

S h e l d o n P a t i n k i n

OK, it is June seventh, 1998. This is an interview with Sheldon Patinkin, chair of the Theater Department, Columbia College Chicago.

And if you can start by telling us when you came to Columbia and what the circumstances were that brought you here.

I began at Columbia as chair of the Theater/Music Department, which it was then and has been up until last month, when the Theater/Music Department separated into two departments. In September of 1980 I was called by Bill Russo to see if I'd be interested in the job. I said, "No," because my teacher, Paul Sills, was also up for the job and he needed it and I was actually making more money at that point than I was when I took the job. And when Paul was turned down for the job, Bill called me again and I was curious enough, especially since Bill told me that the department was falling apart. He was in charge of the Music Program and he is now the Music Department chair. And that there was some talk about his closing down if it didn't turn around because it was not in good shape, there were only about seventy-five or eighty students in the department, between theater and music. And that was interesting. So I went and interviewed; essentially I interviewed them rather than them interviewing me for the most part, and said, "No." And then I was taken out to lunch by a couple of people and said "No" again. I was, at the time, writing for Second City for development deals that they had with Universal Pictures for comedy, films, and with NBC for comedy sitcoms, for sitcom pilot ideas. And

Bernie Sahlins, who was at the time the head of Second City, suggested that I might want to take the job because it would be a power base. I didn't know what that meant but it sounded like a good idea, so I took the job. And I took it with the understanding that if I didn't like it I'd keep it for a year and if I did like it I'd keep it for five years. And I ended up loving it, so I'm still here after eighteen years. Is that what you needed to know?

How did you know Bill Russo?

Why did he call you?

When I was the Artistic Director of Second City in the '60s, Bill, who was also friendly with Paul Sills at the time, asked me if I would stage a jazz opera he'd written based on Othello which Columbia was doing for high schools around the city. And I said I would, we got to know each other that way. And he had earlier called to ask if I'd be interested in a job and I said, "No."

So you had a professional relationship with him acknowledged as a peer in Chicago. Right.

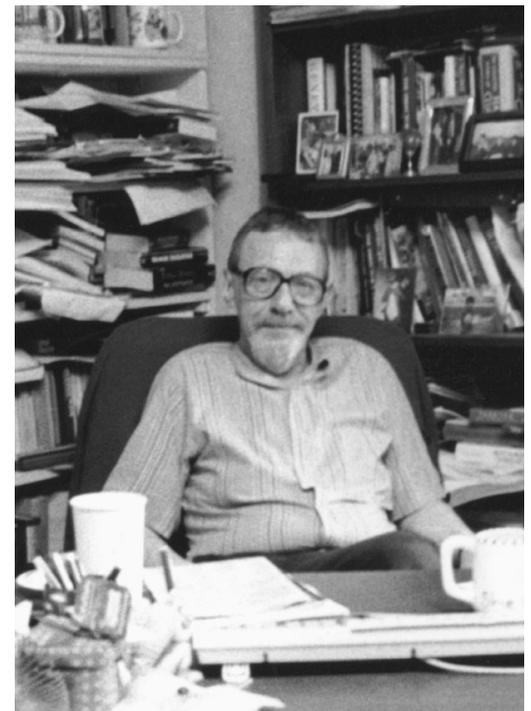
What, do you remember, what were some of the things were that the individuals that were trying to convince you to come here, what they said about Columbia? And did you have any impressions about Columbia before you came here, how did they try to sell you on Columbia, and what did you find?

Their trying to sell me on it was largely based on how much they needed me, frankly.

Ego-stroking.

Yeah, more or less. I was, I had been out of Chicago from '68 to '78

doing New York stuff and doing some film and TV stuff and then in Toronto doing Second City again and SCTV. And I guess what was most interesting about it, because I didn't understand what "power base" meant, was that I would have the opportunity to build a Theater Department basically from scratch. I went to the University of Chicago, which has no theater department. All that we did was outside of school hours, although frequently inside of school hours as well, and we eventually, in 1953, broke away from the University Theater and formed our own theater, which eventually became an improv theater called the Compass and then it became Second City. And when I came back in '78, I started directing again and built up enough of a reputation so that I was enough of a name in town for them to want me as an attraction; that part of it didn't interest me. But that's part of what Bernie was talking about when he said, "power base." I don't



understand the concepts of power very well, except satirically. And having no experience with a theater department, except for three tumultuous and extremely unhappy months at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York when I was living there. I quit, actually, after four weeks but I had to fulfill my contract for three months because it was a nest of politics, essentially. I mean, I had friends and enemies on the faculty I hadn't met yet. It was strange. And I knew that theater departments in general, that are not really attached to a college, are separate, noncredited factories. I knew the theater departments were subject to grave political things and that colleges and universities were subject to grave political things. But I also knew that it was not usual for a theater department to be staffed with professionals. And that, to me, seemed like a very interesting difference.

As it turns out, it's a great part of why the school and the department are so successful. It's one of the best rules about Columbia College, as a matter of fact. There are a lot of good rules; it's a good school. And when I took the job, I also said, "Do not expect me to participate in college-wide activities much or campus politics." And they all laughed. And then when I started not participating they got angry; there wasn't that much at that time. It's much more, as we've grown bigger, of course, the jockeying for positions of power and politics have become much more harder, daily life around here. Although I'm glad to say not in my department, our department. And we very quickly built up a head of steam in the department. I restructured it. Actually, the person who was the chair before me, Paul

Carter-Harrison, who is still here and ought to be interviewed, I was given to understand was hired basically four years earlier to calm the department down, that had turned into nude men dancing up and down the aisles of Rockefeller Chapel and things like that, it was a—and then started disintegrating totally. In fact, the only thing I was told by Mike Alexandroff, when I had my interview with him after I accepted the job, that I could not do was to hire the chair before Paul Carter-Harrison, in any capacity whatsoever. And so since she was an old friend of mine it created some problems in our relationship. She was, in fact, Bernie Sahlins' ex-wife. It was complicated, anyway...

Was she hoping that you might bring her back in some capacity?

Yeah, oh yeah. She actually was rather assuming that she would be made a teacher in the department, but I was not allowed to nor did I really want to. And then one of the things that turned the department around rapidly was the guys who wrote Grease, Warren Casey and Jim Jacobs, were becoming friends of mine because we were both on the Jeff committee together. And they had a new musical which no one would do called Island of the Lost Co-eds. And Warren asked if we'd be interested in doing it at the school. And I had already heard from many people that it was really bad and I said yes before reading it, because I knew we'd get publicity from it. And it wasn't that bad, it was cute and we got an enormous amount of publicity from it because it was the second musical by the guys that wrote Grease, and press coverage and reviews and stuff. And that started building things. And then I decided the next year to have guest artists in our shows. The first show was with members of the Remains Company, the second

show was with Laurie Metcalf, and the third show was this big splash produced by three women who had many ties to money and society. It was an enormous production of Clare Booth Luce's *The Women*, with a great revolving set by Michael Meritt, furs and jewelry and vintage clothing borrowed from friends and relatives all over the city and a big benefit for Second City to raise the rest of the money we needed for the production. It got huge press coverage and the next year we had doubled the size of the department. And I continued the guest artist thing for a while, until the students started complaining that they weren't getting leading roles. And the critics were starting to compare the professionals in the show to the students unfavorably, at which point—well, not so much unfavorably as constantly saying, "You can always see the difference." And by that point we were big enough, well, eighteen years ago we had about eighty-five majors between theater and music, now we have close to four hundred in theater alone. They're not all majors but we've got about four hundred students taking courses in the department; it's way too big.

We'll get to that later.

Much later. And so I stopped the guest artist thing. Although I'm beginning it again, we're beginning it again next season a little bit with faculty members because the students have started asking for it again.

I want to back up just a bit because you talked about that. You didn't come out of a theater department, a traditional...

I've never had a theater class in my life that was for credit.

How, what were your models, or did you have models and what...
When I was six years old, five years old, we lived across the street from a Chicago park that had a field house in it with a library on one end and a big auditorium on the other end and a gymnasium in the middle. And I was on my way to the library one day and I stopped where the auditorium was and looked in and there was a kid's show rehearsing. And I watched it until there was a break then I walked down to the front and said to the women, it was the director, that I wanted to do that. And somebody had just quit the show and that's how I started theater.

What park was it?

Ogden Park in Englewood. I was already playing the piano, and then when I was seven I started—I was taken into a group called the All Children's Grand Opera Company, which did full length opera every year in the original language, with children in all the roles.

Are you kidding me?

I'm dead serious. Very few people have had this experience in their lives. And I was [Pappagano] in Magic Flute at the age of eight and [Dozuozetti] in Carmen at the age of nine and I continued to about a year after my voice changed, at which point I realized I didn't have a very good voice anymore, I stopped. I still direct operas. I teach at the Lyric Opera Center.

What was it like seeing a children's production?

I don't know. I was in them, I didn't see them.

Did your parents go?

My parents not only went; my mother made all our relatives go. They hated me for years.

I mean was it a novelty, was it serious, novelty or Little Rascals kind of...

Well, we took it seriously. No, no, no, we did them straight.

You did them straight.

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, we did them here.

Really?

When I walked into this building the first day as chair of the department, I walked into the building where I had sung in operas when I was a kid and where I had gone to Hebrew high school; because this was the College of Jewish Studies before they moved to the campus...

Had you been here many, I mean, was it a flashback or...

Oh, it was weird for a couple of days, yeah. This was the office of the head of the College of Jewish Studies.

And you weren't in here for discipline reasons?

No, never. At any rate, and then when I was eight I went to Jack and Jill Playhouse for a year and learned how to do things like say, "Prunes, beans, prunes, beans, and a big black bug bit a big black bear." And "Rubber baby buggy bumpers." That's a hard one, stuff like that. And I was in a couple of plays with that. I learned how to put on make-up wrong. And that only lasted a year, I didn't like it. And I was in plays in school, in high school. And then in college I was accepted as a member of the University Theater, which was an extracurricular, after school thing. We did, I think, the first play was William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. And part of that group was Paul Sills. He started, on Saturday afternoons, a class teaching the improv games that his mother had developed. And after a

year of that we opened our own theater on the North Side called Playwright's Theater Club, which ran for two years with people like Ed Asner, and Mike Nichols and Elaine May and Barbara Harris, Joyce Piven, and Paul was the Artistic Director; David Shepard was the Producer—and that lasted for a little under two years—Josephine Forsburg, major improv teacher in town. And then out of that they formed the first improv theater which was the Compass in Hyde Park, and then on the North Side, and then in St. Louis, and then in '59, Second City opened. Now we're having our fortieth anniversary a year from December. That, plus doing a lot of directing of plays and operas and reviews and musicals and writing for television and writing some movies and stuff like that. I've had a long career, and I always earn my living in my field.

So was it a good fit that you wanted to use working actors in your department and that was the message being given to you from Columbia or was it something...

Working with theater people, it's not just actors; all of our faculty, design, directing, the technical, they're all professionals. That's the whole school.

And that fit well with Columbia or is that something that you brought?

No, no, no, that's Columbia's rule.

And so that was a good fit for you then.

Oh yeah. It also allowed, and part of it, a power position, is that it allowed me to hire needy and really talented people. Like the first four or five years here a lot of our acting faculty were Steppenwolf people until they got rich and famous,

stuff like that. And our faculty are all really hard working and well-known professionals in the Chicago theater community.

Could you expand on that, your philosophy, as it has developed here, of what you're trying to do as a department and for the students?

Unlike most theater departments, we're not academically oriented. We are product oriented, in essence. We do an enormous number of shows every year. We do six fully produced main season shows and anywhere from twelve to twenty—that's in a year—and anywhere from twelve to twenty workshop productions a semester. We have a lot of directing students and each of them has to direct a play a semester during their last two years. So we have—and then our faculty also likes to do workshops here because they get a chance to work on shows and the styles that they don't necessarily get a chance to work on in the professional world. So we usually have anywhere from twelve to eighteen directing projects a semester and anywhere from two to four faculty workshops a semester, plus we now have a Freshman Performance Workshop. We do three shows a year that are only open to freshmen. And they create the shows themselves with a faculty member as a director; we're very busy. And that doesn't count the music stuff, which now, fortunately, is mostly moving into its own building.

So that took over the Sherwood?
Yeah.

And is that something, you said that, you know, you really, you said, "No," many times to coming

here. And they said, "If you don't like it you can stay..." How many years?
One.

One. "If you do like it, please stay five." So you came and you liked it immediately. What was it that you liked or that you felt that this is where you belonged?
The faculty.

The faculty, College-wise?

No, no. I didn't even know anybody in the faculty outside of this department for a while because I never went to any of the meetings.

So you knew how many of the people that were already in place?

For the most—to a certain extent, we grew fast. We grew large very fast; we grew big very quickly. I was a college English teacher for four and a half years. That's what my degrees are in, in English lit. It astonishes my students when I can correct the grammar and punctuation on their papers and do.

They'll thank you in the long run.

Another thing about me, as opposed to most if not all of the other chairs, is that I teach three to four courses a semester. So, I'm a teacher and I now have co-teachers for all the classes, so that when I have to miss there's still somebody there. But part of why I liked the job is because I love teaching the students here. Another part of why I like the job is because the faculty in my department, in our department, are as committed as I am to the teaching process. We, I, because they're all working professionals; again, unlike most theater departments, we don't have a [one] system for teaching—we do for voice training, otherwise it would be really confusing to the actors.

We know what, everyone knows what has to be accomplished in any given semester of a class, but how it's accomplished is up to what the teacher wants. And the teachers are constantly coming in with suggestions for changes; we're always changing things: the content of course, adding courses, taking away courses, etc. We drive the administration crazy with our constant changes in the schedule. And another thing about the College as a whole that I find a very valuable part of our, although it also creates its own problems, is the open admissions policy—in that it does two things that I think are very important. It teaches a lot of people very quickly that although they want to do this, it is not what they want to do to try an earn a living for the rest of their lives. I think that's important, rather than allowing people to dream about what might have been. And another thing is that basically every other theater department and theater program in the country requires an audition; we can't because of the open admissions policy. As a result of which a lot of people who don't know how to audition, but are really talented, get the training they need. The problem is that it leads to very uneven first year classes, very uneven. And we sometimes lose a couple of the good ones, along with the ones that shouldn't be doing it, because they get fed up with their classmates. But the professional faculty and the open admissions policy, I think, are wonderful aspects of this College; certainly for this department.

That kind of takes us into—what do you see as the mission of the College and how does the Theater Department maybe synch or does it differ at all, in your words.

And, you know, has that changed over the years since you came to Columbia?

That's a very complicated question, oh my, you're making me nervous (laughs), if this is meant to be a permanent record, especially.

Only say what you're comfortable with but...

Well, I'm, for a long time—when ever I would start getting particularly teased about not coming to meetings—I would come to a meeting and open my mouth, as a result of which they were quite happy when I didn't come to the next few meetings. I consider my job, at most meetings, either to be the voice of reason or the person who makes jokes; sometimes both. But sometimes I just might get angry because a lot of the meetings I attend are about process and not about result and I'm a very result-oriented person. So I get bored and irritated. Also, over the last few years there's been a major increase in jockeying for power and position etc., etc., as we've grown bigger than we can handle. I think the biggest single problem with the College, that the College has at the moment and it is doing something about it, is that it grew from a small mom and pop organization into an eight thousand, over eight thousand, student body without growing in administration and support system in proportion to the size of the College as it was growing. A system of Band-Aids has been the general progress of the school. But it is being worked on, and I'm certainly not saying anything that everybody isn't aware of. But the process involves a lot of backbiting and a lot of ugliness and the necessity for me to go to a lot more meetings in order to protect

my department. Also, the government has required a lot more things in the last few years than was the case before, which involves a lot more paperwork and a lot more thinking about results in a way that aren't necessarily helpful but are, I guess, important. And, well, the first meeting I attended at the school was, it's not called the College Council. It was called, I don't know, the IPC or the APC or, it changed names about six times an after a while I gave up trying to follow the course of it because it was all initials and I'm not good at that. I listened for about twenty, twenty-five minutes to what was going on at the meeting, which is a long time for me to be quiet, and then raised my hand and said, "This sounds to me like a problem of state's rights versus government, versus federal rights. Is that an accurate description?" And I got yelled at by most of the people in the room, although what it really turned out to be was the departments were really thinking of themselves as separate fiefdoms. And that doesn't work so well when we're this big. And there is a—and will continue to be for a while—a major struggle both between the departments and between the departments and the administration for where power lies in what. And the President now is a very different person from the President then. And there's a lot of friction that comes and goes, that I hate. And I sometimes think that one of the saddest things I can think is that I'm the most rational of the chairs, but every once in a while I am forced to think that. That's a sad statement. But what was the original question?

The mission...

I am avoiding, I am avoiding it.

No, you're doing great but how have you found, you said primarily you're a teacher and with this growth have you been able to find a balance? Or is that a continuous struggle between being the chair and being a teacher and with its growth?

The growth has not affected my ability to do both. The increasing demands from the central administration, to be part of the central administration, that has made things very difficult to a point where—in August of 2000 I will have been here for twenty years and I will reach the age of sixty-five, and I'm thinking about retiring. Not because I want to retire but because I really am not happy with the college administrative part of my job.

The paperwork, the...

The meetings, the arguing, the backbiting, the ugliness, the yelling and being yelled at, it's... I don't know whether I will or not. One of the things that I have done that was very foolish is I have never taken a sabbatical... seriously consider resigning, retiring. If I do retire I want to retire as chair but not as a teacher. However, there are plenty of places I can teach if it would make the new chair uncomfortable, my being here, and I certainly would understand that. Nobody asked me about that when I took over and I had three chairs in my department, former chairs, in my department. It worked out OK, eventually. Eventually being now with one of those, because Bill Russo is finally his own chair (laughs); that's not public. I'm gonna take a sabbatical. As a matter of fact, I've written down, through an application, right now, right after North Central, a year

from Fall, and see if that'll do it. Also, Dr. Duff is retiring in 2001 and I'm sort of curious to see what happens at that point. So we'll see but I am thinking about it. I'm sick of a lot of the administrative stuff—not within the department, I love the department.

Would it, can you see it going any other, I mean, do you think this is part of just being larger? I think it's a part of large, being larger and part of the new government requirements. And also part of it is simply that the chairs, who have been here for a long time, are not adjusting easily to a tighter central administration. Not adjusting easily is a kind way of saying it in some cases. And there's a big confusion right now because there are three different kinds of chair contracts: the old guys who have their former contracts, the new guys who have a much different and less binding contract, and the lib art, the gen ed contracts which are different again from the others. There's also a lot of problems about what's happening with the general education program, which is being developed much more carefully than it ever was before. I mean, you cannot any longer take what I like to call Advanced Basketweaving as a general studies course, which was true in the '60s and the '70s, etc, when it was a hippie school. It's a big adjustment; it's a big change. And some people are trying to drag us, kicking and screaming, back into the nineteenth century and some people are trying to drag us, kicking and screaming, into the twenty-first century. And it's complicated and difficult and I understand all the problems, it's just that I don't like them.

Do you see, in the future, on the horizon, is it, can Columbia maintain its uniqueness, its difference, you know, being seen as this large alternative or...

That depends on who takes over after John. John has done a lot toward making it more traditional. I don't think that was his intention; it's just that's what he knows. And he was given an enormous task when he took over the job, both of building the endowment and of restructuring the College. I think he tried to do too much too fast. And that's why some of the unhappiness exists that exists. He also, with some justification, came into the school thinking of the chairs as the enemy. He'd been warned about us and he took the warning to heart. And it has not been an easy adjustment between chairs and him; it's still not in some cases. And—God, I'm just tired of all the anger, I really am, because I'm not an angry person.

How do you account for the growth? Like why is Columbia— I don't know, I don't think anybody knows, really. I mean, there are as many theories as there are people. We're good. We're less expensive than any other private school in the state, we're centered on the arts and management and all the concomitant virtues that go with it, and our reputation has just grown exponentially over the last fifteen, twenty years because we're good. We are against all of the patterns of growth in colleges and universities across the country. I don't think we can continue counting on it, but we've been saying that for ten years and it still keeps on growing. The problem right now is if it continues growing, where are we going to put them? What the College seems to be doing at the moment is growing in terms of space, and equipment,

and staffing for what there is right now, and not even enough of that, and not growing in terms of what they hope it will be in ten years.

So there's still some of that...

It's all Band-Aids. Sherwood's a Band-Aid; it's small. We need a huge new building and that's a lot of money. And the board doesn't seem particularly interested in doing that any more than they're interested in spending the interest on endowment. There are a lot of problems; they will eventually get solved. What the College will be like after they are solved, it's hard to tell. I'm basically a relatively optimistic person but it does get me down.

It sounds like that the College, since you've been here, is a very different place but, and we really haven't gotten this and maybe that's what we could save for—but it sounds like your department, I don't want to say it's an island, but it sounds like you've maintained..

No, it's an island.

...the traditions of the department, even with its own growth, have maintained

We drive ourselves crazy with the overload. And we work many, many hours a day and many, many hours a week. But yeah, we are basically known as an island by most of the rest of the College. And walking into this building is very different than walking into any of the other buildings; not now, there's nobody here. But although we don't have any particular system, we do have a belief in theater being an ensemble art and that stretches to how we deal with ourselves, and with our students. Everyone is made to understand or made to believe that

they are part of something larger than themselves and it's what everyone contributes that makes it work. Because that's the only way you can do things; it's a collaborative art.

Collaborative as opposed to perhaps maybe even competitive? I mean, is that...

Oh, it's competitive too.

It's competitive too?

Oh yeah, there's a lot of crying when the cast lists go up, things like that. But we also try as much as possible to run the department as a school that is modeled on how the real world of the profession works. We have rules here that are like the rules in the real world, like if you don't show up for an audition and don't cancel, you can't audition for another show for a year, which is an Equity rule. And if you, we have rules like: If you turn down a role that you do not feel is commensurate with your talent, you can't be in another show here. Things like that. And the kids pick it up; they pick it up pretty fast. And the ones that don't, don't make it.

So regardless, you're an open admission, but standards—you instill the professional standards from the get-go for everybody?

Oh yeah, we have to accept them, but we don't have to keep them. That's not part of open admissions. And all of our shows are cast by auditions. Nobody's appointed a role, which is also different from most schools.

Oh really, how is that different?

In most schools a lot of casting is done by, "This person has to have this role, this person have this role, this person needs to work on this." And also, unlike almost every other

school, and it's a rule I knew existed in most other schools that I never understood and still don't understand: Our students are allowed to audition on the outside while they are still students here. Most schools will kick you out if you do that, even during the summer. But we want them to start getting those rejections now while they're cushioned

So they can come back home and... Yeah.

What happens when they get the role, on the occasion when they do?

Oh, they do. We let them.

And then you let them...

Yes, unless it's a long-standing interference with class work. Then they either take an incomplete or they don't take the job. But if it's a commercial or industrial or stuff like that, or a show, office rehearsal, it's an hour in the evening where it doesn't matter to class work, yeah, the teacher will say, "Fine, I'm jealous but go ahead." Oh no, we definitely allow, we encourage it. As a result of which we've got literally dozens of our students, recent students, working around town. And all of our tech and design students are working.

Do you get a lot of transfers from other departments? What's the feedback you have?

Yes, departments no, we get...

Other schools I meant, not departments, other departments of theater in other, what's the feedback you get from those students?

Well, most theater departments are very rigid about the process and how you proceed in it. Ours is much more, not totally, but much

more self-motivated. And if one works for you you stay there, if the other works for you you're gonna come here. We, for instance, get almost all of the students who are kicked out of DePaul after their first and second years and most of them do really well here.

And are there students that maybe need more structure and things...

Yes, and they go away, yeah...

...they go there.

...and they should. It's not that we're not structured, we are structured, but, well, one of the things is we do not, in any way, encourage guruism.

What does that mean?

Most theater departments, a teacher has followers. We want them to take as many of the teachers as they possibly can while they're here to get everybody's experience and make their own system out of it, because no one system works for anybody but the person who uses it.

And that must work well with that idea of the working professional where maybe egos, I mean they're out there, they're doing it.

But, you know, there are a lot of egos here but nobody is looking to be a guru. I don't know.

OK, it is June the seventeenth, 1998 and we are continuing the interview with Sheldon Patinkin. First of all, if you could talk to about what have been your major achievements at Columbia or highlights of your time here.

Oh, I think the whole eighteen years is a highlight. Well, when I took over the department eighteen years ago it basically wasn't struc-

tured above the second year. And there really weren't very many students who were sticking around for more than two years. And over the first three or four years we got a four year program structured for acting concentration, directing concentration, for all the various concentrations that we have in the department, which are acting, directing, set design, costume design, lighting design, tech, playwriting; I think that's it. And we have since added a general design major rather than concentrating on one of the specific areas of design. We have now added a—what we call Theater Lite, which is a BA in Theater without a concentration, where they take courses of various areas of it.

L-I-T-E?

Yeah.

OK. No fat?

We only call it that among ourselves, but it's not published. And we've now developed three minors, one in directing and various ones in design and in playwriting. The first year here, my first year here, I realized that for the most part the students were hermetically sealed in their classes and that there was nothing else, no other way to see their work. So I instituted what we call Performance Week, where they perform the final scenes from their acting classes and directing classes in front of the other students. We have developed an enormous Stage Combat program where students can get certified and are therefore able to teach it and professionally stage combats of various kinds. We have formed Amini Second City unit for developing improvisational techniques and our classes in the Second City technique are accepted

as the mini classes at the Second City Training Center.

The only transferable credits that Second City accepts?

Basically, yeah. Well, that's because our improv teachers are all on the faculty there and I've been with Second City since its beginning. And a lot of my, a lot of the techniques I use for teaching acting were developed in Second City, as a matter of fact. We've grown from, I don't know, eighty majors in Theater and Music together to five hundred, six hundred, whatever it is. And one of the things that I really liked that we used to do that we're gonna start to do again next season is have guest artists in our shows from among the professional people in town. The second year here we had the Remains Company, people from Steppenwolf and Under the Wedding and a lot of people and a lot of glitz for a production of *The Women* that we did. And that, plus doing a new musical by the guys who wrote *Grease* that nobody else would do, certainly put us on the map, we got a lot of publicity out of that, that was my purpose. But now the students are asking for the guest artists again, not for reasons of publicity, we don't need to grow, I don't know where we'd put very much else anyway, but because they want the experience of working with professionals. So we are pulling people out of our faculty and putting them into shows. Our faculty have always basically been the directors of our main season shows. Another thing that has, that I'm really proud of is our directing program, which has grown from three students taking one semester of directing from anywhere from fifteen to twenty students a semester. And in order to graduate with a directing concentration they have to had directed four shows, one a

semester for the last four semesters. So we do an enormous amount of shows here.

What about you? Do you have time to do outside production, directing?

Well, let's see: I'm the Artistic Consultant to the Second City, which means that I'm consulted about various things that are going on, and I watch previews of all their shows. I am on the faculty of the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists, where I teach Acting and direct occasional stage concerts, operas for that. I usually direct one show a year out of the department and a show every other year in the department.

Now do you have to stay, I mean does it have to be pretty much in the Chicago area? Because you said you haven't taken a sabbatical or...

I don't accept work out of town anymore. Well, that's, I can't say that's absolutely true, because with the Lyric Opera Center I directed our concert stage and some [*Carmen* image] in a thing which we did in Rockford, but that was a car trip. No, I prefer not to...

A boring car trip.

Well, yeah, it didn't take that long. We only had to go out there four times altogether including the final concert. We're doing it again at Grant Park this summer. And I'm writing a textbook for my New School Theater History class. And right now I'm preparing a text for *Twelfth Night* which I'm co-directing here next Spring. I can stay very busy. I also frequently watch final rehearsals and more previews of shows being directed by friends who are in town who ask me to come in and talk to them after-

ward. I just got a call from Steppenwolf about the new show that's opening in the studio. And I don't have much free time.

Do you find that that is necessary to keep—I guess what I'm asking is, you know, would you ever allow this job here to become so you couldn't do the opposite work? It has to...

The faculty feels that way. If this is all we do we get too hermetically sealed in. And I couldn't do it that way anyway. I'm capable of saying no nearly often enough. I just think it's a really good department and I'm really proud of it. I'm proud of our faculty. Our students are working. Our graduates are working, a lot of them. We don't have any stars but we have people who are working regularly. All of our tech and design students get work all the time. They do so many shows they get an enormous amount of experience, you know, really ready to go out there. And just in general I'm really pleased with what goes on here. And I'm also, by the way, very pleased that Theater and Music are split into two separate departments. It took eighteen years.

Why did you feel that was important?

Because I didn't have, although we were the Theater/Music Department and I was the chair of the Theater/Music Department, I had never had anything to do with the music program and I've always felt that it was a sham and occasional inconvenience. And I think it's just more honest this way. The reason it hasn't happened up until now is up until now Bill Russo hasn't been willing to be called a chair because he didn't want the added responsibilities. I don't know

why he wants them now, since they're much more than they were eighteen years ago in terms of what has to be done for the government, and what has to be done for the office, and how many committees he's gonna be on. I think I'm on six. Unlike most other chairs, I teach a lot. I teach three to four classes a semester and everyone knows that. And I also do a lot of work on the outside, etc., etc., etc. So everyone is understanding of the fact that I can't make every meeting I'm supposed to be at. And it's never because I just don't want to go; it's always because I've got something that I must do that's part of my job, either here or elsewhere.

And will that understanding, I mean, do you see that as the school grows, making, tailoring things to specific individuals, become harder?

If not, I leave. It's as simple as that. If, well, as I've said to Bert Gall, Caroline Latta last year when it was really getting intense around here, "I'm starting to feel like I should be teaching less so that I can be available for more committee meetings. And if that is the case, I don't want to be here anymore."

Do you, do you think that feeling comes from other people's expectations well...

No, it just came from how many committees I was on and how much paperwork was being asked of everybody.

And are you asked to be on those committees or are you told to be on those committees? Do you have control over this?

Well, yes and no. I could say no. All chairs have to be on a certain number of committees, it's part of the job description at this point. I am on the College Council because

I'm considered to be reasonable. I am on the Academic Affairs Committee because I want to be. That's the one committee I'm on that actually gets work done instead of just talking about process all the time.

What does that, why did you want to be on that one and...

I didn't know I wanted to be on it until I got on it. We really get a lot of work done. It's excellent, I'm pleased. I don't think I've missed more than two meetings in two years of that.

And can you point to some examples of what you've gotten done on that committee?

We deal with all questions that come from the Curriculum Committee about Academic Affairs. And we spent a long time last year developing a job description for a new dean that got turned down by the Council, as we knew it would. We deal with anything that they want to throw at us, basically. If there's a question about it that is in any way affecting how the academics of the school work it comes to our council. And we don't talk about process; we talk about the problem. I've got a three-page list of what we accomplished last year, which you can get off of the Internet. What else am I on? I'm on the Sabbatical Committee which is, of course, ironic, and that only meets twice a year, so I said OK to that. And for reasons I'm not quite sure of I was asked to become part of the Executive Committee of the Council this next year and I am now the Vice President of the Council. I was told by Richard Woodbury, who is the President, that that means meeting for an hour or so before the Council meetings or after the Council meetings

and being responsible for making sure that the coffee is there. If that's all it is, that's OK. If it becomes more than that I will resign. What else am I on? I was on Search Committee for the new chair of the Film Department, which took us two years to hire: Ira Abrams, who got fired in three months. That scandal is still going on. So I refuse to be on any other Search Committees ever, although I think I will volunteer to be on the Search Committee for the new President. I won't say why because this is public. All I will say is that I was not on the Search Committee for the last new President. What else?

Well, maybe you could talk about, as well, any crisis that your department made it through, or have things been fairly smooth with you at the helm for eighteen years or the College, or you?
We're dealing with theater people.

There's always a crisis?
Exactly. We exist on a, "We'll fix this one next because this is the one that came up next." It is, for instance, very hard to have a five-year plan for this department. We change things about the curriculum pretty much every semester; certainly every year. We drive them crazy periodically because we're changing things that are already in print. But we're very, very aware of the specific needs of the students and they change. There's no pun intended here but the complexion of the student body changes, has changed enormously over these last eighteen years, and has required constant adjustment. What does not change here very much at all is our faculty. We keep them; they like being here.

And it sounds like you're comfortable, for the most part, with the fluidity or the ability to make differing demands as they come up.

Comfortable? Well, we know how to do it. We do it but it's, really, we are a crisis center. It gets worse right before Christmas when everybody goes into predepression and it's very difficult among the seniors during the last two months of the Spring semester of their undergraduate years. There's a lot of crying and hair tearing and concern and changes in personality. There are not very many faculty crises. Those we work out pretty easily, pretty well. You know, there's certain people who are always in crisis, you know about them. We're prepared as much as you can be. But I wouldn't still be here if this were a place that was constantly in torment. As I'm sure I said last time, when I took the job I said if I liked it I'd keep it for five years. But I really do like it. I just don't love what I have to do outside of the department most of the time.

And is that becoming a bigger issue?
Yes.

How, to change the subject not so subtly, but you said that curriculum can change semester to semester depending on...
What gets accomplished in a particular class? Frequently we're redoing the whole thing; the whole College has to rewrite their course descriptions over the Summer and Fall. And we're going to take advantage of that and make sure there's a...