of us designers were radical fellows, but not as a body.

JO: I want to show you a picture. That's a loose picture so if you can spot people. I have a hunch, just because of the one lens cover, that it might be a backstage crew.

HB: Yes, but I don't know where. A lot of faces look familiar, but I don't know which crew it is. It may come to me but not right offhand. I'll always remember him (looking at photo). He looked like Lee Simonson.

JO: There are some remarkable faces in that, BB: Oh, yes.

JO: Strong faces.

HB: I may remember and I've seen a good many of them later but I can't place them. I'm bad at names anyway. It may come to me.

JO: We have a lot of photographs with no writing on the backs. (Laugh)

HB: No, I can't place them.

JO: How about Sing For Your Supper? Were you involved in that at all?

HB: No.

JO: It took so long for that to be designed and the costumes.

HB: Yes. Well, I don't know why really. Harold Hecht. It was difficult to put together what amounts to a standard musical because that depends on very sharp talent. You just can't take people that you have to take. You have to have a freedom of casting and so forth. And I don't know why it took so long. I never thought it was a very good show.

JO: Yes, I got the impression that it was not that good a show and part of why I was asking is that it was the wrong time to put on a show that was gonna take a long time.

HB: It became a cause celebre. And The Revolt of the Beavers wasn't the best idea in the world either. (Laugh)

JO: Sing for Your Supper, Life and Death of an American and Revolt of the Beavers ---

HB: Well, Life and Death of an American though was kind of old style, up the river with jazz, 1900, get born,

etcetera, etcetera. (Laugh) That wasn't so fierce. No one picked on that really.

JO: It is funny that there wasn't more, even, really plays like Stevedore or Battle Hymn .

HB: Battle Hymn was -- he was a righteous man; he drank milk. The things that Vincent got out of that show were fantastic. (Laugh) Naive things in that that Vincent lost.

JO: There are some bad scenes in it.

HB: And with all Vincent did it, too. And in Life and Death, you know, Arthur Kennedy played the juvenile. He was awful good. Mary Rolfe was the ingenue; she was very good. And some other people were very good but particularly Arthur and Mary. That started Arthur being an actor really.

JO: That was his first major role.

HB: Yeah.

JO: I heard he was reluctant to start on WPA but then that show got such good press and he did so well in it that --

HB: Oh, sure.

JO: Was there much sense of, did you have much sense of camaraderie or cause?

HB: Yeah. Everybody was in the same sad boat, you know, and it was fun though because you put shows together. Yes, it depended on the atmosphere of units, too. Like Jack and Orson's unit was Orson's gang, you know, and it became Orson's Mercury gang. Jack helped Orson. Orson would have flown off into outer space if Jack hadn't been with him. You know, take it easy. The experimental thing was a funny combination of people and Virgil was a dreamer if there ever was one. (Laugh)

JO: I was just gonna ask you about him. How was he as an administrator? I would not think that would be the best choice of a head. He seems like the other.

HB: Yeah, he was an old Nebraskan type (laugh) but he had a smart lady assistant, executive assistant, Rita Hassen who

died last year and Rita did the organizing and Virgil, you know, chewed his cud. He was a nice fellow.

JO: Native Ground is the one I was just looking at in this folder to try and find out about. Did he choose that?

HB: Yeah, with the agreement of the little board like Max and Jimmy Light and Rita and I forgot the other fellow's name. You have it in the -- JD: I have --

HB: You have the staff?

JO: I have Light as director and Feder and yourself. I thought I had a photo but I don't see it now.

HB: You know, Mamlock was a good production that Harold Bolton directed. That was a good production. Joe Anthony was an actor in that.

JO: I didn't know that.

HB: And On the Rocks, which is not a great play, you know, never was, never will be, was a good production. One of our artists in residence I got up at school was in On the Rocks. I've forgotten who directed Path of Flowers. But the major shows were Chalk Dust, Path of Flowers. Where is Battle Hymn?

JO: It should be in there.

HB: It isn't.

JO: I'll have to make a note. (Laugh)

HB: Yeah. By Mike Blankfort and Mike Gold.

JO: Yeah, I know that.

HB: And Vincent Sherman, Bay and.

JO: That was at the Daly, wasn't it also?

HB: Yes. got 'em in his plays. He had long trilogies that went on and on of people chewing each other up out on the prairie. He ended up as a postmaster, you know, up in Connecticut, way up in the Berkshires?

JO: No! (Laugh)

HB: Yeah. He liked it.

JO: It must have been, in some sense, a chaotic theatre with he as the head and James Light as the principal director. BB: Yes, it was. Re designers--)

JO: Some of whom I know but a number of whom I don't. I wonder if you know -- someone else made the list out for me -- but if you know -- Rollo Wayne is just a name to me.

HB: Well, Rollo was an old Shubert designer and he came from Kentucky and did the stock down there for many years. He was sort of a staff designer for the Shuberts before he came on the Project. Do you know about Nat?

JO: Yeah.

HB: Nat (Karson) did not only Macbeth and Horse Eats Hat for Orson, but -- do you know they're gonna revive Orson's Macbeth?

JO: No, I didn't know that.

HB: Yeah Woodie King, Jr., the producer down at the Chelsea group, told me. They're gonna do it; they got permission from Orson to use his --

JO: I've written a paper on that and his Julius Caesar. It's interesting that that's the one that's being restaged. It seems to me that as opposed to the critics of the time, I think that the Macbeth is in lots of ways more Shakespearean than the Julius Caesar.

HB: Yeah. Well, you know, it's an all-black group at the Chelsea and King is a smart fellow. So he got the rights and he's gonna do it. You know Nat died in London. And Nat did a lot of musicals on Broadway and then he was in Radio City for a long time. And he became a packager of stage shows in London music hall type shows in London. Tam Cracraft went to Hollywood and he was the head scenic artist at Columbia. I think he died; I'm not sure. I saw Tam when I was out in Hollywood and he was the head scenic artist at Columbia. And Perry Watkins the last time I saw

him was a couple of years ago in Boston. He got a grant to do a series of black dramas on educational TV, you know, WGBH in Boston.

JO: Do you know if he was living in Boston or if he had just gone up there?

HB: Yes, but he died last year. Eddie Gilbert is still around. I don't know what he's doing. Manny Essman. I don't know whether Manny's still alive or not. He did quite a few of the things like Turpentine and I've forgotten what else. And Hermanson, yeah, Triple-A and, I think, something else. What other ones -- oh, Ben? (Ben Edwards) I didn't know Ben was on it. Woodie McLean was an old scenic artist. Cleon, you know, went off and was a beach bum in the West Indies. Herb Andrews is working as staff on one of the networks. And Phil Gelb, I don't know what he's doing. Woodie's dead, Ben you know about. I don't know what he did on Federal Theatre. Three or four plays.

HB: Oh, he did? And Herb Andrews is a nice designer. (Interruption) . . . fairly close. And Cleon headed the shop, of course. There were designers away from here, too, like Scott McLean was from California and he was up at Poughkeepsie that summer.

JO: He did some with Abe Feder in the Maxine Elliott. I remember Ben Edwards did Coriolanus and Pygmalion and Charles Hopkins --

HB: You know Mary I saw the other day. Mary Merrill is now in charge of costumes up at the Museum of the City of New York. I saw her at the opening of the Shubert show last week. She did a lot of TV and film in between. Now she has a regular job there. Manny I don't know whether he's alive or not.

JO: How about musicians?

HB: Well, there was a Norman Lloyd, the musician. There are three Norman Lloyds, you know, in this world: the actor, the musician and the guy who used to be over at the Rockefeller Foundation. But Norman Lloyd was a composer and he had worked up at Vassar same with Hallie. And, of course, Fart Robinson and Alex North and Life and Death of an American.

JO: Virgil Thomson. BB; And Virgil. And, as I say, Wallingford Rieger on the Greek thing that we did with Tamiris. Jerome Ross did a couple of things, I don't remember what.

JO: Lehman Engel?

HB: Lehman, oh yes. And I forgot who the Sing for Your Super gang was outside of Harold Hecht. Quite a few assorted composers did bits there. I've even forgotten who did the incidental music, which is good, for Power. But you probably have that.

JO: Lee Wainer?

HB: Yes, right. That was good. Who else? I don't know.

JO: Did you have much contact with people outside of New York City? Or was New York City pretty much by itself? For instance, One-Third of a Nation was put on other places. Did you go out and consult or anything like that?

HB: No.

JO: Was there, other than the Vassar summer thing, the sense of a national theatre?

HB: You felt it, yes. But, you know, they wanted to do their own thing. Whatever they did, they wanted to do it differently. Nobody wanted to pay transportation anyway for people to go breezing around. It was pretty much confined to Hallie or a couple of her lieutenants. So I saw very little. I heard a lot about it or I'd see folders from Chicago. They brought, I think, one Chicago thing here.

JO: The Swing Mikado.

HB: Right. Mike Todd beat 'em to it.

JO: What would you say were the scene designers' significant influences actually in the late thirties? Was there much European influence? Was Piscator or Brecht influential in a conscious way? Or was it primarily an American tradition? HIS: Well, Max (Gorelik) was quite influential, you know, in that sense because Eric Bentley wasn't around. It was Max that introduced whatever Brecht and so forth we

had-and Piscator. And Piscator was here, too, you know, in the New School and that was kind of sad. It was only European heresay. Yeah, we were all up on what was going on in the sense. The big exhibit that Lee Simonson put together at the Modern Museum in 1935. The Russian models were fantastic at that time. They sent over this whole dozen or so node's, you know, that were really amazing, and that was the biggest influence. The rest were stuff that we were familiar with pretty much. So we were kind of up on things and we were allowed to experiment, too, If we wanted to try something, we tried it. There was no one getting very sweaty about it.

JO: How about Baker and Oenslager at Yale? I have a sense that a fair number of people were coming from Yale to --

HB: Not too many.

JO: Phil Barber was.

HB: Yeah, and Sammy(Leve) and Halsted (Welles). I saw him a few years ago That was a very good production, Halsted's Murder in the Cathedral, really quite good.

JO: Do you know if he did the set design for that?

HB: Tom Cracraft, I believe. It was very simple, a few arches with screening and good lighting. It was well staged though. In fact, it was the best production I've seen of Murder in the Cathedral, good acting. That was basically a conservative unit though, in the production sense; Eddie Goodman was a fairly conservative fellow in the theatrical sense-- Most of their shows were uninteresting. That one wasn't. The rest of them were.

JO: Was there much rivalry or much trading between units, between Halsted Welles and Goodman and--

HB: There was a kind of jealousy. (Laugh) Yeah. It was competitive but it was a nice competitiveness. They became, you know, ingrown families, Living each group for a while. What was very good about the Living Newspaper was it was, you know, really two people. It was Morris Watson and Arthur Arent. And Morris was --

JO: What was his role? What did he do?

HB: Morris? He did it. He established it. He'd been fired, you know. He and Heywood Broun started to organize a newspaper guild and he was head of AP (Associated Press). And he was fired summarily and a long suit went on for years. He got reinstated and so forth. And he came to Hallie with the idea of a living newspaper. He set up a city desk and reporters, morgues, etc. And you would do editions of papers that you'd continually revamp depending on the news to keep it alive and going. And because of the machinery of Federal Theatre, that didn't work. So then they got down to the subject of developing the single theme with all its ramifications and that became the pattern. And Morris was head of the organization and Arthur was Chief Editor. (keeping the phraseology of journalism). And Morris after the Project went off to the West Coast. He could have gone back to AP but he didn't; he won his case. He went of to San Francisco and he edited Bridges', longshoremen's paper, the Maritime Union paper in San Francisco. I don't know whether he's still around or not, and Arthur died last year. You didn't happen to see -- I belong to the Players; in fact, Arthur is the one that talked me into it, he and Brooks Atkinson. You didn't happen to see the thing -- the Players, you know, put out a periodical every so often and too much of it are obituaries. But when Arthur died, his physician sent a letter in, which they reproduced. I think you would like to see this. Arthur was very sick for a whole year and he was in a coma the last several months. The doctor said, "I assigned a younger doctor whom we will call Dr. Smith to drop in on Arthur on schedule and so forth. And Arthur came out of his coma one morning and said, 'Get me Dr. Smith.' And they located him, wherever he was and he came and said, 'Yes.' And Arthur came out of his coma just enough to say, 'Dr. Smith, you're a horse's ass.' and died." (Laugh)

JO: One of the troubles is both tracking people down and also --

HB: And most of them have died, right. (Laugh) But Jack, you gotta get and Orson I hope you get. I don't know who else really.

JO: How about the critics? Were the critics -- I think probably Brooks Atkinson notably -- but were other critics generally friendly to the Federal Theatre or supportive of

the Federal. Theatre or on the other hand antagonistic? Of course, you had the famous Herald-Tribune story and a lot like that but --

HB: John Mason Brown was supportive. John Anderson was on occasion, if he liked the show. I mean he didn't have a policy like Atkinson to encourage. If he liked the show, he was one of the most honest critics in the world even if he did write for the Hearst papers. He would give very good, clear reviews. And the others tagged along. I don't think any of them beyond Atkinson really had an attitude. Brown did in a sense but nobody else.

JO: Who were the daily or magazine critics that would pay particular attention to such things?

HB: Well, none really. Stark Young was still on The Nation, Joseph Wood Krutch was on the other one. Those were the respected weekly fellows, I don't know whether Kronenberger was on Time yet. I don't think so, no. He was not a very good theatre critic anyway. Then you had these funny reporter type critics like Gilbert Gabriel. Mantle was good, too, Burns Mantle was good. He was very good, very fair and very simple and nice.

JO: How about Theatre Arts?

HB: They were very helpful, too, Rosamund particularly because Edith Isaacs didn't care one way or another but Rosamund was. Rosamund was very helpful. And as time went on and even then, she pretty much ran the magazine. So Theatre Arts was very supportive. And John Martin was very supportive you know, the dance -- and helped a lot. I just bumped into him at the newsstand this morning. Because Helen and Tamiris and Weidman, you know, they had good companies. They had very good companies.

JO: What were some of the productions other than the ones that you were involved in that stick out?

HB: Murder in the Cathedral. Helen's -- I've forgotten what she called it -- her dance with songs and, you know How Long Bretheren was awfully good. She used a lot of folk and blues and stuff. And they were all good numbers and that was a good one. And Weidman's Candide was very good and Mamlock was very good. Horse Eats Hat was fun. As I say,

Faustus was fun for the lighting. Macbeth was fun. I never cared for what the blacks called the "overall" play, the Turpentines and the one about L'Ouverture. How do you say his name?

JO: Oh, Haiti.

HB: Yes, that's right. And those plays. Young Mr. Lincoln and Big Blow. around A lot of those had very good acting performances scattered around in them, so it wasn't just script. I'm not a great fan of Charlie Freeman as a director, you know. The good directors were really -- it boiled down to Orson and Lem, Halsted's Murder. Brett did a good job on Power. Bolton did a good job on Mamlock.

JO: What do you think it was that Welles didn't go on to direct more?

HB: You mean later in life?

JO: Yeah.

HB: I think it's he had a lot of flops, box office flops. He was completely mercurial at times, you know, unpredictable. I don't think you could ever anchor him to a budget. And he needs a sympathetic crew around him. Now, if they should go to the four winds, it becomes a different crowd. Citizen Kane was a miracle and on the strength of it he got a good budget for Ambersons, which went downhill. It was a respectable motion picture. Then he did some funnies. And had no sense of money; he needed Jack. He should have held onto him somehow or other because Jack went on to Paramount, and he's up there. But I guess his ego didn't allow him to tie up again with somebody like Jack. He'd have stooges, you know, who'd run around with coffee and stuff but no real solid partner. It's a shame because there were moments in things like Touch of Evil, you know, just were fantastic. Or even in the Rita Hayworth and Glenn Andrews thing (Lady From Shanghai) but he lost that stock company. He needed that, he needed every one of them, you know. Dorothy Comingore, and Cotten. He seems like a non-actor but he isn't. He's a good actor. And he needed muggers too, you know, the George Coulourises. He needed those people, Paul Stewart.

JO: It's a remarkable group. Are there other things about -
- let me ask you about -- I didn't ask you before about
George Izenour and his work in the Federal Theatre.

HB: I never noticed. (Laugh) I haven't noticed it much since
then, either.

JO: Were there technicians, designers, lighting people that
I didn't ask you about that stand out that did good for the
Federal Theatre or got their start in the Federal Theatre?

HB: I can't think, and I was thinking as I looked at the
list. Herb Andrews is a good designer and Ben, of course.
But that just didn't happen, you know, he did what he did.
There may be some technicians who grew up and went on like
Jeannie who was in the shadow of Abe Feder then but I don't
know. I really don't know. Were there any, do you
think, that because of the amount of time you could go into
rehearsal and the experimentation, were there any signifi-
cant, in terms of the theatre history, significant changes
in design accountable think to the Federal Theatre? The
Living Newspaper in many ways opened up the theatre. Were
there others? BB: Well, you see, we did, somehow or other
in the mid-thirties, late thirties, we did the open stage
really for the first time in a large set. Not that you
couldn't find an isolated show ahead of it, but the open
stage, the frank use of space and in building out the
apron. The formalism of the stage is only so big and so
deep and you see it and you see the lights. All those
things we did kind of in a large way and fairly consistent-
ly. So that except for Eddie Goodman's rather special stan-
dard way of doing things, they became -- they started to
lap over it, you know, in the theatre. And I don't know
what came first. The dramaturgy started breaking up
episodes into strings of vignettes, fragments and stuff
where you had to use the open stage in a three-act format.
I think we were quite an influence that way. There weren't
any other influences, believe me. The Jones tradition went
on, you know. That tradition went on, but we were the only
new large dent in it, I think. Nat was a conventional musi-
cal designer and he did the same sort of things that every-
body else was doing, you know, that Du Bois or Albert John-
son as far as Broadway musicals went. But he did a lot on
Broadway, but that was not different. But Elmer Rice was on
Federal Theatre and I don't think he would have written,

say, Dream Girl the way he wrote it without working with what we were doing. (End of Interview)