

Interview of **DAVID VAUGHAN**

Conducted by **KAREN THOMAS**, Interviewer

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**INTERVIEWER:** I would like to talk a little bit about how you got to the United States and your first impressions, particularly of the American cultural scene at the time when you arrived -- and when you first encountered Merce [Cunningham].

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, I encountered Merce within days of arriving, but I knew about him before I came from England because I had been studying with a very remarkable teacher, a ballet teacher in London. I started dancing very late because I had been in the Army, but I was determined to dance. And so I was fortunate to find this teacher who didn't say, "No, that's ridiculous. Go away." She took me on as a pupil, and she had a very unusual approach to dance, particularly for England at that time, because she didn't think that just straight ballet was enough, and she taught a form of modern dance which she invented herself.

I've always been interested in dance history anyway, and I started reading all the American magazines and publications that I could get my hands on, particularly reading about modern dance. I remember when New York City Ballet had its first season, its inaugural season at the City Center, which was in 1948, I guess, and I read about that, and Lincoln Kirstein invited an English critic who was a friend of mine, A.V. Coton, C-o-t-o-n, to go over to see it, and when he came back, the first thing I said to him was, "What was 'The Seasons' like?" which was Merce's piece.

Okay. Lincoln Kirstein crops up again because when the New York City Ballet came to London for the first time in the summer of 1950, I was dancing in a show in London, and so the only time I could see the City Ballet was in the matinees, and I wrote a letter, a note to Lincoln Kirstein telling him this, and saying there was one ballet I couldn't see, which was "The Four Temperaments," and could I come and watch a rehearsal? The telephone rang in my parents' home the next morning, and it was Lincoln saying, "Come to see the rehearsal. Come and talk to me afterwards."

So I went up to Covent Garden and watched the rehearsal, and he appeared, took me to lunch, and asked me about what ideas I had about choreography, and this is all, by the way, in Martin Duberman's Lincoln Kirstein biography. And as it happened, I told him of an idea I had for a ballet based on a story by E.M. Forster, who was a friend of Lincoln's, as it turned out, and Lincoln had always been trying to get Morgan Forster to write a scenario for him, and here was somebody with a scenario already made. So he said, "You better come to America."

So one thing led to another, and in fact he did bring me over to the United States, and I took class

at the American School. My ballet never happened, by the way, so there is no point in talking about that. The first day I came into the School of American Ballet, I found that Merce was teaching a class there once a week. You see? And, of course, I knew about him and I knew about modern dance, and I wanted to study modern dance, so within a week of coming to New York, I was taking Merce's class at the American School.

**INTERVIEWER:** How lucky.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I don't really remember much about the class. If I had known that I would end up his archivist, I would have made notes, as I used to make notes of other people's classes. And I don't think Merce remembered me in the class. I think John might have. John played the piano for the class.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, he did?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yes. And so, yeah, I was taking this class on Monday afternoons, and after a few months, Merce and John left and went off on tour together, this was when they were touring by themselves in a car driving around the United States, and they never came back to the American School.

And actually for a while other people -- Anna Sokolow taught classes for a bit and so on, but after a while they abandoned the idea of teaching modern dance to ballet dancers.

But anyway, I had had this beginning with Merce. And at the American School, I also met James Waring, who was -- do you --

**INTERVIEWER:** I don't know James Waring.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** The name... I'm afraid people don't remember it or even know anymore, but Jimmy was also an avant-garde choreographer at the time, very important, very well-known, very influential, and he and I became friends through being in class together mostly. And he introduced me to a lot of what was going on in the other arts and so on, and I think he was the first person who ever mentioned Bob Rauschenberg to me, because it was at the time when Bob and Jasper were making windows for Bonwit's, and I remember Jimmy telling me that there are these two young artists who make these windows and, "Let's go and look at these windows." Why Jimmy never insisted I went to any of Merce's performances I don't know because he introduced me to other dancers, told me to go and see other dancers. He and I made a little group together called Dance Associates because we were both hoping to be choreographers. In fact, Jimmy turned out to be a choreographer of some genius. I after a while gave up on it.

It was Jimmy who told me what art exhibitions to go to and so on, and I did start going to things like that. But mostly, I was most interested in the dance and in the ballet, and I used to go every night to the New York City Ballet because they would give me a free ticket to see it and because I still had this idea that maybe I would join the company and eventually choreograph for them, which is what Lincoln had brought me over to the United States for, but he also forgot about it, I

think.

But I have a Russian friend who, when I told him some of this story, and I said that I met Merce, and he said, "Well, of course, that was your destiny."

[Laughter.]

**INTERVIEWER:** It's very Russian, isn't it?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Very Russian, yes, and I think he was right, because I continued to be around the American School and make my little dance ballets and so on and work with Jimmy, but after 5 years, I decided to go back to England for a year, ostensibly to decide where I wanted to live, but I knew perfectly well I wanted to live in New York because everything was beginning for me there in a sense, and I had friends and I was involved with the whole life here. But for my family's sake I did this. And while I was there I wrote some articles about what I had seen in America, including one about Merce, in a magazine.

And when I came back after the year, Merce, Remy Charlip had shown him what I had written, and Merce invited me to his classes where he was teaching now. He was renting a studio in Midtown. And that was when I really got to know Merce and got to know the work, and I had started by then -- I mean, the first time I ever went to see a piece by Merce was in 1953 before I went back to England when there was this sort of festival of American dance on Broadway, and Merce did one piece, "Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three," which Bob had nothing to do with -- this was before Bob was involved with Merce.

And I was immediately swept away by this dance that I saw, that- Merce was the choreographer for me, and not the other choreographers on that program who were like Martha Graham and José Limón and those people, they didn't interest me the way Merce did. And that's one of the things I wrote about in my article about him. But as I say, when I came back, he invited me to his class, and we used to all go out to dinner after class and so on, and by 1958, I was really much more closely involved with Merce and his company. In fact, Merce invited me up to New London the summer of 1958 for the performances, which was when "Antic Meet" and "Summerspace" were performed for the first time.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right, right.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** And that was really when I first encountered Bob because I didn't really have that much knowledge of him. I didn't go to Black Mountain at all, so I knew nothing about that, so I missed the 1952 summer when --

**INTERVIEWER:** The theatre piece summer.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** The theatre piece --

**INTERVIEWER:** You probably would have enjoyed that.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Or the following summer when the company started, but -- well, when they first performed as a company, and Merce and John decided to try and keep it going as a company, and the holiday week that year they had performances at the Theatre de Lys, which is now called the Lucille Lortel over here on Christopher Street, and I went several times to see Merce's work then, so I was really getting to see more of him.

Anyway, so then --

**INTERVIEWER:** So when you saw "Antic Meet" and "Summerspace," that was your first introduction to Bob Rauschenberg --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** -- as an artist.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, I might have gone to his shows. Jimmy might have told me, "You must go and see Bob Rauschenberg's show," but I certainly didn't encounter Bob personally at that time.

But then the following year, 1959, December 1959 was when Merce opened the studio of his own, which was in the building The Living Theatre had, on the corner of 14th Street and 6th Avenue, and they offered him the top floor. I think Merce paid \$100 a month for it, and that was his studio, and he asked me if I would like to come and be the studio secretary, and by then, I was pursuing a career more as an actor than a dancer through having been in musicals and things. So it was something I could do, and if I were in an off-Broadway show, I could be at the studio in the afternoon and then go down and do the show in the evening. And so the fact that Merce said he could pay me probably \$15 a week meant that I had a little more money, because in those days you only got \$45 a week anyway for Off Broadway. So I was more and more closely involved with the company, continuing to take the class, and so on.

And I guess in the winter of '63, John said to me that they had received invitations to perform abroad. Merce and John and Carolyn Brown and David Tudor had just gone as a small group a couple of summers, but the Company had never gone yet, but John said they now had an invitation to go to India and to Japan, there were possibilities in Europe, would I undertake to put together a tour around these possibilities? And so I spent that winter writing letters to everybody anybody could think of who might give us a performance, and we got replies from some of these people, sometimes months later from somebody else, but gradually I had put together this ridiculous tour, and in June of 1964, we left New York and we went around the world, it took 6 months, and had this really barnstorming tour that I had put together in my completely hopelessly amateurish way. I had no idea how to do anything like that, but somehow we did it, and, of course, Bob came as the stage manager, which already he was doing in the Volkswagen Bus days when they would go around with the six dancers, as they were, including Merce, the two musicians, who were John and David Tudor, and the stage manager, who was often Bob. And that's how they toured around the country.

But in the '64 tour, already we had an augmented company, ten dancers, I think, instead of six, there was an assistant for Bob, who was Alex Hay, and myself, and another company manager because John had said, "If you make this tour happen, you can come along on it." And it was a real, as I said, barnstorming tour, but somehow we did it, and we picked up more engagements on the way.

In London, we had a big hiatus after a week of Sadler's Wells; we had 3 or 4 weeks we didn't know what we were going to do, and the producer who had put us into Sadler's Wells said, "Well, there is a theatre in the center of London I can put you into that happens to be open for the next 3 weeks, and we'll split the box office." So we did that because that really saved our bacon, at least we were performing and something was coming in. And there was this piece that Merce had made the year before called "Story," for which the decor was something Bob put together. Every night he would invent a decor out of stuff he found around the theatre.

**INTERVIEWER:** No matter where you were, he would just start scratch every night.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Every time.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** And, of course, dismantle it at the end, and that was the end of it. And we did it all over the place, all through that tour, but those 3 weeks in London -- we did it for one of those weeks every night for a week, and what Bob did for the decor was to paint, make a picture, on stage just while the piece was on. He would make this picture and then stop when the curtain came down, but at the end of the week he had a painting, which is called "Story," and he sold it then and there to the Art Gallery of Ontario, where it is, this painting, sort of a combine really.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did that go over with the dancers? Did they notice?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, I mean, there were other problems with that. Nobody really liked doing that dance, and Merce, in a way -- he dropped it after Bob left because Merce really liked to control a piece more than he could, because the dancers also had -- it was an indeterminate piece that they had certain movement phrases they could do, but they would be triggered by what anybody else was doing, so the piece was completely different every night. There happens to be one wonderful film of it because in Helsinki we did television, we did a performance which went out live over local television, and although this was before the days of videotape and anything like that, but we got a kinescope of it, and that's the one place where you can see one of Bob's decors that he made with bicycle wheels and so on. And the costumes were similar, had a similar idea, that there were these two big duffle bags full of garments that Bob had picked up or bought or whatever, and they were dumped in the wings on either side of the stage, and the dancers, when they came off, would pick up something and put it on over basic leotard and tights. So the piece, as I say, was different every night, both in the way it looked and also the dance. But you can see this -- have you seen this film?

**INTERVIEWER:** No, I haven't seen it. The dance sounds very John Cage, sort of chance

oriented?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. It wasn't John's music, though John and David performed it. Before you go, we could show it to you.

**INTERVIEWER:** I would love to see it.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, sure. I mean, it would be better to see it than I try to describe it. I mean, there are things like that stage had to revolve, and so Bob sort of pulled the lever to make the revolving stage go without really telling the dancers, so they dealt with it.

**INTERVIEWER:** How was he as a stage manager?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, you know, of course, we would arrive in a place and the technicians would ask for the lighting plot, and there was never a lighting plot, Bob would sort of improvise it on the spur of the moment. The first engagement we had on that tour, we landed in France and immediately took a bus to Strasbourg where the first performance was on a Saturday evening, and we were supposed to have a translator from the sponsor, and we never saw the translator, we never saw the sponsor, but we had this crew of stagehands who didn't speak English, and Bob didn't speak French. So I was trying my best to interpret for him and for them, and, of course, the kind of French they spoke, in any case, was Alsatian French because this was in Strasbourg. And we somehow got the performance on, but it was difficult.

There was one piece we did a lot on that tour called "Winterbranch," which is a notorious piece because the music was so unbearable, by LaMonte Young, and Bob would, I mean, literally just sort of pull switches and improvise the lighting on the spur of the moment for that piece, and it was often in darkness or there would be lights shining out into the audience's eyes, which upset a lot of people whenever we did it. But it was a wonderful piece, I mean, it was an incredible piece.

Have you read my book? Have you seen it?

**INTERVIEWER:** I have, yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I do describe it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes, you do, yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** All this story I'm telling you is in that book, so I shouldn't really go on and on about it. But, of course, by the end of the tour Merce and John and Bob were somewhat at loggerheads, and in any case, Bob had won the Grand Prize in Venice during the tour, and he had now become a world famous painter, and one thing in another, he wasn't going to continue as Merce's resident designer and stage manager, and it was unfortunate. I thought, oh, my god, this is all my fault, I was the one who started this, but then one day Merce said, "If somebody asked me, I'd do it again tomorrow." So I thought, well, if he feels that way, that's all right, I shouldn't

blame myself anymore.

**INTERVIEWER:** Here you have, on the one hand, Merce and John, and the company is moving forward, and you have Bob Rauschenberg, who loves dancers, loved, I think, being with dancers.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Oh, yeah, absolutely.

**INTERVIEWER:** But he's also beginning to receive some success of his own.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Natural tension?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, yes, in a way, because up to then, John had always been, in a sense, the most famous person involved, I mean, even before... Merce was well-known as a choreographer, John was known as, or at least notorious, as the kind of composer he was, but he was known, and he had that extraordinary success in Milan when he was on that television program. You know about that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I mean, so he was famous in that way, too. So, as you say, there was a natural tension because Bob was getting more of the limelight than John was. Also, there was myself and the other company manager taking care of things that John used to take care of. Also finding places to eat and things like that. So, I mean, not that there was any tension between me and John, in fact, we used to go out to dinner a lot together while the company was getting ready to perform.

**INTERVIEWER:** But I heard a story, from your book, about the show in Montreal in 1961? It was called "Aeon" -- A-e-o-n?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yes, yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** That was the first time Bob was the lighting director or the first time he was the stage director, and after he got everything ready, he went and sat in the theatre pit?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** This isn't my story.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's not your story? Hmm. Well, you can tell me then if it's a true story from what you know, because what I read was that Bob sat in the music pit waiting for the program to start, and they didn't start the program for 20 minutes because they were waiting for Bob to come on stage, and Bob didn't come on stage. Finally when they found him and they could start the show, Merce apparently, from what I've read, Merce and John were furious and said, "You have to --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Is this in Carolyn's book by any chance?

**INTERVIEWER:** I think I read something from Steve Paxton and read something from Calvin Tomkins -- and those sources were saying that that was likely the source of -- that that was a beginning of a tension between Bob and them, and that they almost fired Bob at that point from the show. But you're not looking like it's a familiar story to you.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** No. Well, if it's in those books, I must have read it, but I don't recall it.

**INTERVIEWER:** You would have known.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Of course, I wasn't there. I didn't go to Montreal for that -- it was 19 --

**INTERVIEWER:** '61.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** '61. So it was after the summer when they did "Antic Meet" and "Summerspace," but Merce and Bob were still collaborating. I mean, Bob was still the resident designer.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** And there are all those little sort of things that happened in "Aeon," the little events that Bob devised, the explosions and things like that, which I think Merce was perfectly pleased about, was willing to let Bob do anything he wanted. I mean, after all, that's the aesthetic, is to let the designer do what he wants to do.

**INTERVIEWER:** It seems like a unique relationship.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you talk about how it worked?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, I mean, there is the letter, which I quote in my book, that Merce sent to Bob about "Antic Meet" and "Summerspace," but that was unique, I mean, that he actually wrote something to Bob, because it wasn't really necessary, perhaps, because normally -- I mean, often, if they would be touring in the Volkswagen Bus, they would talk about things. It's the way Bob talks about it in Elliot Kaplan's film, he says that Merce would come to him and say, "Oh, Bob, I want to do a new piece," and tell him something about it, and then Bob would go off and do whatever he wanted to do for the design. And, of course, that culminated in "Story," where Bob did something for the piece every night.

**INTERVIEWER:** And ultimately became the design.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah.



**INTERVIEWER:** At the very end.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah. So.

**INTERVIEWER:** I haven't seen that film, but Merce would basically say, "We're doing this next piece," and Bob would --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, that's the way Bob tells it in that interview in the film, so I have no reason not to believe him because the thing is that they were together all the time, they ate together and drove in the car together. So either they could talk or there was no need for them to talk because they just thought the same way, and that was one of the things that John immediately felt when they met Bob, that they were absolutely on the same wavelength about everything.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know John met Bob at a gallery opening --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** -- but I wasn't sure when he met Merce.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I thought it was at the same time.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was it?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah. It wasn't at Black Mountain, but --

**INTERVIEWER:** No, at the Parsons Gallery.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, that's right, where Bob had a show.

**INTERVIEWER:** It made sense that Merce was there, too, but I wanted to ask you.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah. Which was in the winter before they were together at Black Mountain and did the theatre piece, yes, I believe.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** That's when Bob first did anything with Merce. I mean, he didn't really -- because there was no question of designing the piece, but Bob certainly took part in it and he participated in it. And so the first piece they did together was in the second year of the company with "Minutiae" when Merce actually asked Bob to design something for a piece, but Remy Charlip did the costumes because Remy was really the costume designer at that time, Bob hadn't started doing costumes yet, but he made the set for "Minutiae," which was historically the first combine, and was shown in the exhibition of combines.

**INTERVIEWER:** When he brought that [to the studio] did they talk about "Minutiae"? I know you weren't there, but I was wondering whether or not they took it for a test drive of some sort ... if Bob brought the combine and they put it on the stage and the dancers worked with it, if they made any adjustments to it or if it worked just like we see it today.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I think so. I don't know. I mean, maybe Bob brought it and put it up in the studio, or the dancers might have gone to Bob's studio where he was making it. But, no, I don't know. Carolyn could tell you that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Black Mountain has such sort of a romantic sort of sense to it today, but I was wondering when you were first at the company or at anytime with the company if they talked about it at all, Black Mountain.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I don't remember it, but, I mean, by the time I really got to know them, Black Mountain, it was several years in the past. I mean, I got to know them, well, 3 years later, they were talking about other things, if anything.

**INTERVIEWER:** One of the comments that Steve Paxton made was that Bob, when he did the costumes, he made those costumes as tights and leotards because there was no room in the bus, and they had to be simple, or do you think it has much more to do with the style of dancing?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I think yes, I think yes, though, I mean, obviously you can see from this book that Bob had other ideas about what costumes could be. So that might be one element of it.

**INTERVIEWER:** I was interested in your book that there were drawings that I guess Bob did of different costumes for the different dances (No) -- I think you have "Labyrinth" and I'm not sure --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** "Labyrinthian Dances" is the only one I ever found a design for. There's this funny little sketch which I do reproduce in the book, which is on a piece of legal note paper, a legal pad, the drawing for "Travelogue," but mostly Bob dyed the costumes or painted on them or whatever, like "Summerspace," the pendulous thing that was done on the costumes, maybe as the dancers were wearing them.

**INTERVIEWER:** I wanted to ask you if this would be of interest to you. They have just boxed up Rauschenberg's files from Captiva, and they've taken them up to (Lafayette Street) -- to Lafayette Street. As I was going through, I saw several Cunningham-related pieces.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Oh, yeah?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes, a list of dancers in leotards --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Oh, really?

**INTERVIEWER:** -- and colors, and then one piece that I didn't fold out because it looked like

it was the drawing for a costume on vellum paper. Anyway, I said to Gina [Guy], "I think that David Vaughan might be interested in this."

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, I would indeed.

**INTERVIEWER:** She offered that she could scan anything that you would like to have. I thought I would go back and mark those?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, right. Thank you. It would be very interesting. I mean, Bob did the costumes in different ways. The last set that he actually made, of course, were for "Interscape," where he asked to have two sets of white leotards and tights for each dancer and a Polaroid picture of each dancer, and then he silk-screened the designs on those white leotards himself for the individual dancers and brought them to the studio, and they all put them on one day, and Merce told the story about how they all came out beaming because they loved what they were given to wear, and those are in that book, of course. Of course, then there were things like "Antic Meet," with the basic leotards and tights again with all the other garments that Bob found or wanted to use, the night dress for the duet, and all those things, and plus for the objects in the dance, too, which, you know we are going to do it at The Joyce in March. We've brought it back.

**INTERVIEWER:** "Antic Meet"?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. We did it in Paris. And so the costumes have all been faithfully copied, some of them by people at Bob's, and some --

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes, I know. Somebody made a chair.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, but we have somebody who made the new door and the table and everything for the --

**INTERVIEWER:** Particularly for "Antic Meet," did the dancers have a chance to -- at what point, I should say, would the dancers have had a chance to work with the add-ons in a performance, for a performance?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, presumably, I don't remember, but I think it must have been when they were in New London, where they first did the piece, and Bob must have brought all the stuff and they had maybe a dress rehearsal. I mean, in those days things were much less organized in that sense than they are now, where we have full dress rehearsals or something. I mean, in those days there wasn't always necessarily a dress rehearsal.

**INTERVIEWER:** So I guess Bob wasn't preparing doubles and triples for each costume.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** No, no, probably not, and in those days we didn't have a wardrobe person, so the women had to wash their own costumes themselves.

**INTERVIEWER:** Times have changed.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Indeed they have, yes. I mean, they wouldn't hear of it now if they were asked to do that.

[Laughter.]

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have a favorite of Bob's works?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Hmm. Well, I have favorite dances. "Summerspace," I suppose, I think was wonderful, and it still is, because it was staged for Juilliard students last year. So it gets performed again.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know that there was a big gap between the [1964] tour and the time that Bob and Merce got back together again.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, well.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did the "get back together" part happen? They must not have been speaking to each other for a while.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, well, I think after a while they stopped not speaking to each other. After all, they had been friends for so long, it was too important a relationship, and so when "Travelogue" came around, which was in '72 or '73, which was already -- what? -- 10 years later, it became possible for Merce and/or John together to ask Bob if he would undertake another design, which he, of course, and he made this fabulous piece. His costumes for that piece and the sets were wonderful.

**INTERVIEWER:** That must have been a spectacular reunion.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I think so, yes, and it was for -- you know, we actually had a Broadway season in a Broadway theatre, a week in a Broadway theatre, and that was the pièce de résistance of that week.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever cram yourself into bus and go on the road with those guys?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** On the Volkswagen Bus?

**INTERVIEWER:** Uh-huh.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, that time when Merce invited me up to New London, I got to drive back with them, I think, because somebody else wasn't -- I mean, there was no room in the car, in the bus, for an extra person. It had to be that somebody wasn't in it and you could -- and I could drive part of it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was it really true that they played Scrabble so much?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. I think I played Scrabble with John as we were driving that time, yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** As you were driving?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, somebody, maybe Merce, was driving, and then John and I were playing Scrabble in the front seat. I beat him, too.

[Laughter.]

**INTERVIEWER:** When I did a film on Bob a couple of years ago, I filmed an interview with Merce, and he talked about driving around with Bob and playing Scrabble, and that Bob, they would get the board out and every once a while Merce would say, "But, Bob, that's not a word."

[Laughter.]

**MR. VAUGHAN:** The other thing, when we were driving around in Europe in a bus, but in a coach, you know, a big --

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** -- Bob would be making drawings with lighter fluid, you know, the way he did, the --

**INTERVIEWER:** The transfer drawings.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, transfer drawings, and he'd make a drawing and do that, and somebody would take it. I never dared to do that... I don't know if Carolyn still has them, has one, but the dancers were snapping those up, I remember.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, that's funny. That's like Picasso drawing on a napkin.

[Laughter.]

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, that's right, that's right.

**INTERVIEWER:** It becomes a piece of your collection.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Absolutely, yes. I have to ask Carolyn if she still has any of those.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did the dancers feel the connection with Bob that Bob clearly felt with them?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, he was very close to Carolyn, and especially to Viola, and Steve, of

course. I don't know. Some of the dancers probably didn't have that close a feeling about him -- Sandra, Barbara Deleemy [ph], whose husband and child were on the tour, so she didn't.

**INTERVIEWER:** I copied down this quote that I thought would interest you .... "Local touring with the dance company was awkward but a beautiful addition to my work. The dances, the dancers, the collaboration, the responsibilities, and trust, which are essential in cooperative art, because the important and satisfying element in my life worked positively with the privateness and loneliness of painting."

**MR. VAUGHAN:** That's beautiful.

**INTERVIEWER:** They seemed family to him.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, that's right, absolutely. And Jasper never had quite that feeling. Also, Jasper wasn't interested in working in the theatre that much, though sometimes he would dye costumes, that's true, but I can't imagine Jasper improvising a set from stuff he found around the theatre that way.

Although Jasper, too, in his way, was close to some of the dancers, again, Viola, I think.

**INTERVIEWER:** And he did some sets for Merce, didn't he? (Oh, indeed he did) Jasper?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yes, indeed. And Jasper designed the piece that Merce and John did for the Paris Opéra in '73, "Un jour ou deux," and Jasper had to dye those costumes himself because the people in the theatre weren't doing it right. Of course the last thing after -- well, of course, Merce's last piece, "But One," was designed by Bob in the sense that he gave us a painting which was blown up for the decor, and I think he just said he wanted the dancers all in white leotards and tights with different cuts. But we did this -- we were in Miami in 2007, and after that we did a performance in Naples, Florida, and the next day we had this wonderful picnic in Bob's studio in Captiva, we all went over there. It was wonderful then to see Merce and Bob in their wheelchairs together.

I have a photograph of myself with them then. [shows the photograph, which is on his bulletin board]

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, sure. That's a great picture.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. They had a wonderful time together that day.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's great.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** The room was amazing with Bob's paintings all the way around. And then actually there was an exhibition that I went down to see in Ft. Myers of Bob's work for Merce, and I stayed the night in Captiva afterwards and had dinner with Bob, and that was really the last time I saw him, the last time I spent time with him.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was he cooking then or --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** No, no, we went out to dinner. But, of course, there was this evening -- I mean, this book was made for a benefit that we did.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, it was?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Bob was involved with -- what's it called? Impresarios.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Oh, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was that with De Antonio and Jasper and Bob?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Oh, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** It was a fundraiser, right?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. Oh, yes, okay, that goes back a way.

**INTERVIEWER:** I know!

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah. Merce -- I mean, everybody thought it was time Merce had a New York performance, a performance in New York, not just at BAM or somewhere, and this was before I was working at the studio, and I think Bob and Jasper and De Antonio probably got together and rented what was then called the Phoenix Theatre on 2nd Avenue and 12th Street, which is now a movie theatre, and for one night, and Merce did "Antic Meet" and "Summerspace," did we? What was the date of that? That would have been in 19 --

**INTERVIEWER:** I have it here. I want to say '58?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** '58? Yeah. No, because "Summerspace" and "Antic Meet" were made in '58, so it was the next year or something.

**INTERVIEWER:** '60

**MR. VAUGHAN:** '60 or --

**INTERVIEWER:** But you weren't there quite yet.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, no, actually I was. Of course, I was working at the studio by then.

**INTERVIEWER:** I would have thought you would have been counting the money after that!

**MR. VAUGHAN:** No, I didn't do that. Lou Lloyd probably did it.

**INTERVIEWER:** As a producer, it didn't quite seem what Bob would normally do except for since he was a stage manager -- February 16, 1960. [date of performance]

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's when it was. Top price was \$8.33.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, which was probably not, at that time, outrageous, or not particularly cheap.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever think about joining the Judson group?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, I worked at Judson, but not in dance, but because I was in a lot of the musicals that Al Carmines wrote, so I was certainly close to a lot of those people through Jimmy. I mean, all those people had studied with Jimmy as well, and some of them with Merce, so I knew them all.

**INTERVIEWER:** But you didn't pal around with the chickens and stuff like that.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** No, not that. I actually choreographed a couple of little numbers myself that I did in Judson concerts, and I was in concerts of Jimmy's at Judson.

**INTERVIEWER:** Jimmy Waring, that's what you said?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Waring, yeah, I had been working for a long time on a monograph of him, which I have to finish when I get through all this business.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, yes. I'm going to see what else I should ask you about. In Washington right now, there's an exhibit that's gotten quite a lot of play called "Hide and Seek."

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** There's assumption, it appears to me, on the part of the curators of that exhibit that these guys were a little bit behind the times in terms of expressing their sexuality, and I'm just curious, what was the sense in the community at that time?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** I mean, you know, we all knew and accepted the fact that Merce and John were lovers, and that Bob and Jasper had been, and Bob and Steve, of course, were very closely involved, in fact, in the '64 tour. But I don't remember so openly discussing it very much with other people, not because one wouldn't, but because one didn't, I think.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. Well, you know, it keeps coming up, ... You weren't there when "Nocturnes" went on fire, when the stage went on fire, but it was a great story that -- or with the



firemen said that --

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Yeah, I saw it. I was at the performance, but I think I wasn't at the rehearsal. (Okay.) I only heard about that afterwards. (Right) But I was there at the performance. That piece was so beautiful.

**INTERVIEWER:** Any final words about collaboration?

**MR. VAUGHAN:** Well, I think really Bob says it all in those interviews, in that interview, in the film. As he says, it was the most excruciating form of collaboration because you didn't really know how it was going to come out until you actually had it on the stage, and then it was too late to say, "Uh-oh, this isn't working." But somehow it always did because there was this extraordinary kind of trust they all had in each other's integrity and sympathy with the work and so on.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, I thank you very much.

**MR. VAUGHAN:** You're welcome. If you think of any other questions, you can always e-mail me.

[End of Interview]

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