

An Oral History of

ARTHUR WAGNER and STANLEY CHODOROW

On September 15, 1999

1 **CHODOROW:** This is a part of series of interviews with founding chairs of departments. The
2 long-term purpose is to write an intellectual history of UCSD that looks at the way in which the
3 departments and the institution as a whole are formed; what its purposes were from the
4 intellectual point of view; how it fit into both the disciplines and American education in the sixties
5 and early seventies. The period we are concentrating on is basically from the founding—1959-
6 60—through about 1975. Once departments have achieved their corporate status and their
7 political status as a unit, they enter really a second phase. We're interested in the first phase,
8 under the leadership of the first chair and those who immediately followed him or her—in this
9 case, I believe it's always him—the way in which they approach and the founding of the
10 department; the way in which early recruitments, both failures and successes, affected the
11 original vision; and, in their view, what happened. And, of course, in many cases that's not
12 merely what happened internally in the department, but in the relationships between the
13 department and other departments and other agencies. In your case, of course, the La Jolla
14 Playhouse. But that's how we are approaching it, so why don't you start by talking about what
15 you were doing before you got here, and how you got here, and who brought you here, and
16 what they told you.

17 **WAGNER:** Good. Well, it's an interesting story, because I came here immediately from
18 Temple University where I was head of the professional actor training program, which I had
19 been doing previously at Tulane and Ohio University and then at Temple University. A little
20 sidelight of it though. When I was leaving Tulane University—which is an interesting academic
21 story—because the whole department resigned. I arrived at Tulane in 1965, and almost
22 immediately the department decided they were going to resign in a conflict with the
23 administration. At first, I thought it was because I arrived, but it wasn't— [laughter]

24 **CHODOROW:** Who was the president then?

25 **WAGNER:** [Herbert] Longenecker! He was a fats and oil man; we use to call him—he was a
26 biologist. Tulane at the time would have been ranked in the top five of any drama departments,
27 mainly because of the *Tulane Drama Review*, which is now the drama review, and continues; it

was the most prestigious journal of avant-garde theater, perhaps, in the world. So in any case, we were all resigning—all the Ph.Ds.—there were seven Ph.Ds. in the program. And when the word got out that the Tulane department was up for grabs, you could have run a travel agency out of the office. So, we were all out doing all kinds of interviews. Dick [Richard] Schechner, who was the editor of the *Tulane Drama Review*, was a colleague and a friend, and he was brought one December weekend to San Diego where he met with Peterson [?], John Stewart, who were trying to form this rejuvenation of the La Jolla Playhouse. And they had recently hired—and I'm going block on his name—a great British director, who at that time was at the Stratford Theatre in Canada, to head up this theater. And they wanted Richard to come to start an institute—a theater institute connected with the theater, and a magazine, et cetera, et cetera.

CHODOROW: This is in 1965?

WAGNER: 1965. So they went out on a yacht and Richard asked was there going to be any kind of training programs involved in it? And they said yes, that they were going to have an actor training program—not at the university but connected to the theater. Because although the head of the theater was also going to be a chairman of a department, the department was going to be purely undergraduate liberal arts department. And then all real theater activity—professional theater activity—was going to go on in the theater. So, yes, they were going to have a training program, and he said, "Well, what you should do, you should contact my colleague, Arthur Wagner." So sure enough, a few months later, I get a call from John Stewart. Could I fly up to Stratford to meet with—his name will come to me [laughs]. So I did—in the middle of winter—I remember driving along these icy streets. And I spent a whole day with this unnamed director talking about this possibility. And it was very exciting.

Well, to make a very long story short, of course, that never happened. And the reason it didn't happen was because Peterson [?], the director—John Stewart—had gone out and hired an architect by the name of Shapiro [?] from Chicago. He was a very famous international architect who designed the theater in total secrecy in Chicago—spent a lot of money. When the theater was finally exposed and priced out, the Playhouse and the university had \$3 million to build the theater. It priced out at \$10 million. So it never happened. And so, although this director was on contract for three years, nominally the chairman of a non-existent department, and the director of a non-existent theater, he would spend three or four weekends here a year. I think he was collecting \$40,000 a year at that time for that—that was a really scandalous kind of thing—and

59 eventually he went to the Guthrie [Theater] as their artistic director—Michael Langham, okay.
60 So fill in Michael Langham back on all those— [laughs]

61 **CHODOROW:** Well-known name.

62 **WAGNER:** Right. So he must have left—his contract must have run out in 1969. Whereupon,
63 they began seriously searching for someone to start a drama program—the Department of
64 Drama. And so in 1971—

65 **CHODOROW:** By this time, you had gone to Temple.

66 **WAGNER:** Now I'm at Temple. Because I had gone from Tulane to Ohio—only stayed there
67 two years—and went to Temple to start another acting program. So in 1971, I get a call from a
68 very dear friend, Monroe Lippman, who had been the chairman of the Tulane drama
69 department—chairman for thirty-one years; a real icon of academic theater in this country—who
70 had resigned along with us. He didn't have to do that. He could have just retired or whatever. He
71 lived in New Orleans for thirty-one years, but he was feisty guy. And so he resigns, and he goes
72 to NYU and starts the drama department there, which still continues; hates New York; and takes
73 a job at [UC] Riverside. So he's chairman of the department at Riverside. Well, he's
74 approaching sort of mandatory retirement age—remember, it used to be sixty-seven, I think
75 back then—something like that.

76 **CHODOROW:** Right. Sixty-seven and then—

77 **WAGNER:** It then it went to seventy, yeah. And so, he called and asked if I would be
78 interested in applying for the chairmanship at Riverside. Well, we had been waiting all these
79 years. I took Molly out of California, you know, and all we were waiting was to get back to
80 California! Sure, I say to Monroe. So, he proceeds with that. A few weeks later, I get a call
81 from—I think it was Eric Christmas who called me—it could have been Floyd. It's interesting
82 because, you know, Floyd had been a colleague of mine at Ohio University—that's where we
83 met. And Floyd—

84 **CHODOROW:** This is Floyd Gaffney?

85 **WAGNER:** Yeah, Floyd Gaffney. See, what happened—if I have to back just a little bit; and
86 this all part of the founding of the department, there's no question about it—there was going to
87 be a company of actors, and the teaching was going to be done by that company of actors.

88 Okay? And so early on, while there was a non-existent department and a non-existent theater,
89 Michael brought Eric Christmas, who had been a member of his company for fourteen years at
90 Stratford, but who had done some teaching—who had done some college teaching. He used to
91 go out in the off-season, and he would teach. And I knew Eric because he once came to Rollins
92 College, where I was chair for nine years before I went to Tulane, to talk about the possibility of
93 him coming to Rollins; and so we had an acquaintance. Now they call and ask if I would be
94 interested in applying for the chairmanship of a non-existent drama department at UCSD. So, of
95 course, I said yes. So my interview was coordinated—it had to be coordinated—there were two
96 competing UC campuses. Fascinating. So I flew out—

97 **CHODOROW:** More control about the competition for faculty between campuses than there
98 has been recently.

99 **WAGNER:** Unfortunately for me. [laughs] I probably could have done better if it hadn't been.
100 So it was interesting—I had this enormous pull towards Monroe; I mean, we were very intimate
101 friends. And it was an established department at Riverside—just needed a kick in the pants. But
102 then I came to San Diego, and, you know, here is this potentially developing thing in a much
103 more urban situation than Riverside was. And I was offered the chairmanship of both
104 departments. And they had the same salary, all of that sort of stuff, had to be the same so that
105 there was no competition relative to that. And, in a sense, that made it easier for me as well.
106 And the decision was not a difficult one to make—outside of Monroe—you know, that personal
107 kind of thing. So there was a committee headed by John Stewart, which was the search
108 committee, and they were really interesting, because they didn't know, really, what they were
109 looking for. I'm not even exactly sure how they came to me—I've never found out whether it was
110 Floyd, whether it was Eric, whether it was somebody else out there in the world. Because I don't
111 think they really knew what they wanted. The music department and the visual arts department
112 were clearly established on very avant-garde principles. And John Stewart was much more
113 knowledgeable in those than he was in theater, especially music. My whole career had been, up
114 to that point, professional training in academia; establishing MFA programs at Tulane, at Ohio,
115 and Temple University. This was something new in academia. Prior to that, there were only
116 three professional training programs—prior to the sixties, there were three professional training
117 programs. The first one will surprise you. 1914, Carnegie Institute of Technology had the first
118 professional training program—way back in 1914. It's the oldest drama department in the
119 country, and, of course, still goes on. That was an undergraduate program. Then in 1926,
120 George Pierce Baker is brought from Harvard University, where he had taught a very famous

121 playwriting course—including students like Eugene O'Neill—he was brought to Yale to start the
122 Yale School of Drama, because Harvard wouldn't have anything officially theater in the
123 curriculum. So that's how you get the Yale School of Drama in 1926, and there isn't another
124 department of that sort or school of that sort until after the Second War World when Boston
125 University began one. But then in the sixties, with the explosion of the regional theater in this
126 country, the need for trained actors, for the first time, became necessary. Before that, most of us
127 actors, as myself, we trained in New York with an acting teacher, because all that we had to do
128 was psychological realism. And so therefore, you didn't need too much voice training and too
129 much movement training and too much speech training.

130 **CHODOROW:** This is the Stanislavski—?

131 **WAGNER:** Yeah, the whole Group Theater. I mean, that was at the base of all of the training
132 that we did. You studied with a teacher, which is what I did. But now, they required actors who
133 could do Shakespeare, [Jean] Racine, the Greeks, and whatever. So we had an explosion of
134 MFA programs. And that's why Tulane decided to establish one and I went there. So in
135 choosing to look at me as a potential candidate, in a sense, that's what they were buying. They
136 were buying professional training programs, including acting, you know, as a discipline. So I did
137 my interview here, and then, of course, I went over to Riverside and did the interview there, and
138 it was perfectly clear that this is where I wanted to come. And they were very thorough. They
139 sent one of the members of the committee; they flew him to Philadelphia to see a production of
140 mine, to evaluate that work. Other people came through, we talked, and finally I was offered the
141 position as chair of a not yet existing drama department. There would only be Eric and Floyd on
142 the faculty, both of whom were non-tenured—Eric as a lecturer, and Floyd as an acting
143 associate professor—which was very wise of them to do. Of course, they didn't know who was
144 going to be chair, and they didn't want to tie anybody down with already tenured faculty.

145 Eventually, I accepted the terms of my appointment; and once I did that, then I received this
146 letter from John Stewart, which had some really interesting tidbits in it. For one thing, he said
147 that he didn't think that I would ever have a course that I could call acting; that certainly not
148 something like makeup. That the department might grow to as many as seven faculty. That Eric
149 Christmas should teach only small classes. The Eric thing, of course, is the funniest of all
150 because Eric became our bread and butter. He taught Introduction to Theater to 250 to 400
151 students, and it was ten performances that he gave. You know, the most popular faculty
152 member in terms of that. So anyway, that's sort of interesting—the kinds of limits that were

153 suggested in terms of the department. Then, once the appointment was made, John asked me
154 to come out for about ten days in May—my appointment was not to begin until July—mainly to
155 meet with the Theater and Arts Foundation, which was the holders of the La Jolla Playhouse—
156 traditions and potential money. So that was great. We came out; we could look for a house;
157 Molli came with me; we stayed at the Mandeville Suite, which is the greatest. And I met with
158 Chip—I have a block on Chip's name, but it will come out. He was at the time the chair of the
159 Theater and Arts Foundation, which was a group of local citizens that, as I say, kept this idea
160 going. No theater knowledge in that board at all—none whatsoever. And so we talked about
161 what the possibilities were. They had a mandate from the attorney general of the state of
162 California that, if and when they were to start any kind of theater, it had to be with the University
163 of California. And it had to have some kind of children's component in it because the funds
164 came from a children's charity fund—that was a little shady. I forget the name of the guy who
165 was running it at the time—but if the funds were going to come, that's where they were going to
166 come from. The problem was the funds were tied up mainly in land. What is now Fairbanks
167 Ranch was called Zorro, or something like that, because it was owned by Fairbanks, who
168 played Zorro. And land values were way down, so there was not a large amount of monies that
169 would be available.

170 But we talked about how would proceed together in terms of the resurgence of the La Jolla
171 Playhouse and potential relationships with the department. So that was that. And then I arrived
172 in July, and my first responsibility was—well, I guess I had done that in May—was to establish
173 some kind of curriculum. Coming into the University of California system out of the kinds of
174 academic institutions that I had been at was really very difficult. My first chairmanship was at
175 Rollins College, in which the college was literally owned by the president because he was
176 married to the wealthiest woman in southern Florida. And she wrote the check at the end of the
177 year to cover the deficit, which was why he was appointed. He was an interesting guy. He was
178 an artist. I mean, he taught art history and things like that. Great collection of Tiffany glass. But
179 what I did there, when I needed anything—I hardly ever saw the dean. I only saw the dean
180 socially, right into Hugh's [?] office, for anything. Not only for things that I needed for the
181 department, but things that I needed for myself, like a promotion. That's the way it happened. I'd
182 walk into the office. After I got my Ph.D., I said, "Oh, by the way, Hugh [?]"—as we were
183 discussing something else—I said, "You know, I'm still an assistant professor." He said, "You're
184 an assistant professor?" So the next day, I was an associate professor. So that's a little bit—

185 that's a different part of academia. There are those places out there. Yeah, I went from—I came
186 as an instructor, which was a rank that we hardly have now, to full professor in eight years.

187 **CHODOROW:** At Rollins?

188 **WAGNER:** Yeah. It was very important for me because I started late. I was thirty-three when
189 I started in my academic career, so it was just a wonderful thing. And then from Rollins to
190 Tulane, which was a more traditional kind of thing, but still nowhere near what was the situation
191 here in terms of appointments and promotions and all those steps—career steps. None of these
192 places had that. You got into a rank and then maybe you got merit raises. Or you were
193 promoted to the next rank. But there was not all of that complicated thing, so it's a pretty difficult
194 thing to deal with in the beginning. So when I arrived, the faculty is Eric, Floyd, and I hired a
195 designer. So we were four faculty members. At the beginning, we were housed—

196 **CHODOROW:** Who was the designer?

197 **WAGNER:** Dan—I'm having a terrible time today with these names, but they will all come to
198 me. Unfortunately, deceased, but a wonderful guy. He stayed with us for five years. Dan
199 Dryden.

200 **CHODOROW:** Dan Dryden?

201 **WAGNER:** And eventually his wife, Debbie Dryden, who served in the department for many
202 years as our costume designer. A few years back, she decided to go to Ashland to be their
203 resident costume designer. So anyhow, it was Dan.

204 **CHODOROW:** Dan had died?

205 **WAGNER:** AIDS—about, I would guess, six or seven years ago. Yep, sad. So we were the
206 four faculty members to begin with, I being the only tenured faculty member. And a beginning
207 curriculum. And in the beginning, the curriculum was modest. We all taught undergraduate
208 classes—that's all there were—were undergraduate classes. But I knew where I wanted to go,
209 and that was to establish professional training programs at the graduate level. You have to have
210 a graduate program at UC, or forget it, you know. So my first hire, which was very important,
211 was an old friend—Mike [Michael] Addison—who at that time was dean of the theater division at
212 Cal Arts. And what had happened was Michael, who had been at UC Santa Barbara for a
213 number of years and became chair of that department, was recruited to be the dean at Cal Arts

214 in the same year that I'm recruited to be chair here. And so, Michael's wife's family had a home
215 on the beach in Ventura, and we were invited one weekend to go down and spend the weekend
216 there. And in one of our conversations, Michael and I agreed that either one of us had any
217 difficulty where we were going, we would hire the other. So I'm three months into my job here,
218 and I get a call from Michael. [laughs]He says, "I'm calling in my bet—my I.O.U." [laughter] He
219 ran into terrible things at Cal Arts. They never had any money or anything like that, so—

220 Well fine, Michael is a wonderful selection. We were looking for somebody who eventually
221 would teach directing, but also we needed somebody in literature and stuff, you know. Mike was
222 a Ph.D., which we didn't have aside from in the department, so he brought all of those wonderful
223 things and a knowledge of the system. So Michael came on board in 1973. And he and I
224 immediately set out to develop a graduate program. And what we devised was an MFA program
225 in acting, directing, playwriting, and dramaturgy. Dramaturgy being a relatively new thing, but
226 beginning to become important in American theater because of all those regional theaters who
227 were looking for, you know, really directors is what they are—advisors, etc. And so we thought
228 that there was going to be a real need for this. And we set it up in such a way that it had a real
229 intellectual component to it. I was very interested in the work of Eric Berne, who was a
230 psychiatrist who developed a theory of human psychology called transactional analysis. And I
231 had come across this at Tulane. And I saw its uses in terms of actors' use for character
232 analysis—not for therapy, but for character analysis. And I had used it at Tulane, and I used at
233 Ohio, and I used at Temple—it really worked. And the actors liked it. They felt much more
234 confident about—

235 **CHODOROW:** What's this general approach?

236 **WAGNER:** This general approach is basically relative to transactions, which is a stimulus
237 and a response.

238 **CHODOROW:** And what is this character going to do in certain circumstances?

239 **WAGNER:** Exactly. Why the character does what the character does in certain
240 circumstances—that's the given.

241 **CHODOROW:** You have a description of what the character just did or is about to do.

242 **WAGNER:** Yeah, it's in the play.

243 **CHODOROW:** The question for the actor is—

244 **WAGNER:** "Why am I doing this?"

245 **CHODOROW:** That's right. Why wouldn't that character do that in that circumstance?

246 **WAGNER:** Exactly. And of being of Stanislavski background myself—which is what we all
247 studied in New York—we always talked not in terms of "what am I feeling," we always talked in
248 terms of "what am I doing and why am I doing it?" In other words, why do I—which we call the
249 action and the objective. And that was fine, but still you sort of have to go deeper than that. You
250 can see what you're doing, you know, I'm greeting you—that's perfectly clear—but what are the
251 dynamics of that? Well, we always use sort of vaguely Freudian dynamic, but, you know,
252 Freudian dynamic is very ambiguous—effervescent. But here was this guy who was writing
253 about everyday kinds of things. And he broke everything down into categories, which was nice,
254 because the categories helped to focus you in; whereas, if you don't have that, then you're
255 always worried that you missed something. But this didn't allow you to miss anything as long as
256 you covered these categories. So the categories were—what were the ego state that you were
257 in? There were three ego states—the parent, the adult, and the child. And, what is the nature of
258 the transaction? Transactions are time structures because that's why transact, to help us to
259 pass time. And there only six ways in which we transact, one of them not being a transaction—
260 withdrawal—which is obviously what we are involved in. Just our inner transactions. But the
261 other five are with others.

262 And so my actors could add to their score. Where they always did an action and an objective,
263 now they could add—what was the ego state? What is the nature of the transaction? Is it the
264 past time? Is it a racket? What is the nature of the racket? What is your role? Is it persecutor,
265 rescuer, or victim? So all of these things, you see, to fill out. So if you run across one of my
266 actors, they do a lot of homework because they something to do homework with. So many
267 actors don't have the wherewithal. Look, really gifted actors probably don't need it, but it's
268 helpful to all depending upon where they are. So I already had this kind of what I call social
269 science bent. And so we built into the program this social science component, which they were
270 going to take classes in anthropology, sociology—and it was a wonderful idea. It's just that, in
271 practice, it became impossible. There wasn't enough time. I mean, actor training requires, you
272 know, now our students in the acting program start their studio work at nine o'clock and they
273 finish their rehearsals at eleven o'clock that night. And they're either in studio or rehearsing all

274 that time. So even if they had time to go to class, they couldn't do the work. But we tried it. The
275 first few classes tried to do it. But I think it was helpful in us establishing a program, because the
276 university was very reluctant at that time to begin programs like that. They would say, "Well, it's
277 just like such and such...", you know, we already have a program like that. And so we devised
278 something that had a uniqueness. And that was very helpful, you know. Michael was very clever
279 about that. So we presented this to all of the committees that keep going up, right? Finally goes
280 through the campus, and finally goes out to the whole university's committees and everything,
281 and we get the go-ahead from the chancellor's office to begin recruiting. So that was in the—I
282 think it was in the spring of that second year.

283 **CHODOROW:** '73-'74?

284 **WAGNER:** 1973, right. But now we need some other kind of faculty. We need—first of all,
285 we need a dramaturge faculty. Secondly, we're going to need voice and speech teachers. So
286 those were the days when I served on the program review committee. And I think I'm still
287 notorious with that—in fact, I think you mentioned it in my retirement party—for my ability to
288 bring on tears. [laughs]

289 **CHODOROW:** That's right. Tears on call.

290 **WAGNER:** One year, I got four FTEs.

291 **CHODOROW:** There were awards given. It was a Wagner Award.

292 **WAGNER:** Four FTEs. Anytime an FTE, I'd raise my hand. Okay, so now I get one more
293 FTE, and that's when we recruit and hire Frantisek [Deak], who is now the dean. I mean, it's
294 mind-boggling. And we had to Frantisek out of New York. He was working at NYU. Now
295 Frantisek, you must understand, is a Czechoslovakian refugee who comes to this country with
296 no English, and in two years gets a Ph.D. from Carnegie. And he's doing work at the *Drama*
297 *Review*, so we have mutual friends and everything. And to this day, I think Frantisek came for
298 one year, just to sort of see what it was like. New York was the place to be. So now we're into,
299 let's see, 1973-74—we go out recruiting. I must have had two FTEs that year—we did because I
300 recruit a movement teacher Yen Lu Wong [?], who was a movement teacher. [*inaudible*] we
301 recruited, and we chose eight actors, two directors, two playwrights, and two dramaturges. And
302 we went to New York and Chicago. We didn't have a lot of applicants—we were just starting
303 out.

304 **CHODOROW:** And this was where there were the pooled auditions?

305 **WAGNER:** Not yet. That comes much later. No, we're on our own; we'd just go out on our
306 own. So in February, we accept this class. In March, [William D.] McElroy gets a letter from the
307 president's office saying uh, uh—you can't do that MFA program. Yeah, in March, Roy [Harvey]
308 Pearce was dean of graduate studies. So they present this to me, and here we have a—

309 **CHODOROW:** Students in—

310 **WAGNER:** Students coming, you know, that we have accepted who gave up—very likely—
311 positions in other programs and things. Well—

312 **CHODOROW:** This is the because the graduate counsel ultimately turned you down?

313 **WAGNER:** You know, I think it was even beyond that. I don't know what it was—

314 **CHODOROW:** Do you think it was the president's office that did it?

315 **WAGNER:** Oh, it was definitely. It was what's his name—

316 **CHODOROW:** David Saxon?

317 **WAGNER:** No, it wasn't David Saxon. It was the vice-president for Academic Affairs at that
318 time who said that the program was too repetitive of other programs; that nothing would come of
319 it; that we wouldn't really be able to achieve anything with it; and, therefore, we could not do it.
320 Well, fortunately, McElroy was very, very supportive. And so, I was asked to write a response,
321 which is what I did, and it was presented. And it's my understanding—although I have no actual
322 proof of it—but it was told to me that McElroy went to the mat over this. Now, what does “going
323 to the mat” mean? I don't know whether it means, saying, “Look, this doesn't happen. I'm
324 resigning.” But it was something that was pretty potent because that letter, which I have copies
325 of, which I keep, and my response was very final. I mean, it was not an open kind of thing. So
326 they reversed themselves, and that's how the graduate program started.

327 **CHODOROW:** It's a program that became far and away the most distinguished program in
328 the UC system.

329 **WAGNER:** Oh, by far. You see the—

330 **CHODOROW:** No competitors.

331 **WAGNER:** None. Not even UCLA, where you would think it would be. If you look at the *U.S.*
332 *News and World Report*, the department is now third in MFA programs in the country behind
333 Yale and NYU. We're by far the youngest department. We're the furthest away from the center.
334 And we have an incredibly distinguished faculty that gets more distinguished by the day. So
335 it's—yeah it's very, very special. But you know, around here, you have to overachieve or you're
336 not going to survive. I recognized early on that numbers were a very important game, and that's
337 how I got Eric to do that Introduction to Theater course—something he had never done—would
338 never conceive of doing. And so we got our numbers way up there, and that's why we continue
339 to get the faculty. And so that by the time I finished my chairmanship in 1997—'77—my five-year
340 term—we were eleven faculty. So we were four over John Stewart's prediction that we would
341 only be seven. So am in the direction you're wanting to go in?

342 **CHODOROW:** Yeah. Tell me something—you did eventually add—and you had already
343 added by the time, I think, you stepped in—design.

344 **WAGNER:** Yes. No, it happened after stepped— We did not offer design because we did not
345 have the facilities for it. So design did not come into the program until the eighties—the early
346 eighties—the MFA, yes.

347 **CHODOROW:** Is that true? That's when Israel [?] came?

348 **WAGNER:** No, Bob came before that. He was an interesting recruitment.

349 **CHODOROW:** This is Bob Israel—Robert Israel?

350 **WAGNER:** Yeah, I mean, an internationally distinguished designer. Wonderful guy, too. So I
351 would guess that Bob came in about— Well, I was the first one to begin recruiting him, so I was
352 still on board. So that could have been in 1976-77, because he didn't come the first year, he
353 came after that. So he probably came either in 1978 or 1979, is when he arrived. And that was
354 on the basis of doing a design program because, by then, the theater had been approved and it
355 was going to happen. So I guess we should go back to the theater because that's a big part of
356 the history.

357 **CHODOROW:** Well, one of the things that's interesting was the story of the building of the
358 theater over in Matthews [Quad].

359 **WAGNER:** Oh, you mean the original Warren Theater?

360 **CHODOROW:** Yeah, the little—

361 **WAGNER:** Oh, yes. Well, that was—

362 **CHODOROW:** That was for a long time your only—

363 **WAGNER:** Right. That was Eric's doing. I mean, he knew how to work on the cheap, which
364 is what he had to do. I forget what that building was, but it was some kind of a utility building,
365 and next to it there was like a little house. Because I remember my first office was in there, and
366 there was like a fountain outside the window and a garden.

367 **CHODOROW:** Yes, that's right. A little square.

368 **WAGNER:** Right. And it was right next door to the Warren. So Eric talked them into giving
369 him the Warren and enclosing it, or whatever it needed, in some way, and then he used student
370 help to build the seats, which he built in the shape of Stratford. And that's how we ended up with
371 an open stage. And so when Eric picked me up at the airport for my interview, the first place he
372 took me was to the Warren. He was so proud of that, you know. And yes, that was it—that's
373 where we produced until the [Mandell] Weiss [Theater] opened—and that wasn't until 1982.

374 **CHODOROW:** What about the Mandeville [Auditorium] Did you ever get to use the
375 Mandeville?

376 **WAGNER:** Yes, but not much. The Mandeville was a disaster. When I came to that ten days,
377 one of the things John Stewart showed me was the plans for the Mandeville, especially for that
378 performance space, and I told him then that it was a disaster. I mean, they had no way of
379 getting anything large into that building. And although it was interesting idea—you know, you
380 could drop that center thing and play on both sides—those kinds of things vary. That flexible
381 theater idea, especially for what they were going to use it for. Have you ever seen it used? They
382 used it, and they did it when they opened the theater—when they opened it in 1975.

383 **CHODOROW:** The famous opening.

384 **WAGNER:** Oh, that disastrous opening. So that, to me, was clear that— There was a small
385 room, like a little black box, that we used—not a great deal—I did a lesson from [*inaudible*] in
386 there, and so every now and then—

387 **CHODOROW:** I saw you did Krapp's Last Tape in there.

388 **WAGNER:** That's right, Krapp's was in the Mandeville. I'd forgotten that. Yes, we did Krapp's
389 Last Tape in there, so we did a few things. It was a nice little black box—I mean, that was fine—
390 we would have used it more, but it was not always available. So the only facility that we had was
391 the Warren—until 1982. So in any case, from the beginning, I am working with the Theater and
392 Arts Foundation. And the problem, of course, is money—how are they going to get the money;
393 how much is it going to be?

394 Well, finally, what happened is that land all of a sudden got value. We never really found out
395 how much, although I have my suspicions about how much it was. But what they said was that
396 they had \$3 million, finally, and so that now we could begin to plan a theater. And it was so
397 interesting, you know, mainly because, as I said, there was really no theater—there was very
398 little theater knowledge on the board's part. Not their fault—they just were not theater people—
399 and so that almost all of the knowledge was in the department. And so we worked out a theater
400 program and eventually a theater plan, which is the theater that you see—which is the Weiss.
401 And we built that for \$3 million, which is incredible—the theater part of it. We built it for \$3
402 million because it was a real recession in construction in San Diego. We went out to bid, and we
403 got these incredible bids.

404 **CHODOROW:** I remember.

405 **WAGNER:** Yeah. I mean, that building cost a minimum of \$10 million today, probably more.
406 And so then we arranged an agreement between the Theater and Arts Foundation and the
407 university because, of course, the university owned the building. The university's contribution
408 now—there was no more money from the university; that money went away—now it was just the
409 land. But the university owned the building, and, therefore, an agreement had to be set out on
410 the use of the building and things like that. So the original agreement, which was constantly
411 being attacked and which will, I gather, may begin to be more flexible, was—Theater and Arts
412 Foundation, three months; department, nine months. It was ludicrous. But they didn't know what
413 they were going to do to begin with. I mean, that group had no idea—

414 **CHODOROW:** They thought they were a simple summer theater.

415 **WAGNER:** A simple summer theater, exactly. As they were—as they had been—in the high
416 school. You know, when the Michael Langham idea really went out, The Board—I'd hate to tell

417 you how many theaters were planned. One by Bob [Robert] Mosher, right down to working
418 drawings. Nice theatre—would have been a lovely theater—but we went elsewhere with this
419 theater, and it's a wonderful theater. The outside could be more elegant, but that's where we
420 save the money—that's how we get billed—but inside it's still the finest proscenium theater I
421 have been in, in terms of acoustic, in terms of sightlines, in terms of its feel and everything. It's a
422 wonderful theater.

423 **CHODOROW:** Flexibility.

424 **WAGNER:** Yes. So the only thing we didn't have money for was the shops. And that's how
425 Mandell Weiss got into the picture. But before that, now— Okay, so now we're going to have a
426 theater, what are we going to do? What is the Theater and Arts Foundation? What kind of
427 theater are they going to have? They have no idea. They don't know where to go to, who to go
428 to. So I came up with some ideas. And I proposed a postgraduate company, which we carried
429 on for quite a while, and which eventually fell down on fund-raising. McElroy was very much for
430 it. You know, I put it on the basis of postdoctoral kind of style.

431 **CHODOROW:** Very similar to what Yale had?

432 **WAGNER:** No, no—

[END OF PART ONE, BEGIN PART TWO]

433 **WAGNER:** —so that's the difference. It's like the acting company. The acting company
434 was the model, and that was originally all Juilliard students. Now, of course, it's a mixed bag,
435 which is what I was proposing. The acting company was already in existence, but what I was
436 proposing—but it was all Juilliard—and what I was proposing that we form a graduate program
437 taking the best actors from all these programs that were out there now. All of a sudden, we had
438 all of these programs. And the League of Professional Theater Programs had been started
439 when I was at Temple, so I was one of the founders of the League of Professional Theater
440 training programs. And we were all eastern schools; we were seven eastern schools. And then,
441 when I recognized that an organization called URTA—the University Resident Theater
442 Association—which is made up of multiple university departments that also recruit students for
443 graduate work, which is mainly performing in their theaters. But they had sort of training

444 programs around them, but nothing like the training programs of these schools. It was Juilliard, it
445 was Boston, it was Brandeis, it was Carnegie, it was Temple; and I believe—

446 **CHODOROW:** And NYU?

447 **WAGNER:** And NYU. So we were the seven original schools in what we called the eastern
448 grouping. Well, I read in the paper that URTA got this grant from the NEA [National Education
449 Association] for their interviewing—for their auditioning. And I said, "Gee, we should go after
450 that money, but we got to go national." So I invited three schools: University of Washington,
451 which had a very, very fine program at the time; Ohio University, where I had been and started
452 the program, and which was still an ongoing and good program; and Southern Methodist
453 University because Jack Clay, who ran that program, I knew when I was in Florida. So I knew
454 these programs. And so we were the ten schools that started the League of Professional
455 Theater Training Programs in 1971. Well, now I come out here and we are not in the League.
456 And in order to get in the League, you had to be voted in unanimously. So it was harder to get in
457 the League than it was to be a founding member, because founding members was like, you
458 know, self-chosen. So it was out of those schools that I was anticipating that we'd work. It was
459 great. I went to the NEA and they were interested, but we wrote to funding things. If you didn't
460 have something going, it was very tough to get it going, so it just never happened. Well,
461 eventually, what happened was that that board got very bold. I mean, they really surprised the
462 hell out of me, the way they went. First, they hired Allen Levy, which was an interesting thing to
463 do. They didn't go out and look for an artistic director, they looked for a general manager—at
464 least somebody who would be knowledgeable. And then it was Allen, of course, who educated
465 the board. I mean, he brought people out from organizations out in New York that do that—they
466 educate boards. And that's when they did their recruiting and ended up with Des McAnuff. It
467 was a mind-boggling choice.

468 **CHODOROW:** Tell me about—I was dean through the eighties and often had to deal with
469 the issues about teaching and about introduction of your students into productions and about
470 Des and others teaching in the department. You want to comment on that?

471 **WAGNER:** Yeah. Well, in the original agreement, there is a statement that there would be
472 mutual work going on. To where the department, the faculty, and students in the department
473 would participate and work at the Playhouse. And where artists at the Playhouse would
474 participate in the academic program. So the first thing we established was an internship

475 program. We had been doing this. We called them externships because we sent our students
476 out to regional theater companies. I have to backtrack just a bit here because it relates to the
477 program and the way the program developed. The program was a two-year program in the
478 beginning, which in the main were programs that I had run before. They were two-year
479 programs. Places like Yale and Juilliard and eventually North Carolina School of the Arts and
480 ACT—et cetera—many of whom were now becoming members of the League. The League
481 began dropping some members and adding members. And at one time, we had as many as
482 thirteen here. And so places like Cal Arts at one time was in the League—at the end, they were
483 not—North Carolina School of the Arts, State University of New York at Purchase, ACT—
484 became members of the League.

485 So there were three year programs around. We knew that if we were going to get into the
486 League, we were going to have to be a three-year program. And a three-year program requires
487 more resources, as you well know, Stan. And so once again, we devised a program in which we
488 could do it with the resources that we had. And so we added a fall and winter quarter. The
489 winter quarter being mainly production oriented. The fall quarter being studio and production,
490 but minimally. And then that last quarter, externship—in the second year. This is the second
491 year. Actually, the second year was two years of full studio and then an externship, so we didn't
492 have to teach in that quarter—the second years. And the third years, we finished at the end of
493 the winter quarter—we graduated them at the end of the winter quarter with the justification—
494 not a false one—that they got out there before everybody else, in terms of work—if there were
495 going to be summer work or whatever it was. But it also saved us a quarter of teaching.

496 So in the spring, all we taught were first year students. So we started this externship program,
497 and we had some agreements—not formal agreements—with theaters, especially Milwaukee.
498 Milwaukee Rep took most of our students. The Globe used to take some of our students. And
499 then our students would find other places that were interested in having students in a
500 professional situation. And they would go to these places to act. They were to be actors. They
501 were to have acting roles, not box office or anything like that. And we had been doing that for a
502 number of years, but now comes the Playhouse. And Des is on board, and they're doing a
503 season, and we now establish an agreement that they would make use of our second-year
504 students—actors, designers, and directors. Actors in modest roles, designers as assistant
505 designers, and directors as assistant directors. Something which paid off marvelously,
506 especially with designers and directors. The current artistic director of the Playhouse is one of
507 our students, who was Des's assistant on *Big River*; who was my assistant on the first play at

508 the Weiss. I opened the Weiss with *Threepenny Opera*, and Michael [Greif] was a first-year
509 graduate and my assistant—his first assignment. So that was a lovely kind of thing that
510 happened there.

511 **CHODOROW:** And I remember that the need of the Playhouse under Des for more time in
512 the theater was a leverage tool for increasing and solidifying that interaction.

513 **WAGNER:** That's what happened. Yes. It was a real give and take mutual thing. And so you
514 went through these wars—and they still go on—more and more time. And then, of course, the
515 thrust toward that second building, which is also a very interesting story. But I think we were
516 back on the students' relationship to that. So the other thing was, in addition to some adjunct
517 teaching—mainly Bob [Robert] Blacker, who was the associate director and dramaturge—so he
518 was wonderfully useful. And Des used to come in and teach, but Des was not a teacher. In
519 many ways, Des was not really a director. Des was a musician. He was a rock musician before
520 he sort of worked his way into the theater. I had great admiration for Des—I was not a great
521 admirer of his directing skills—but he placed that theater in the world. It was an incredible feat,
522 incredible achievement. Of course, he almost broke them—almost broke the university—I mean,
523 we know about all that stuff. But you'll have to give credit for that, so that was marvelous.

524 So then, now, we want to get into the League, so that's sort of the next kind of step in terms of
525 the program's notoriety, if you will. So what you did was you applied for membership. And that's
526 what we did. I believe we were turned down the first time because we were a two-year
527 program—that's when we knew we had to go to a three-year program, yeah—because we were
528 a two-year program. Everything else was okay, but we were a two-year program. So when we
529 added the third year, we requested another review, and we were accepted, I would say, into the
530 league—1980ish or so, something like that. And wonderful benefits came from that. In fact,
531 that's where the Suzuki [Training Program] came from, because there was money to bring
532 people in. And we brought in [Tadashi] Suzuki, and Steve [Steven] Pearson was able to go out
533 study with somebody, and we became a kind of a Suzuki center as you well know, too. So that
534 was an interesting development. Of course, getting into the league put us in a whole new ball
535 game, because now there were the joint auditions, which we had started way back in 1971, and
536 which they had been doing. And we used to go out and sort of be on their coattails. You know,
537 we would try to be in the same city and the same time and things like that, but to where we were
538 maybe getting 100 to 125 applicants a year. Once we joined the League, we began to get 300

539 applicants a year, 400 applicants a year. So the ten schools would be out there in the same
540 place at the same time, and recruiting.

541 **CHODOROW:** How did you establish among students? Because I remember in the
542 eighties—let's see, toward the end of the eighties—you were in direct competition with the best
543 places in the country. How did you establish yourselves among students as that good?

544 **WAGNER:** Well, I'll be as modest as I can be. I think the beginning was because I was
545 selected to be the chair—because I already had that reputation out there—I had already started
546 three MFA programs. I knew that world. The people who were sending students out knew about
547 me because I had already been training their students in different programs. So that kind of
548 national visibility was extremely important. I could have started the same thing at Riverside as
549 here. It's just that here, it turned out to be a much more fruitful place in terms of resources
550 because we exploded. I mean, when I came, there were years when thought 7500 was steady
551 state. I don't think it was until the late seventies before we changed our view. So that, of course,
552 helped enormously. Then we made wonderful appointments. We appointed Bob [Robert] Israel.
553 Your design program has now got national visibility. And, of course, the biggest one was Allen
554 Schneider. That's a fascinating story.

555 **CHODOROW:** How did you bring him in?

556 **WAGNER:** Well, Allen was an old friend. When I was at Smith College doing my masters
557 work after the war, we were six male graduate students at Smith. Allen came to see a show that
558 a very dear friend of his directed at Smith that I was in—*Skin of our Teeth*. And Allen was a hot
559 young director at that time—probably in his late twenties, early thirties—at the Arena in
560 Washington. And he saw the play, and we sort of met each other in that way. And then, over the
561 years in different circumstances, we would run across each other. Once, in a mind-boggling
562 way, we spent—the two families—three days at Grossinger's [Catskill Resort Hotel]. We both
563 ended up—this is a resort hotel in the Catskill Mountains—

564 **CHODOROW:** Probably the eye of the Jewish alps.

565 **WAGNER:** Oh, exactly. Totally that.

566 **CHODOROW:** The place where all the great comics and performers from the twenties and
567 thirties went.

568 **WESTBROOK:** And where is that?

569 **WAGNER:** The Catskills?

570 **WESTBROOK:** No, I know where the Catskills are, but where are the *[inaudible]*

571 **CHODOROW:** Near Liberty, right?

572 **WAGNER:** Not near those. Liberty, New York. I can't remember—I do know the name of the
573 towns where they were, but I can't remember them. But when Allen and I saw each other, we
574 were in a room with a pool table. And, I don't know, we were at either end, and we turned and
575 we looked and we saw each other. And both of us silently said, "What are you doing here?"
576 Cause it was not the kind of place that sophisticated intellectual theater people went. So we
577 knew each other. In 1977—1977-78, that year—the American Theater Association, which I was
578 a vice-president of, held their yearly conference in December of '78 in New Orleans, and Allen
579 was a keynote speaker. And on the day that he arrived, which was about the second day, a
580 whole group of us were leaving the hotel to go to one of the fine restaurants that we knew in
581 New Orleans, having lived there for two years. And Allen was just getting off a taxi. We greet
582 each other, and he says, "Arthur, I have to talk to you." I said, "Well, Allen, when I get back
583 tonight, I'll give you a call—I'll give your room a call." So I go off—what does Allen Schneider
584 want to talk to me about? He is the head of the theater division at the Juilliard. I'm an acting
585 teacher of some renowned. Allen is going to offer me a job—New York.

586 So we got back—I got back very late—and I called, and we agree that it was too late, that we
587 would meet the next morning. And so I go into the room and we sit down, and I forget how the
588 conversation started, but Allen read something because he said, "No, no, Arthur. I'm not going
589 to offer you a job." He says, "Jean and I want to move to California. Do you know of any places
590 where we might go?" Boy, did he come to the right person. Maybe he knew that, but he didn't
591 specifically say "your place." He was really asking advice, or apparently so. Well, of course, we
592 recruited him in no time. You know, Paul Saltman—I went into Paul—Paul understood this. And
593 that's how Allen came on the faculty. Now that was not easy—he was a very difficult person—
594 but it was part of our expanding reputation to have somebody of that stature. He was the dean
595 of American directors, who became productive again after he joined us. He went to Juilliard
596 because the work had sort of quieted down. But then when he was with us, he became very
597 productive. And then, of course, he was the first holder of the Quinn Martin Chair. In fact, the
598 only holder of the Quinn Martin Chair. Because we don't appoint somebody to that, we do it

599 every—you know, for the spring quarter. And then, maybe most importantly of all, our students,
600 you know, are out there, making their mark, mostly in regional theater. We don't have any movie
601 stars, but we have a lot of people working seriously in—

602 **CHODOROW:** Except for the woman who did the-the Mexican American woman—who did
603 Water Like—

604 **WAGNER:** And we didn't take her in the acting program. That's why she went in the
605 dramaturgy program. Did you know that?

606 **CHODOROW:** No, I didn't.

607 **WAGNER:** [laughs] That was one of the most embarrassing things we ever did.

608 **CHODOROW:** But you know, she's just made—what she calls—a mockumentary—*The Day*
609 *the Mexicans Disappeared*—which is an attempt to show what would happen to California if all
610 the Mexicans suddenly disappeared.

611 **WAGNER:** Oh really? Yeah, that's Yareli [Arizmendi] is her name.

612 **CHODOROW:** The state would shut down.

613 **WAGNER:** Absolutely. I think there's a play of that kind. I think it's a play.

614 **CHODOROW:** Is it a play?

615 **WAGNER:** Oh, yes. I've seen productions of it. That's what she's doing, she's using a play to
616 do that. But yeah, Yareli was a—but she only made that movie—nothing else came out of her.
617 She was marvelous, and she was good actress, but she was not quite up to the snuff of our
618 applicants that year. So she has an MFA in Dramaturgy—she's one of our graduates. Directors
619 who've gone out there and made a mark—Michael, of course, being a very, very important one.
620 Playwrights—Naomi Iizuka [?]
621 I can't pronounce her last name—who's one of the leading
622 young contemporary playwrights out there. So it's a combination. And then the faculty. Now we
623 have on this faculty a lighting designer, who either wins a Tony or is up for a Tony Award, which
624 he was this last year. We hired a set designer who has won Tonys, mainly working with Hal
Prince; she did *Candide*.

625 **CHODOROW:** This designer replaced Robert?

626 **WAGNER:** Not really because Robert went some time ago. It was to replace Debbie—she's
627 a costume designer. I'm sorry, she's a costume designer, so she replaced Debbie. And that was
628 a wonderful replacement. Les Waters, who has the directing program, is a very well-known
629 English director. And now, of course, the appointment of Kyle Donnelly to our chair is going to
630 increase that even more so, especially for acting; especially for acting, it's going to be— The
631 acting program has been slightly in limbo. Walter was head of it awhile, but then he went on, I
632 think, to become head of theater, and then it was sort of run by committee there for a while. So
633 this is a real first head of acting who's going to come in with a vision, and do what she does.
634 And, you know, the next one we knock off the list is NYU, who, I think, are vulnerable,
635 especially—as soon as Zelda leaves. Cause Zelda Fichandler—it's a person who usually does
636 these kinds of things, who really establishes it. You don't want to ignore the undergraduate
637 program, because we have a very active—I think there's about 150 majors now.

638 **CHODOROW:** Oh good. And dance added a lot to that.

639 **WAGNER:** Ah, now the dance, that was interesting edition.

640 **CHODOROW:** I engineered that.

641 **WAGNER:** I'm sorry, you what?

642 **CHODOROW:** I engineered that.

643 **WAGNER:** Yes, it was very important.

644 **CHODOROW:** Got them out of the P.E. department—

645 **WESTBROOK:** Oh, that's right.

646 **CHODOROW:** And persuade the department of theater to take them on.

647 **WAGNER:** I was on your team.

648 **WESTBROOK:** Is this when P.E. was closing up?

649 **CHODOROW:** It was before it.

650 **WAGNER:** Let me tell you about dance because that's interesting. Because when I came, I
651 could have had a dance program. I said no, we will not have a dance program, because I had

652 seen too many instances in which the dance program wagged the dog. Very popular. Quickly
653 getting a lot of resources and things like that. That was the situation at Riverside—the dance
654 program had more power than the theater part, and they were in the same department. Now,
655 when Margaret called me to talk about this this last time, then I immediately went—I guess it
656 was Adele [Shank], who must have the chair—and I said, "Adele, I think now is the time to do
657 this because it makes practical sense. Now we can use those students that they have." And it's
658 worked out beautifully.

659 **CHODOROW:** It has.

660 **WAGNER:** And I think eventually there's going to be a graduate program in that.

661 **CHODOROW:** And I think that if they do succeed in recruiting someone—

662 **WAGNER:** That's what they need to do.

663 **CHODOROW:** —very well-known. You know, one person they will— That's it. It's the same
664 principle you just mentioned.

665 **WAGNER:** Absolutely, absolutely. And then it helps with the recruiting, and recruiting of
666 faculty, and everything of that kind.

667 **CHODOROW:** Do you want to add anything or ask any questions?

668 **WESTBROOK:** [*inaudible*] fascinating.

669 **CHODOROW:** It's been a great, great talk.

670 **WAGNER:** Yeah, okay? I mean, enough stuff?

671 **CHODOROW:** Perfect. Absolutely terrific.

672 **WAGNER:** Well, it's an interesting narrative.

673 **CHODOROW:** It has people, it has ideas. I mean, it's exactly what we're looking for.

674 **WAGNER:** Great. Terrific.

[END OF INTERVIEW]