

VDC Interview Transcript

Gladys Bailin

11.03.16

Total Time: 1:22:08

Ohio University

Athens OH

Key:

CF: Candace Feck

GB: Gladys Bailin

MDB: Mean Davis Bushway

CF: It is an understatement to say that you have had a long, distinguished, and varied career in dance. In this project, focusing on Ohio dance, we are most interested in your role with the Dance Department at Ohio University. However, I think your coming to Athens from your multiple engagements with Nikolais, Louis, Redlich, and so on, are closely related to the work that you have done at Ohio University — or at least to your transition in coming here. So I wonder if we could begin by laying some of that groundwork...would you mind talking about what you were doing in New York prior to coming here?

GB: Well, half of my life was in New York, and I would say now it's a little more than half of that I've been in Ohio — which is shocking to me, to even think about that. Yeah, I did all of my training in New York. I was born in the city, lived in lower Manhattan and had access to remarkable training — in *all* the arts. All the arts! It was just a great immigrant neighborhood that provided —

Henry Street just provided *everything*, and my family took advantage of that, and I was the beneficiary. I took piano lessons, and I took dancing lessons and I took lessons for — I don't know, they were probably a nickel or something, I don't know (laughing). I went to school in New York City, I went to college in New York City — I went to Hunter College, and when I *went* there, it was free! Can you *imagine* college being free?! You know, Bernie Sanders doesn't *remember* that — he's younger than I am, but there *was* a time when the city colleges were available to everybody at no charge.

(We pause for a brief sound adjustment)

Do you *want* all this background?

CF: I do...but we won't linger there, because I'd like to lead from that history into what you brought here, to Athens, Ohio.

GB: Okay, because that also goes into later... I taught at NYU with Jean [Erdman].

CF: You and Jean were more or less the founders of that program. Is that right?

GB: Well, *she* was brought in as the first Director...

CF: Okay...

GB: And then she hired me.

CF: ...and then it became Tisch¹ sometime later...

GB: That's right.

(We pause for another brief technical discussion)

GB: I just did a whole program on her — I just talked about her two weeks ago! In New York...² There were several people who met Jean at different times of her life and covered different aspects; I talked about her as an artist/teacher. She was a wonderful lady! Wonderful.

CF: Let's pick back up with the Henry Street Playhouse...

GB: Okay. I think I was just talking about going to college for free (she laughs), which is so odd to people nowadays, isn't it? Anyhow, I studied with whoever came to teach, and just out of sheer being at the right place at the right time, Alwin Nikolais arrived in 1948 to a place that had really not been a dance center at all, but was primarily a theater. But he saw its potential, and he was going to bring it back. There were, the first year, ten GIs — you know what *that* is — the guys who came out of World War II, and could go to any school — and two teenagers: I was one, and my friend Phyliss³ was the other. Phyliss [Lamhutt] is younger than I am. And that's how we started. The following summer was a very important summer for me:

Nik was teaching with Hanya Holm at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, and he asked me if I'd like to come. And I said I'd *love* to do that! And it was an eight-week summer session, and I thought "Oh my God! I could dance for eight weeks in the summer..." I said, "but I just couldn't afford to do that" — so he got me a scholarship, and a *work* scholarship. So, my room and board was paid for, and the tuition was paid for, and I just had to find my way out there. And at that time, in '49, I went by train —

and sat, the entire trip! But when you're, you know, eighteen, nineteen years old, it doesn't seem too difficult to do. And when I think about it now, the *convergence* of events was *so* remarkable.

Three days later, when I got off the train, the first person that I saw was this young man, whose name was Murray Louis.

I mean, *how* could that be? Right? He had come from the west coast, also fresh out of the navy. He had a relative who lived in Colorado Springs, so he met the train. There were a few of us, and we all went and had iced tea, and then went to the college.

So he became a good friend, and then of course Nik's classes were very exciting. They were, to me, much more exciting than Hanya's. Hanya [Holm] was a task-master, very Germanic, very precise —

¹ Tisch School of the Arts in Manhattan was founded in 1965.

² Bailin spoke about Erdman at a 100th birthday celebration of her life and work in NYC

³ Phyliss Lamhutt, dancer who also began her performance career with Alwin Nikolais.

you didn't move onto the next thing until you perfected the previous thing — and Nik was much freer, open, and it was great to be in his class. So, eight weeks of that, I was hooked — *forever*.

When Nik came back to New York, lots of other people loved him, and the school increased — doubled, actually, so now there were 25, 26 people — many of whom were very serious dance students.

Nik was evolving his ideas. And we were his *clay*, in a sense. We were willing to go along...he'd come up with interesting ideas almost every day in the technique class.

He set up a course of study that was so unusual. You had to come every day, and at that time because everyone was working in some kind of a job, classes were in the evening. We had technique class from 6:00 to 7:30; we had improvisation — what he called 'Theory class, from 7:30 – 8:30; then from 8:30 – 10:00, we would have various classes: composition, percussion, pedagogy and notation. He was developing a notation system, because he knew Labanotation, but he thought it was cumbersome. He called his system *Choroscript*. It actually was a very nice system, and we learned that as a form of movement analysis, something that I was completely unaware of. You know, you'd have to figure out where your arms are and where your legs are in relation to your torso, and so it was very enlightening, at that point. Then we had composition one day a week, and then we had to learn how to play rhythms and drums, and then pedagogy — how to teach.

He had this wonderful plan: he was going to develop the school and he needed teachers to teach at every level — you know, youngsters up through high school,

and that was the thing —

those people who stayed with him were going to become the teachers. I mean it was a self-generating operation that was so beautifully thought through! And I think that's why we all stayed, because it provided us with a (very limited) income, but nevertheless, it was a skill — we were learning skills. So that developed. In the meantime, he was also developing us as dancers, and realized we needed performing experience, and he would make pieces for children. We would perform them on Saturday, and it was a nickel for the local children. And they were fabulous little pieces: sometimes we spoke, we danced — they were little narratives, but they were based on Indian myth, American Indian myth — or other little stories of various kinds. *Alice in Wonderland* was another one. I mean, it just was endless! So, we got a lot of experience. And then when he thought that maybe these people who stayed with him had learned enough, then the serious work started.

But all along, he would encourage us to make our own pieces — and he would produce them! I mean I think back, and I don't think anything has existed like it since! It was modeled after the Mary Wigman School in Germany and modified for us in America. I think we try to do that in a university setting, but not to the same degree, because even as focused as it is in a university, the students are still distracted because they have all these other things, whereas here it was a set period of time where nothing else mattered. And you were totally focused on your training; you had your work, but that was separate — because you had to pay your rent. Anyhow, it is something that I treasure, and realize was unique.

CF: Were you still at Hunter during this time?

GB: I did a lot of that during the time — and he *waited* for some of us to graduate. Murray [Louis] came, and I think he was doing a Masters at NYU, and I finished college in '51/'52. Then he moved all the classes to the daytime, and so people had to find their work in the evening or in the early morning. So classes went to the afternoon — and then at some point, he said “No, we’re going to be very professional; we’re going to move it to the morning” — and we had classes in the morning...I think starting at 10:00 and going from 10:00 to 1:00 — and then there was a rehearsal period. So, if you were serious about it, if you were asked to be in the company, then you had to be free during those daytime hours. There were jobs at that time that were “temp” jobs — typing: right? Who does typing anymore? It was just a whole different time of life, just a different period. So, people managed! And some of us managed with a little bit of teaching here and there, especially on the week-end. Saturday was a very big day — and there were after-school activities for kids. I think we had to be finished with rehearsal by 4:00, because that was for after-school activities, and there would be dance classes at that time for kids right after school, and evening was devoted to teaching adults. So, you know, the place was active all of the time! And because Nik was such a wonderful theatre person, he did a lot in the theatre — we had the theatre there, too. See, that was the other thing: the two studios were upstairs and the theatre was downstairs. We often had composition class on the stage in the theatre, so you could sit back and see from a performance distance — I mean, it was ideal! And we just don’t have that anymore.

It was a fantastic background, and it was hard to leave — because we were encouraged individually to do our stuff. And the thing that I also appreciate now, which I did not see at the time, is that he allowed us to all grow in our own way

— and I think it was partly because he was not a dancer — we did not have to emulate him! Because at that time in the 50s, you know, Graham was still very active — and you could spot a Graham dancer, because the training developed the muscle memory in a very particular way and the dancers all looked like they had Graham training! The Nikolais people, I think, probably had something unique as well, but it was harder to point out —

it was not so much a stylistic thing as a way of planning your movement. It was a way of seeking the movement — because he did a lot in “How do you find sources?” — that was a lot of what he did. Very provocative classes...and I think that allowed us all to find something individual about ourselves.

CF: I hear a lot in that description that likely came with you in your own pedagogy, developing yourself as a professor here. But I also wonder how formative it was for you to go and begin a program at NYU. Maybe you could talk about that — how that came about and what you did.

GB: Yeah. Well, I stayed with Nik through the '50s and early '60s. We did a lot. In 1962, he was invited to Spoleto, when it was still in Italy, with Gian Carlo Menotti running the program, and I really wanted to do that. It was very exciting to be there. It was after that that — I was still doing work with Murray Louis and with Nik, and I felt maybe I needed to do some other things as well. Also, in 1963, my husband and I adopted our son, and being a mother — he was only four weeks old when we adopted him — that was a whole other life, too, to become a parent — *suddenly* a parent. I was still active professionally — I wasn’t going to give up my life — but I was now divided in some way. I needed to spend some time at home and I needed to spend some time as a mother and still keep my active life going. It was in some ways limiting, which was unfortunate; timing was such — I mean, you make choices in your life, right? Nik’s work was very, very popular at that time,

and he was getting more and more touring, and the touring was starting to go international. I couldn't leave for long periods at a time, so it was impractical for me to do that. And I realized it was also time, maybe, to try something "other." I felt very good about what I had done with him, and I felt very secure in understanding a lot of the philosophy, which I embraced fully. I think

it was some time in the mid-sixties — or after '60, Jean Erdman called me, and she said they were starting a brand new Arts program at NYU and she'd like me to come and teach on the faculty.

I didn't know Jean at all, but got to meet her, and I just fell in love with her. She was a wonderful lady! She set up a remarkable program: technique, improvisation, choreography and world cultures. and lots of interesting cultural people from the city. She was so interested in the students having experiences in other cultures — and being in New York, there were so many people available, and she knew most of them. So teaching in that kind of atmosphere was wonderful.

There were a couple of *rules* about it — you had to be a working professional — everybody was part-time, and you still had to keep your professional life going. And that's when I started with Don Redlich, and I figured "Oh! With just one other person, we could make our own schedule!

I didn't have to contend with ten other people in a company, so it was going to be a lot easier to work with just one person. So we just did duet concerts! Don was very nice to work with. He was a good person. His background was more with Hanya Holm, and he had done a lot of Broadway work — but his work was good; it was good work. And it just fit my schedule very well. So I only taught four days a week, which was great — and I was free in the afternoon. I hired someone to be home — now I could afford it. You see, you work in order to pay someone to take care of your son so that you can work as a dancer. Right? If he had to be picked up from school, or something like that. I mean, I don't know — we were just very energetic people at that time, to do all that: teach, go to rehearsal, be home, be a parent, be a wife — that's a lot of roles to play. But it seemed all very possible to do, and I just did as much as I could do.

In '68 — I can't remember — '69? — things mushroomed, you know?

You can't be a duet group for too long, because you'll have only solos or duets. We added a third person so we could do trios, and then even that became harder to schedule. You know, "When can we rehearse?" You just work it out. I did that, because Don was invited to go to Paris to dance through a U.S. State Department grant. So,

[we] went to Paris, did a few tours — you know, mostly small things. And at one point, I said to Don, "I think I have to leave, because now you're starting to get more bookings." I mean, it's what you want to do, you want to perform more, but it was taking me out of the city more and more, and I couldn't do that any longer.

And I knew it was time. It was time to move on, do something else, maybe start looking at my own work a little bit more.

Vietnam was...terrible: '68, '69 — in '70, it was really bad. '71 was even worse — there were terrible riots all over the city, all over the country, actually. And they just wanted that war to stop — it was bad news.

I remember I was invited to teach in Detroit — that was perhaps '71, at Wayne State — I did a summer session up there. It was so dangerous that I had to be escorted on the campus, I had to be picked up and taken by car because they were just worried about riots, everywhere. It was not good, not good...

After that, my husband and I started thinking about maybe it was time to leave the city, maybe another place for Peter to grown up. And I thought “I’m not going to tour anymore, I’m not going to do that anymore.” I was already 42.

And I thought, “Well, let’s write to a couple of places. Maybe we’ll get some bites, and see. He was an artist and a wonderful teacher, and we thought maybe he could get a job teaching art.

And we made a pact that whoever got the better offer is where we would go. Well, the dance world is small — you know that. And people know each other, and they heard “Oh, Gladys is thinking about leaving New York,” so I got a few offers here and there. I went out to a few places, and visited, and when I got to Ohio U, which was off my radar completely, I met Shirley Wimmer and we clicked just as two human beings, and I learned over the years that it isn’t always where you are; it’s who you work with — and that becomes so important:

It’s the day-to-day activity that is the thing — it’s not just the place. This was such a remote place to me then! I remember when we came out, we flew to Columbus and then drove a car on a two-lane road from the airport — they didn’t have the highway system they have now — it seemed to take forever. And I thought “Oh my God, we’re going into the sticks!” I mean, I just had no idea where this was. And the town wasn’t as nice as it is now — I mean, it was pretty tacky. There weren’t even supermarkets: the contrast with NYC was incredible. But we came out for the week-end,

and talking with Shirley was just so easy. And I liked what she had to say, and the department was still young, and I knew that I could bring something to do it.

And she encouraged that, which was great. My husband did not get a teaching job here, but he thought it was okay — and my son absolutely adored it. He said “My God, there are *trees!*” And he said, “Mom, you promised if we ever moved to a house, I could have a dog”: he had “dog” on his mind. And he was already nine by that time. So, my husband was willing to take that big leap; I was a little bit hesitant — it was hard to leave New York. But he said “Why don’t we try it. We have to give it three years; if we don’t like it, we’ll move.” I said, “But I hate to give up the apartment in New York! How can we do that?” And he said, “Well, we’ll manage, we’ll manage.” He was always very optimistic. Well, the three years went by like *that* (snapping her fingers). I don’t know where they went, they just went by so fast.

And it was also a time when we had a lot of students — a lot of people wanted to dance in the early ‘70s. And it was great! We had fabulous kids! I loved them! And I loved that they came with a kind of openness. There was none of that “New-York-I-know-it-all” kind of thing; “*I’ve seen it all.*” These [students] were fresh, they were eager, they were open — and I figured “This is great!” And I started to do my own work,

and they were so willing to be there for you. And then we had a house! And we had a dog! (She laughs). And, had to buy a car — two cars! It was just totally a complete shift! And I realized it was not a bad life. It was also still at that time reasonable to go to New York, so I would go to New

York at least three times a year — catch up with friends, go see things — and you could do it for a reasonable price. And it just worked out! It just worked out. And it was a great place for Peter to grow up, and before we knew it, it was time for him to go to college! I think he was in third or fourth grade when we came out. So he went to high school here — it was a very good high school, and he went to OU. Couldn't wait to go back to New York! I mean, it was *incredible*. Incredible...you just can't *plan* your life! It makes me think about a student I had once who told me she was going to leave because she had a different “plan” for her life. And I said, “I don't see how you can plan it — there are all sorts of things that happen that you could never plan for. So, you know, “Be wise! Take a chance!” And she said, “No, I have this life that I have planned out.” And I said, “Good luck! I don't know if it'll ever work out.” It seemed like something very unrealistic to me — but to her, it was very important.

And I think it's that unexpectedness, the willingness to try, that fits in with my ideas about choreography — that you can't plan it, you just have to kind of *do* it. And then assess what you did, and take a chance. Maybe it'll work out, maybe it won't, but you've just got to do that — and in a way you have to live your life that way — you just have to sort of go with where those paths are taking you. And if they're not right, you have to use your judgment and say “No, I'll take another path.”

CF: That's amazing. There are a couple of different lines of questioning I could pursue here. I guess I'm interested in the fact that what you've just described sounds a lot like Nikolai's training. I wonder if that degree of openness and spirit of investigation was something you think you already had when you met him, or did you get that from him? I'm curious about that...

GB: I think I got it from him — because we did so much improvisation. And in fact, a lot of the work that he built was built on our improvisations. He got his own ideas from us: he would just throw things out. He'd throw props on the stage, or he would put a barrier on the stage, and he'd say “What can you do with that?” You know? And that would spark his imagination. But we always improvised even as part of our classes, as well. He very seldom came in with set material that you would learn, but there was always a movement principle or idea that he was offering that day. He'd kind of invent the material while you were watching him invent it, and then that would become the phrase. So, I think that part of discovering things and making things happen at the moment was very much a part of my training, and has stayed with me. And I think it's been a wonderful lesson. You can't live in it *all* the time, but it's that willingness to take a leap when you think maybe you shouldn't, you know, but you do — or you're intrigued by the idea, so you explore it a little bit more. Yeah, I think that might have come a lot from that training.

CF: You mentioned Shirley Wimmer and the amazing fit you felt between the two of you. Was it just you and Shirley running this department?

GB: Well, she was the head person — she started the program in the late '60s. There was another person here...it was pretty small — it was very, very small; there were very few faculty here. Pat Welling (later Pat Brooks) was here, and she was teaching most of the ballet classes. I didn't do the ballet classes at all. Shirley was interested in developing the comp and improvisation classes, and that's really where a lot of my strength was, and she was very willing to let that happen. That, to me, was the exciting part. I was still doing technique — I was still able to do that, and that was important to me, too — because you have to be able to develop bodies to be able to do all that other stuff. But the creative work was so important, and that's what I wanted to see happen here. What I was seeing

was the beginnings of very strong technical training going on, and that became even more so, later — where students just would be fearful of inventing something, and I thought “That does not do them a service at all.” And so it became important for me to push that creative side of the program a lot more, and Shirley was very open to it. And I had seen it even at NYU: that that aspect of the program was also very important to Jean Erdman. It makes something happen for the students: they become more independent when they have to be responsible for what they’re doing, and not just following the teacher. It’s interesting — I’m reminded of an experience I had in the late 90’s. I was invited to Hong Kong to review the dance program — the modern dance program at the [Hong Kong] Performing Arts Academy. They had the most divine dancers I’d ever seen in my life. They were, I don’t know, the cream of the *cream!* And I looked at the program and one day they asked me to teach a class, and I said “I’ll do an improvisation class,” and they didn’t know what that was. And I said “Well, I’ll just bring in something that won’t be too fearful.” And the students were so frightened! They were so frightened they would be wrong. But they were the most glorious technicians I’d ever seen — but being right, and being perfect was more important than, you know, being creative. They didn’t know what that was. So, it pointed up even more how important that was — I mean, we see their performances and we think “Oh my God! They’re incredible!” But I don’t know if they could really do a lot for themselves, it seemed... I don’t know if it’s an American idea, but I think through exchange programs in Asia and Europe and the United States we see lots of creative ideas flowing across continents.

CF: You had taught at the Nik/Louis Lab, and you had had some experience at NYU: you taught in order to keep working — you said that was how you supported yourself. But what about the shift to an academic institution? Was there any disconnect there, or did Shirley and this place make it possible for you to experiment? I’m curious about that.

GB: Shirley was really very accommodating.

She encouraged me to sort of do my own thing, which I thought was very wonderful of her. I think it’s probably because the department was small; it was also a time when dance was quite popular, and there was a lot to be seen; we used to have so many more companies come and visit; we don’t have it anymore. It was a wonderful time for it to develop. I think the students got a lot out of it, and certainly *I* did. There were some things that were quite different: at NYU, for instance, they had a production department, and it was all built-in, so the work that was done could be produced. Here it was a big deal. That was very different to me. I assumed that production was a must, and would therefore be assisted... But now we had to go borrow equipment, and we had to rely on the kindness of the theatre people to help us. There was no costumer... It had all been built-in at NYU, so that was really quite marvelous. Here you had to sort of find your way, and I realized, “Oh, God! I can’t make assumptions anymore.” But you had to develop relationships — and that was a whole new thing. And there were political aspects to it that I did not have to deal with at NYU at all, because it was a production school. The formality of academia sort of hit me in the head. I was very surprised about things like that; I didn’t understand it at all. We did not have tenure at NYU — you were just given a year-to-year contract, and so forth. Here it became a big deal, you had to keep track of everything, it was all — *academic!* Right? Yeah, it’s hard: you have to fight for things here in a different way; it wasn’t easy, in that respect. Shirley was a good buffer for a lot of that.

She made a lot of things happen behind the scenes, because she knew people that I didn’t know. But eventually, I got to know it, and then at some point in the mid-80’s, when she retired, I realized that I’d gotten to know how it works. So that when the Directorship came up, I applied for the job

and I thought “I’m not going to be dancing all my life...anyhow I might as well *see...*” And the thing I became very conscious of, too, being in the university, is how much the training I had experienced made it possible for me to move into other aspects of the university — like administration: when you’re in a company, you have to deal with other people, you have to negotiate all the time. Not just time; I had to negotiate money at some points. Just dealing with other people all the time. I realized that I could do it; I didn’t always like it, but I was able to do it. And, you know, you get to a point where... I gave up technique, completely — I could not teach anymore. I felt that should be done by younger people. But I always stayed with the choreography classes, or the improvisation classes, because *that* I felt I could still do. In fact, I still do it!

CF: Your Directorship lasted from ’83 – ’95?

GB: Exactly right.

CF: So, you’ve nicely laid out how you stepped into the Directorship. What was your agenda for directing this program? I mean, what sort of initiatives or what sort of vision did you have for the program?

GB: Hmm.

I wanted the OU program to be known as a creative dance program — that you could come out of it and have the tools to become a choreographer. I felt that the [students] needed to be skilled technicians, but that was not the whole thing. And we even took people who showed a real direction towards choreography, even if they weren’t gorgeous-looking dancers. I felt that was one of the important ways to keep the dance *lively* — with new ideas and new people and new thoughts. Technique was always there, but that was not the prime focus: I felt that there were plenty of schools that did that and did it very, very well — and that we could make a niche: that if you were really interested in being a creative person and you wanted to choreograph, or become a director of some sort for a group, that *this* was the place to be.

And I sort of tried to do that. And I think we succeeded for a while. But as you know, things change, the tenor of a country changes and support now has changed so completely. It’s very sad for me to see how the NEA, National Endowment for the Arts, has been trimmed and that now there is the threat of elimination! The whole tenor of the country changes —and now, dance is not *important*. It filters down, you know, to the states — when you don’t have it at the federal level. And now the arts are not being pushed at all at the federal level. There’s just no money for it, and you see it in a whole lot of other ways; it’s a shift, there’s just been a shift in the culture — and it bothers me terribly.

CF: In ’86, not long after you assumed the director position, you were nominated as a Distinguished Professor.

GB: Yes!

CF: Talk about that.

GB: That was a surprise!

CF: A good one!

GB: It was a wonderful honor — it really was.

[Off the record, we discuss among other things the fact that Bailin was the first woman, and for a long while the only woman to have received this honor at OU...]

CF: Well, again, we talked about the shift from being mainly an artist to now being mainly an educator/artist...

GB: True!

CF: ... but you also went from a gigantic city to a very small town.

GB: Right.

CF: Is there anything you'd like to say about that?

GB: It took me a very long time to say "I live in Athens, Ohio." Because, to me, it was a temporary move — but after about twenty years (laughing), I couldn't say that any longer! I would always say "I live in Athens, Ohio, but I'm originally from New York." Now it's more than 40 years and I just say "I live in Athens, Ohio. "

CF: So, if it seems productive to you to talk about this — you mentioned that you were keeping up your connections with your artist friends in New York. How did that inform your work here, or what you were able to do here?

GB: Well, I tried to encourage students to get out of the state — or to get to places where they could see things. I think that was probably the biggest hindrance — that many of the students, if they didn't come from a big city, hadn't *seen* much. And they needed to see more, they needed to have a better grasp of the field. And so I would try to encourage them to get to Chicago or...places where there were things happening. Sometimes Pittsburgh would have visiting artists, and of course when *we* had visiting people — that was very important. That was the other thing, getting a visiting artist program established here. It was so important here, because many of the students really didn't have a lot of background before coming.

I think Shirley always wanted to have more guest artists — she understood that it was important to bring people here. And that was something that required you to work with the Dean, because you need extra dollars to do that — the operating budget could not support that. You had to be in very good graces with the Dean so that you could get extra money to bring visiting teachers, and visiting choreographers — in order for students to have other experiences. During the 70's and 80's there were many dance events presented in the big auditorium on the Performing Arts Series but that dried up as federal and grant funding also declined. It is now a rarity to see dance companies on that series—most of the events are popular kinds of entertainment that bring in more dollars. So, I tried to encourage summer study, tried to encourage getting out during other times to do workshops and things of that nature. Mostly, because the students needed to broaden their exposure; they just didn't have enough exposure. And this is a pretty remote place — you've got to bring a lot of people *to* it.

CF: What was your sense on arrival, and then as things have developed, about dance in the rest of the state?

GB: I have to admit, I didn't get out enough, myself, to see what was happening in other parts of the state; I did earlier on, when I was driving a lot more, I would see things. I always felt that what was going on at Ohio State was very important — bigger department, having a graduate department, which we had also explored at some point, and that never happened here. I think that was important, and also, the kinds of things that were going on at OSU were different from the things here. There was, I think, a lot more emphasis on very contemporary kinds of activities that I felt the students needed to see. And they were encouraged to go — I mean, it's not that far away, and yet you simply have to make the time to do it. We did have students from other parts of the state, and there was important activity in Cleveland that I was aware of, and tried to encourage that.

It felt like we got a lot of students who came from local dance schools, who had very different ideas, wanting us to teach a little of this and a little of that, and that to me was kind of okay when you were little, but then at some point you kind of have to make a decision, because you can't be everything to everybody. That was a problem. I always felt that teaching the freshman class was very important and very difficult, because you are dealing with a very limited understanding of the artform. They were looking at dance much more as a business; also, a lot of what I call “smiles and teeth” — and how high your leg is. I mean, they all were the kinds of things that they would do in a competition — and to get the competition element out of it was very difficult to do in that first year — [to communicate] that we're not competing now for prizes; we're trying to learn this thing on a different level. And that was hard to do, especially if they came from a school that didn't have much of the arts in it. So that was very foreign. And I always felt that that was an enormous challenge... didn't seem to be as much of a challenge in New York because they're so surrounded by arts. It's a very big challenge in Ohio, because there are lots of small towns in Ohio where the activity is eating pizza and going to the movies! And they don't *see* anything. And how do you...where do you start?

CF: How *did* you start? How did you develop strategies for teaching?

GB: I can't even remember anymore, though I used to teach a lot of those freshman classes. Mostly, it was just eye-opening to me: how do you break through? How do you *do* that? You have to find a way to make them want it; at the same time, you don't want to play into that. You have to give them other tools. And I felt, “Well, there are new ways to find movement: you know how to do that step; how can we vary it? How can we find a variation on the thing you already know?” Rather than trying to say “That's not good,” you just say “Okay, this is what you have; let's see what we can find to do with it. How can we transform it — use it?” That was very challenging, and those who stayed with it would often find a lot of good in it. And that was worth it. And then, they pretty much sort themselves out: I think the students discover that: “Yeah, I liked it, but maybe this isn't something I really want to do.” And so they'd find something else. But those who'd say “I think there's something in here that speaks to me. I'll stick with it for awhile.” And those are the ones...and some surprise you enormously. And that that's always the joy, isn't it? It's not the immediate gratification at all! It comes much later, and in some cases, it comes *way* later, doesn't it? And you don't realize it. In fact, I got a letter — this blew me away — I got a letter about two years ago from a student that I had when I first taught in a private dance school in New York; it was upstate, outside the city. My first job out of college was a dance-teaching job at a private school for girls: it was called the Riverdale Country School for Girls. And it was not easy to get to — I used to take the train to the end of the line in the Bronx, and then take a bus, and go way up — it was beautiful, on the Hudson

— and then take a bus to 242nd Street or something, and then I'd have to walk down to the school. I did that for two years. But they were wonderful kids, they were very bright young ladies. And I did this dance class — I used to go up about four half-days a week. And I got this note from a girl who said “I am now a grandmother, and I have a grandchild who is going to a dance school, and I thought about you and what you taught us when I was in high school.” And she said, “I still remember the way you had us walk, and the images you gave us just about *walking*, and how I suddenly felt like a *tall* person.” And I thought, isn't that amazing? So this is like, what? Fifty, sixty years later that she comes back to that — I mean that blew my mind!

CF: How wonderful!

GB: It's pretty exciting! It's pretty exciting to know that you affected somebody and now she's telling her grandchild. It makes you feel old sometimes...

CF: There's also that! We're getting close to the time when we have to stop, but would it perhaps be interesting to talk about landmark moments in your time here or in your development of the program at OU? Highlights, challenges...

GB: Hmm...

CF: And if it's not productive, we'll do something else.

GB: I don't know... It's hard to say about highlights; obviously, I've stayed now. If there weren't some gratification, I don't think I would have stayed. And I think a lot of it has to do with people I met. Again, I go back to that statement that “it's not where you are as much as who you are with,” and I made some very good friends here: friends who are in the Arts and people who are not in the Arts. I always feel that the people who stay have something to give, and they enjoy that act of giving. I, now that I am older and I don't — well (reconsidering), I still run around the world a lot. I still do a lot of traveling, but I like coming back here to my house, rather than the noise of the apartment. I still go to New York — I was there two weeks ago, and I realized that I don't think I could live here anymore... I don't think I could! It was always busy and crowded, but it's more so now. And it's so expensive; I feel we're always running to keep up. There's a lot of activity there and I often wish I could be there, but I can't be there all the time to see all the things I'd like to see. So I've become very selective about when I go back, who I see, what I'm seeing, and the reason I go. And I've gone back quite a bit because a lot of my old dance friends... a lot of them have passed away. There are not very many left now out of that original group of people. And we were a family, you know. When you're together with people for so long, you don't think of them as just dancers: they're your pals! They're your family. Yeah... we've lost quite a few. It's sad in a way... But I got on the subway at 2:00 in the afternoon, and I got *shoved* into the subway! It was so crowded, I couldn't believe it — it was 2:00 in the afternoon — it wasn't even rush hour! I mean, that was two weeks ago! It was just amazing to me. I just have a different attitude now: I really prefer the quiet, I like my house, I like the fact that I can get where I need to go in a very little bit of time. And it's afforded me the opportunity to travel and see the world, which I've done a lot since I've retired — because I've been retired a long time now. And I try to do interesting things... My last trip, which was in September was a trip to England on the “Queen Mary.” That was just such a pleasure, mostly because I dislike air travel so much now, especially overseas air travel. The hassle is terrible, and I figured if I could just go leisurely one way, I wouldn't mind going back the other way. So, I did that, and it was very exciting. And I spent some time in London, and I went to the theatre every night, and that was

pretty terrific, too. But London is just as busy as New York — it's just crowded, crowded, crowded. So it was lovely to come home, and be here in the quiet stillness. I've gone back to playing the piano; I take lessons now, and entertain myself with that. I'm very active in town; I've become active at the Kennedy Museum, and I'm now active in another group of seniors here in town — trying to keep them in their own homes as opposed to leaving their homes to go elsewhere. So, I do a variety of things, and I think that my experience on the faculty, as a director — well, I get put on a lot of committees (she laughs)! I suddenly find myself doing things like that because it's not so hard for me to do anymore. I can become a leader, or an active member of a group because it doesn't seem so difficult now.

CF: How often do you teach composition?

GB: I just do one course a year, and I usually do it in the Winter/Spring semester. It makes the winter pass more quickly and it leaves other times of year to travel. So now I just do January to the end of April, and I think that's coming to an end, too — I don't know. I try to do new things: I've become very involved with music — more as I get older, and I find that the kind of sounds that the students use are uninteresting to me. So I try to introduce them to other music things — in fact, I thought if I had another life, I would probably do music.

CF: Well, I'm wondering... You've had such a *long* career in the field, both in New York, and here at OU. Dance itself — contemporary dance — has changed considerably...

GB: Yes, I hardly recognize it. It's a very different thing. I mean, I remember — this is really interesting, I hope I can go back to that, because in that mid-sixties time, there was also a major change. I mean, we left that whole narrative focus that was happening prior in the forties...and a *lot* of it in the 50s, and there were some wonderful new things. And then Nik comes along, and he kind of changes things because his stuff is not narrative. Then in the mid-sixties, along comes Yvonne Rainer, and she says "Down with all this artifice, down with all of this... Let's go back to just stuff." And I remember students who were picking that up just as an idea, and they'd come in and they would undress without giving it another thought, or just do very simple things, and I kept saying "Well, you come to that later; you can't *start* with that, because you don't develop." And I would just *reject* that in the classes — because they wanted to start where — you know, they had no *background* to do that! I said, "That's a philosophical *idea*, you have to *come* to that — you can't start with that now. Otherwise you won't dance, and why are you spending all this money at NYU, if you're not going to dance?" Right? "If you're just going to walk!" But I see all those wonderful ideas sort of emerging now, and... *everything* is possible now! And I think in a way, it's confusing, but people have to find their own *way*, and I think as responsible educators, we have to *tell* students that all of that has happened: "How are you going to find your way through it? What is *your* voice? How do you find your own voice *through* that? And know that it all existed; there's very little new. You can bring something fresh to something that has been around. So, that's your charge.

CF: An inspiring educational thought! Is there anything we haven't touched on that you'd like to say? Particularly, I guess, about being at OU, or being involved in dance in Ohio.

GB: (She thinks a moment): Yeah...With all the years that we've had dance, there are still people who don't understand what they're seeing. I don't know whether they're not geared to a kinetic understanding, or there's still a lot of sort of *old* ideas that are ingrained somewhere in there — that when they go to see dance, they're still looking for theatre, or narrative: "What does it mean?"

Abstraction has just not filtered into this culture. It doesn't filter into rural cultures. I mean, we have some big cities, but I see Ohio as a very rural place. I'm not going to get into the politics of it, because that's very volatile right now. But I think that's going to be a challenge *forever*. And it may be because it's not in the schools, and that's where I think there's a tremendous lack. And the way money has been funded for education has taken away a lot of the arts activities at the lower levels, so we're always fighting for something that isn't there. It's hard — it's hard on the *kids*, and I don't know if we can make up for it at the university level. I think sometimes we do — sometimes you hit just the right moment in their life, or that *sensitivity* to it, but for the most part I think it's an *unfortunate* occurrence. I think it makes the culture less *vital* in a way, when there isn't that awareness. Our kids lose out when they don't have exposure to the arts at an early age.

CF: I agree 100%. (To the film team): Is there anything either of you would like to ask? I think Megan has a question.

MDB: I wonder if you have a relationship with Factory Street at all?

GB: Oh, you know about that!

MDB: Yes, my friend Megan Yankee is there.

GB: I haven't met her yet. I remember there were two students, Marina Walchli and Cita Strauss, who started the school for children —and they were on Factory Street, which is why it's called the Factory Street Studio.⁴ They felt it was important to do that in town, and they did it, and of course it's lasted all these years. They were very influential and very important to it, so there *is* something creative going on here in this town. For a while there wasn't a lot of connection, but I think they're re-establishing that now, and I think now that establishment is pretty well ongoing, because a lot of our students teach there — which is great for them; it's good experience for them. Yeah, I think the connection is even greater now under Travis Gatling than it was in the past. So I don't know what will develop out of that...

MDB: Did you have any interaction as it was first starting?

GB: Not personally, but I did at some point; in fact, I did a couple of pieces on them many years ago, with little kids — something that I transferred from older kids to the younger ones. And that was very different, working with little kids. I mean, you've got to work *fast*, and you can't keep them for very long...It was a very different experience, teaching children.

Do you think we've covered it all?

CF: No, of course we haven't covered it all!

GB: No, but we covered a lot!

⁴ A local studio located at 37 Ohio Avenue in Athens, Ohio.

JD: I was wondering if you might speak to the transitions in the department — like, how it is today with Travis⁵. Just something about how the department's changed through different leaders.

GB: You know, our directors have always come from *in-house*, which is really interesting. From Shirley, it went to me; and then it went to Madeleine [Scott]⁶ — Madeleine was there a long time. Madeleine is a wonderful human being; she's *great*. And now it's transferred just recently to Travis [Gattling]. So it's been rather interesting — sort of everybody growing from inside of it. I don't know what Travis will do — he's pretty new at it, but he's got a lovely manner, and he's very dearly loved. So hopefully, you know, something will happen. But mostly, I'm upset because we should have more students — and I don't know if this is happening nationwide, but I think it is. I just don't think the arts are important enough in our culture right now; we're living through a very bad time.

CF: I agree with that.

JD: I have one other thing. You had talked before we got started about your family supporting you — it would be good to have that on tape.

GB: Well, that is sort of nice because I don't know how many families do that now. Right, now they're so worried about... So, do you want me to go back to my early life?

CF: Yes!

GB: Oh my God: do you know how many years *back* that is? (laughing) Oh, Lord!

I was eight years old when we moved to the lower east side of Manhattan, which was within *walking* distance to Henry Street Playhouse and Settlement House. My father played the piano, but couldn't read a *lick* of music, though he was very musical! You could hum something, and he could transfer it right away, which was sort of wonderful to me! My mother, I think, always wanted to be a dancer. So when I indicated a real interest, she was very encouraging about it — and of course, it was *available* — at the Music School — the Henry Street Music School, and the [Henry Street] Playhouse, which offered modern dance classes. And then at the Settlement House itself there were folk and square dancing, which I used to do *with* her. So there was great encouragement throughout the family to do all of that stuff. And it was just a nice thing to do, you know? I feel very fortunate that I lived when I did: at that time and in that place!

CF: And with an encouraging family!

GB: *Very!* Very encouraging family. I think about it now, and parents come and say, you know, “How are you going to make a living?” — which is, you know, a real concern— but I'd like to speak to that. I mean, when I was a teen-ager, I could never, ever *dream* that I would be in a university and then run a program! It never *occurred* to me — at all! I didn't know it *existed*! So, you have to *trust* that

⁵ Travis Gattling began as an Assistant Professor at OU in 1998, and assumed the position of Artistic Director of the Dance Division in July, 2015.

⁶ Madeleine Scott began as a Visiting Professor at OU in 1980, and became Director of the School of Dance in 1995. She was the founding director of the School of Dance, Film, and Theater when it was created in 2013. She retired in June, 2015.

there is something in that training that will *give* you these abilities. (She comments on statistical studies published by NDEO that show that students of dance perform better on certain metrics in school. But she herself is interested in talking about the more aesthetically-enriching aspects of dance training). You learn how to deal with people and you learn how to take care of your body, and that's all applicable to other jobs. Not everybody's going to dance...

CF: I think one of the most interesting things about talking to you is how you're able to see the through-line in Nik's values of exploration and freedom...and finding your own voice, among other points...

GB: Isn't that great that a teacher can *give* that to you?! I mean, I think about that — and I realize...you know when I was in New York, I did go to other schools. I needed to know! I was so involved with Nik, at one point, I said "I've got to see how the other half lives! I have to go try it out!" I went to the Graham School, I took classes with Anna Sokolow, Humphrey-Weidman — I loved José Limón. I did things like that, and I went to things. I went to [jazz classes with] Luigi. I *did* those things, I took some ballet, I tried toe shoes — I *tried* it! But I kept going back to Nik! I kept coming back — he spoke to me in a way that I knew was right for me. Now, other people did other things. I found that the Graham technique killed my hip joints; I couldn't stand it. It was so *unnatural* for my body; I could not do that. Sokolow — I thought she was going to kill me; she was too violent! She would *push* you into things, doing it — and you would stretch and you would tear — I mean, that's not dancing! Even *I* knew that! You don't force people into positions! And ballet was completely unnatural. I never had a princess complex, even as a growing-up child: I *never* wanted to be a princess! — Although I was one in one of Nik's pieces — but it wasn't a "tutu princess." It was an Egyptian thing, in a children's piece. So ballet was just not right for my body, either — and you kind of know it, even on an instinctual level. But I had to *try* it. I remember one summer, just saying "I'm going to do toe work, because I have to know what it feels like." And I went to the Joffrey School and did it, and then I said "That is so unnatural." Of course, I was much too old to do it, but I did it!

CF: Don't you think — I mean, I don't mean to give Nik credit for your entire life; that would be foolish! It has to do with what *you* brought to Nik. But don't you think even that, for example, in Nik's appetite for "anything that works"...the way that you said he would throw things at you... Well, you threw things at *yourself*. You did the same thing!

GB: Right. It's true. He threw ideas at us and we learned to throw things at ourselves. The spirit of experimentation was in the air all the time while I was with him. But I was able to do it, and I think it's because I lived in New York, at that time. It was just right for me at that time, and it was available to me. And it was available to me without a lot of difficulty — I didn't have to *travel* far to do it — so that plays into it as well. But I certainly did have the appetite. I did.

CF: Well, I think we have to stop, just because of the clock. But it's wonderful to talk with you, and thank you very much!

GB: Oh, you're very welcome! I could go on for hours.

CF: I could too!