AL CARMINES

Interviewed by Steve Bottoms, New York City, September 1995

AC: I think probably the roots of OOB are the Living Theatre. We looked to the Living Theatre at Judson as a mentor, as a group which we could look to for instruction, or not even instruction, for a way of life, for a way of doing theatre. Judson is an unusual church, strange and peculiar, always involved almost to the limit in the community. Back in the thrities in the depression, the homeless slept in the church. In the forties during the war we supported some anti-war activities. Then when I... I went to the Living Theatre before I'd even heard of Judson, when I was in seminary at Union [Theological Seminary], and saw *Tonight We Improvise*, actually. And was thrilled by it, and loved it. And then they needed an associate at Judson for a year, so I thought it would be interesting to live there and to work there, and they wanted someone who was interested in theatre. Well my interest in theatre was totally un-alternative, I worked with E. Martin Brown and did T.S. Eliot, Charles Williams, the religious - somewhat religious, quasi-religious - plays of the period, at Union Seminary (and I was a great admirer of E. Martin Brown, he was a remarkable man). But anyhow I wanted to stay and get a graduate degree, so I took a part time job down at Judson. At that time there was one authentic OOB theatre and that was Caffe Cino, Joe Cino, and he had a tiny cafe, the size of a postage stamp, and from about '59, maybe '58 even, he would say 'Magic Time!', ring his bell, and ... in the beginning he didn't do as many new playwrights as he did later: he did plays by Tennessee Williams readings, and readings by William Inge, people like that. Then he began to get interested in new playwrights...

(We are distracted by Al's cat, Alma, 'a Russian blue'...)

Judson began with a ping-pong room that we decided to use as a gallery. And just before I came there in 1961, very avant-garde painters and sculptors were having difficulty finding spaces to show their work: people like Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms and people like that: people who were just beginning: Allan Kaprow... and so they opened this ping pong room for them to show their work, critics came down, and they became really a great success. Through that - I used to go to the shows when I was in seminary, and they had parties and dances afterwards - through that somehow the church decided it would like to form a theatre that was based on modern Village playwrights, which was a new concept really.

SJB: Was this even before Joe Cino was doing that then?

AC: Doing that particular thing, yes. And so we began, and I was given a very skimpy salary and coffee money and beer money to go and hang out in the bars and meet playwrights, which I did. And so this was all part of the church being in the community and taking the community very seriously, rather than simply doing a big work like something by Eliot or Shakespeare... this was like trying to find, or to ferret

out the playwrights that were part of the community and seeing what we could do with them. The first playwright we did was Joel Oppenheimer. We did Irene Fornes, we did Rosalyn Drexler, we did Sam Shepard of course, we did Lanford Wilson, and in all of those cases it was thrilling. Incidentally, it was through doing these works that I discovered that I was a composer, because I had never composed before. And then we had a wonderful director named Larry Kornfeld, who was interested in Gertrude Stein. And we began to work together on Stein, and we did a remarkable play called *What Happened*, and then *In Circles*, and we've done about seven, eight plays together...

But the beginnings were Cino, Judson and Ellen Stewart, we were the three for the first two years, then Cafe Genesis [sic] at St. Mark's, then Theater for the New City, and a lot of other places, they sprang like crazy. But we were the beginning three, and we used to exchange actors, we exchanged costumes, we exchanged sets, we ransacked trash cans for money, I mean we had no money at all, we charged nothing - people donated whatever they could afford to donate - and something beautiful and remarkable and quite unusual and unique happened - through Judson, Cino and La Mama.

SJB asks about progression of Judson projects:

AC: Yes, that [Dance Theatre] was two years later. We began the Judson Poets' Theatre, and we did a Stein play early on, called *What Happened*, that had five lady dancers in it. And some of them, Yvonne Rainer and Lucinda Childs and several other dancers came to me and said - Could we use this space for dance? Could we begin an alternative to Merce Cunningham, really, a way of going beyond what Merce is doing? And we did. And the Judson Dance Theatre began in 1962, I think, late 1962.

And the Happenings, they happened in the gallery, mostly. Mostly with Claes Oldenburg - I remember a happening where Claes read *The Scarlet Letter* in Swedish, as we all followed him through the gymnasium. It was thrilling, and bizarre, weird. And the happenings somehow melded in with the theatre also, because with the theatre happening at the same time... for instance a lot of the Stein works took their impulse from Happenings. And I remember Sam Shepard's early, early work, and I always felt that he and ... that probably he was the most talented of all the playwrights that OOB produced (although many were remarkably talented, like Lanford and Irene Fornes and ...) And then Joe Chaikin and Larry and Sam and I did a workshop together, where I set various things to music, and Sam made up dialogue and Joe kind of guided movement, and that was interesting.

SJB asks for clarification if he's saying the workshop was happening-influenced too:

AC: It was, yes, it was.

SJB asks about the 'cross-fertilisation', esp. at Judson:

AC: I would say at Judson probably, from '61until '75 or '76, we had the Dance Theatre, we had the art gallery, Yoko Ono - I remember a wonderful show she did - and the Poets Theatre, all somehow influenced one another, and remarkably we used dancers in theatre and theatre people in dance, and Robert Rauschenberg for sets, and Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms and some of the artists for ... kind of ... atmosphere, and sets were created in the midst of rehearsal. A lot of work got done in the midst of rehearsing, we would decide to do a project, and then rather than rehearse it as we would a play, we would make it as we did it.

SJB: Using spontaneity?

AC: Yes. Right. And none of us had any money, and therefore we were totally dependent on the imagination.

SJB: How did your ministerial role influence what you did?

AC: Well you know it was interesting - we began somewhat slowly. I did not want a religious theatre, nor did the theatre want to be a religious institution. On the other hand I wanted the spontaneity and verve of LIFE to take place. So the first year we used maybe three or four people from the congregation itself in the plays, but mostly we used people who wanted to be actors - cab drivers and waitresses and people like that. And then gradually, I think in a very strange way that's almost bizarre, someone had the idea of having - the first Sunday of every month - what was called an Agape meal, rather than communion. And suddenly the actors and dancers and artists began to come to this Agape meal in order to eat, in order to get a good meal. And they got to know one another, and some of the middle class, more staid people in the church, became fascinated by these bizarre creatures, and the bizarre creatures suddenly realised that these staid people had cachŽs of things that weren't staid. Then we began to really mix it up, and we began to do plays and dances - mostly plays but some dances, and a good deal of Happenings - based on there being no separation between the church member and the artist.

SJB: Wasn't Larry Kornfeld on the liturgical committee, even though he wasn't a church member?

AC: Yes, and we met in my apartment once a week, to revamp the worship service after about three years, and to take out the pews, and put chairs up so dances could take place and theatre could take place.

SJB: And that's when shows moved down from choir loft?

AC: Right, yes.

SJB: Was there ever any opposition from congregation members to things like Gorilla Queen, or Dracula Sabbat?:

AC: Not at all, you know it's very interesting. As I look back - the church I work in now, for instance, it would be impossible to do a work like Gorilla Queen, but in those days... One of the things that helped was, one of the things we asked, was that each playwright and each director and as many of the cast that could, come to a Sunday service discussion (they didn't have to come to the service), to a discussion of the play with the congregation. And therefore the congregation got a chance to air a lot of their feelings, and whatever they thought about it, and that was interesting.

SJB: Was that heated?

AC: It was heated, and we had a group called the Hall of Issues on Wednesday nights, where anyone, from Sunday to Wednesday, could come and hang a poem, play, picture, cartoon, anything that they wanted to, in a room that we had. And then on Wednesday night we had discussions, that Ed Koch back in those days moderated, and I remember the mayor's assistant coming, and one of these really weird off-the-wall artists calling her an old fat bitch... and it was really quite a wild time, and quite exciting.

SJB: How did your composing start?

AC: We were doing a play by George Dennison called *Vaudeville Skit,* up in the loft this was, and it became quite obvious that it needed music, and Larry said to me 'Why don't you just improvise four or five piano,barrel organ-type songs to fill in the play. So I did. And I set them a little bit. And critics came and said, there's a new composer in town and he's remarkable. And I thought - My God! I'm a composer! And I had no idea...

SJB: Did you develop a conscious style?

AC: I didn't develop a style in that way, except... David Richards of The Post did an article on me just last summer, and he said I had the kind of style that at the heart of every gay song was a sob of pain. And what I mean by that is that Kurt Weill is probably closer to an influence on me than Richard Rodgers or George Gershwin or someone like that. There's something about the cabaret, Kurt Weill-sh, Mahagonny idea that is exciting and informs my work. And when I first began to compose, my two Gods were Mozart and Bessie Smith, and I used to get up every morning, and with my morning coffee listen alternately to Bessie Smith and Mozart. And in a way they fed into what is going on: I'm now in the midst of a play about Bessie Smith, Gertrude Stein and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a German pastor who was martyred by Hitler for helping the Jews. It's called Martyrs and Lullabies, and a lot of my feeling about all three of them comes about through those very early days of composing, because I'd studied theology and I knew Bonhoeffer, but I didn't know Bessie until 1961 and I didn't know Gertrude Stein until 1962, and they became icons for me.

SJB: Your music seems very eclectic in its range and influences.

AC: It is, it's extraordinarily eclectic, and I used to feel embarrassed about that and somewhat apologetic, but I don't at all any more. I mean I feel - not proud of it - but it is, it simply is, it's an eclectic style that has at its heart something that is both happy and sad. And further than that, I can't go. I've written symphonies, and I've written operas, and I've written oratorios, and all kinds of things, but there is something where I feel as eclectic musically as I feel one should be literarily or... and the figures that have influenced me as a composer are not basically musical figures: Samuel Beckett, Thomas Mann, they're the figures of my youth, and they feed into me in an incredible way.

SJB: This idea of being the music being both happy and sad seems to chime in particularly with a play like *Promenade*, which I've studied in some detail.

AC: Yes. And I supppose *In Circles* was seminal for me. And *The Journey of Snow White*. Those two - Lincoln Centre had both of them in video form I think. Seminal... I found *In Circles* seminal because it gave me a new way of thinking about words and thinking about actions and thinking about pianos and... I mean we had a girl get in the piano and take a bath, I mean it was like, thrilling and wonderful. And also the lines and the words, I realised for the first time that she was extraordinarily profound as well as clever. And *The Journey of Snow White* was the first work I did where I did both the words and the lyrics and the story and the everything, it's a Jungian version of the Snow White Story, and it was a remarkable work really. I look at it now, objectively, and I realise that it's a remarkable work, it's a Jungian interpretation of animals, dwarves, princes, fathers, mothers, and Snow White.

SJB: Was there a 'Judson house style', as some critics seem to claim? Ross Wetzsteon, for example, once said that the Poets Theatre was at its best dealing with what he calls "the language plays" -- Stein and Fornes and Drexler and so on -- because they're based on word-play, they dictate less in terms of characters and stage directions, so you had more freedom to bring your own ideas to them.

AC: Yes I would say that's an insight that's probably true, although we did some very heavy work that didn't leave that kind of room. There was a wonderful play by Sam Shepard called *La Turista* [note: the Shepard play produced at Judson was actually *Red Cross*: Jacques Levy directed it, and then did *La Turista* for the American Place the following year (1967)]. There was a wonderful play by Irene called *Dr. Kheal*, a wonderful play by Leon Katz called *Dracula Sabbat*which even frightened me. One of the things that was important to me was that the dance theatre pulled me out of academia... My background was classical, I mean Greek, Latin, theology, Hebrew, philosophy (I majored in philosophy), religion, Martin Heidegger, and so that was all my background...

(interrupted by phone call)

But I would say that for about five years, maybe seven years, Judson did have a - a hard to identify but a definite, nuanced, style. And that style involved crazy happenings, the unexpected, and taking the bizarre very seriously. And some people called that camp, but I never thought of it as camp. I think camp is its own legitimate genre, but I never thought of it as camp.

SJB: Irene Fornes has suggested to me that the work at Judson was often distinguished by a kind of "high camp" sensibility -- as opposed to the Cino's more obviously "gay camp"; she says that Judson had this kind of arch sophistication. Are you comfortable with that definition?

AC: I'm uncomfortable with the word camp. And I'm uncomfortable with it for the Cino even. For me, camp is like the Theatre of the Ridiculous, it's a definite way of approaching life and reality. Our style was more... bizarre than camp. Grotesque. We took the grotesque very seriously. That was one of the things that made things exciting. Nothing was... camp has certain things they wouldn't do, because it wouldn't fit in with the camp ethos. Whereas there was nothing we woundn't do, really, so that means that... we might do a prayer in the middle of a play, or we might do a dance totally on a chair... we would use people who had never even dreamed of... I mean the oldest woman I took into Equity was 72, she was a Sunday School teacher, and it turned out she was like Sarah Bernhardt! I mean she was a brilliant actress! And so we were very fortunate in being in touch with ordinary people, because they gave us and fed us something about life that neither La Mama nor Cino nor any of the places in the Village at that time had. They had other things, and other things in abundance MORE, but they did not have this kind of... touch of the ordinary person... that our congregation, for some reason, gave to us.

SJB: It sounds like a kind of sincerity you're talking about.

AC: Yes, a sincerity, and also a kind of simplicity. I mean there was no artifice, they hadn't been trained, they didn't know what theatre was, they simply did it.

SJB: Why does camp not allow certain kinds of things?

AC: Well, a camp show was Gorilla Queen, now that was a camp show. But in Gorilla Queen nothing was taken seriously, nothing was sincere seriousness, everything had an edge to it, and now... I believe in doing theatre that takes some things seriously, some things have an edge, some things have wit, some things pathos, some things are sentimental, some things are soupy, some things are sloppy, some things are precise, and therefore when I was at Judson the doors were open to all kinds of things.

SJB: Some people seem to feel that, as the 1960s went on, the "auteur" director became more important to the OOB scene than the playwright. Is that fair, do you think?

AC: No I don't believe that happened, at all. I think what did happen is that money began to corrupt the original beauty and power of the imagination of OOB. It was interesting, before 1965 and 1966, when we were scrounging for lights, and even scrounging for costumes in trash bins and so forth, some of the work was terrible but some of it was powerful. Then grants began to come, and without ever ever consciously thinking, one began to fashion one's work toward the grant, so that whereas in 1963 one would not have used a broom to sweep the floor before the audience came in, from 1965 you made sure that was done. Now that's a very tiny, silly example, but that kind of influence and power and money began a slow process of corruption which finally ended what OOB was originally intended to be.

SJB: Is that true of, say, the Judson shows that moved uptown?

AC: No, I don't think the... the Judson shows that moved, we did not change in that kind of way in order to... to sanitise them in any way, no. They stayed the same, which was true from the first, which was *Home Movies*, until the last, which was probably *The Making of Americans*. That kind of sanitation never took place. But the imagination is a frail thing, and one wants always, for some reason, something to fall back on, and the thing that most theatres fall back on is money. If they don't have money they fall back on famous personalities, if they don't have famous personalities they fall back on bizarre personalities like... er... people who are known for their bizarreness. No, I think money was the corruptor of OOB.

SJB: Can you give me any examples?

AC: Oh I remember very early on being at a party at the Mayor's - Lindsay was mayor - with Ellen Stewart, and Ellen said I'm gonna get in there and get some money from the mayor. And I said Ellen you're crazy. ... But she did. And La Mama - and I mean, I admire Ellen incredibly, she's not only a great producer but a great artist, but .... her wealthy friends and her wealthy donors in a strange way deluded was happening at La Mama in 1962 when I saw my first Pinter play.

SJB: So they started to go after grants?

AC: They did, and everyone wants it, it's a natural desire, but it's sad.

SJB: Did Judson apply for grants?

AC: Oh yes, we got some grants for the Dance Theatre, and also for the Poets' Theatre although mostly for the Dance. But not large ones. There was a time when the Rockefeller Foundation was thinking of making us their venue of... their kind of example of what dance and theatre and community could be. But I think they were bothered by the church/art relationship, and they didn't know how to deal with it somehow. And we had many meetings with them and dinners with them and many... but it didn't somehow.... La Mama was 'cleaner', they didn't have a church attached!

SJB: Was there a kind of tension between OOB's spirit of do-it-yourself, this inspired amateurism if you like, and then the pressure to succeed, to become more professional?

AC: Well, when we closed the Judson Poets' Theatre we had a meeting, and I said that what Judson was was amateur in the highest sense: we did it for the love of doing it, period. Now there are all kinds of reasons for doing it, and that particular kind of tension was not a big one with me, I mean I'm as thrilled by [?] as I am by Hair or by Showboat. I mean those kinds of distinctions have passed away for me, they were very strong in the 60s, the legitimate theatre or the illegitimate theatre... Now it's simply whether a work is good or not, and there's something....

SJB: So there was actually a point where Judson Poets' Theatre closed?

AC: Yes, right, right, and I thought that the beautiful thing about Judson, and to a certain extent Cino, was that we did things for the sheer joy of doing them. Or the sheer pain of doing them, who knows? But that's why we did them, we didn't do them for any ulterior motive, there was not secondary...'If we do it this way we'll get money or we'll get publicity or...' I remember when I wrote *The Faggot* in 1973 - we were packed, I mean we had people lining around the church to see The Faggot because noone had written a musical that took that subject with that kind of seriousness. And I remember how shocked I was: I wrote The Faggot because of an incident where I felt someone was mistreated because they were gay, and all of a sudden it blossomed into this big cause celebre.

SJB: Wasn't there some controversy around *The Faggot*?

AC: Some, yes.

SJB: I read a sermon that you wrote in response to it, called "We are all faggots", I think. Did you cross-reference theatre with sermons a lot?

AC: I did, I did, although I keep them quite separate in another way, I mean... theatre's one thing, worship is another. You can have theatrical elements in worship,as probably you can have worship elements in theatre, but they are two distinct activities of human beings, and it's important to remember that. In fact Peter Brook, in the very early days, I went to a symposium that he was leading, and a lady raised her hand and she said - Oh Mr. Brook, I love theatre and I love your theatre, it's my religion. And he said - Madame you are on your way to fascism. And I thought that's an interesting insight.

SJB: What is your own theological position, in relation to the literal existence of God, say, and Judson's so-called secularisation of its activities?

AC: I'm a Tillichian, I'm a Paul Tillich scholar, and I followed him around the city and studied with him, and he was the reason I went to Union and Columbia, so ...

when Paul Tillich talks about the God behind God, that is probably my closest way of trying to talk about it. I'm a little unhappy with the term 'the God within' because the God within can be easily corrupted because we're sinners, I mean we're all... corrupt. So the God within doesn't please me, but on the other hand God as a figure doesn't please me because it's too hierarchical, and unreal... The holy is a close term for me, but words, all words have been corrupted so much that... I would have to say that sometimes, in any activity, one feels the presence of the holy, and that one in worship, intentionally, and nine out of ten times you fail, seeks to make that connection.

SJB: And theatre can be holy too but not in the sense of worship.

AC: No, not in the sense of worship. *Waiting for Godot* is not a holy play, but it is a totally human and profound play. Where they meet, for me, as a Christian, is in the figure of the Christ, but what that means is open to all kinds of interpretations... But you have Isaiah 40, and you have *Endgame*, and somehow, both of them, by some kind of miracle keep integrity.

SJB: And both are also somehow true.

AC: Right.

SJB: And Ecclesiastes is Beckett before Beckett. "There is nothiing new under the sun."

AC: Exactly.

SJB: What about other influences on your thinking? You've mentioned Beckett, the Living Theatre...?

AC: Well Tillich, Beckett, the Living Theatre, Thomas Mann... Bessie Smith and Mozart. They're the influences on me. I mean the greatest showman of the 20th centrury, the greatest theatre man of the 20th century was Oscar Hammerstein who wrote the words for Showboat and Oklahoma, the two great musicals of the century. But he lives in a different world than I live in. He lives in the world of Broadway and Shubert and all of that, and that's a different world. But nevertheless I don't sneer at it anymore. There was a time in the '60s when I sneered at Jerome Kern and all of that, now I don't, I'm moved by them, and I'm enchanted by Hammerstein's way of taking a clichŽ and turning it into poetry... and then sometimes turning it back into a clichŽ (smile).

SJB: When I interviewed Larry Kornfeld he told me about how he'd come to love Noel Coward, when it was the last thing he would have imagined in the '60s.

AC: Larry was a great influence on me, probably because I had never met anyone who hadn't had a kind of classical education, gone to the right schools, who was more

brilliant than I. Really and truly. And Larry was smarter than I was about music and opera and theatre and a lot of things. And I suddenly realised you could be a New York Jew, and be brilliant, and it didn't make a good fuck whether you went to Harvard or not. Larry was very important to me, and is, I mean I love him profoundly, like a brother.

SJB: What do you think has been the influence of Off-Off-Broadway since the movement ended?

AC: Without OOB one of the important plays of the century, Hair, would never have been done. Hair made - and Clive Barnes by his championing of Hair - made alternative theatre both wealthy, possible, and opened up the gates to the world. And that would not have happened without OOB.

SJB: So OOB really transformed musical theatre?

AC: Well, yeah, in a way it transformed musical theatre because, although a lot of the songs are great, what it did was change the idea that a song had to be in the Rodgers/Hammerstein, Jerome Kern, Gershwin tradition. It changed all that, turned our minds around. So that was important.

SJB: And there was a fresh emphasis on staging, right? Again, Larry seems to believe that the vitality of the staging of modern musical theatre owes a lot to OOB?

AC: I would say it owes its influence to dance, to modern dance more than almost anything. Agnes de Mille really [?], I mean it goes back beyond OOB.

SJB: What did you make of the other OOB venues, besides Judson?:

AC: Well Cino I loved because of the intimacy. It was the most intimate place I've ever been in my life. I took my first lover to Cino, I saw my favourite Christmas play at Cino, I saw a lot of crap at Cino! La Mama was more crafty and precise in its staging: from the very beginning Ellen had a sense of how work should be staged, but... I had a mother and I found La Mama smothering. Although wonderful.

SJB: Smothering in what sense?

AC: Ellen, Ellen was fun and glorious but somehow... Joe Cino let you be, he let you be (I mean he killed himself finally), but he let you be who you were, if you were fat if you were thin if you were old if you were young he let you be. How he did it I'll never know. But you always felt a kind of influence from Ellen. She wanted everyone to be... she wanted to be Mother Goose and us all to be the ganders, you know. She once sewed my pants; one time she came along to the church and my pants were torn: I found that very offensive. She meant it in the very best kind of way but I found it offensive. So... Joe let you be, Ellen wanted to be Mother Goose, and at Judson in some strange way we were concerned with religion.

SJB: In the broadest sense...

AC: Yes, and those three differences are the most interesting to me.

SJB: What about Theatre Genesis?

AC: You know I never spent much time at Theatre Genesis, although I know Sam Shepard did a lot of work there. I knew Ralph [Cook], when he ran it, and we were friends.

SJB: Did St. Mark's have a similar policy to Judson regarding community links with artists?

AC: I think they did, although they weren't quite as free as we were, and the congregation was not as involved itself as we were... Genesis was always too butch for me. I don't know what I mean by that, but I always felt that everyone was trying to be butch. And I didn't want to be butch... I didn't want anyone to tell me how to be butch.

SJB: Ralph Cook once wrote something about Theatre Genesis being "almost conspicuously heterosexual" in the context of Off Off Broadway.

AC: Right, right. Although it turns out it wasn't... I remember the first time I heard of Sam Shepard, I was at a party at Judson, dancing with a young woman, and she said- I have a new boyfriend, he's a playwright, his name is Sam Shepard. And I said Oh. And she said he's like all the others, he doesn't know what he is and he's bisexual. So... But I was frightened in those days, I was terribly innocent in a strange way... and I maintain my innocence even today in a way, but back then, I was <u>really</u> innocent... And here I was thrown in the midst of this... den of iniquity [he smiles], and I was as iniquitous as all the rest but in a very different way.

SJB: Do you have any thoughts about the standard of OOB acting?

AC: When actors, or an actor, had the touch, like Jeff Weiss or Florence Tarlow, or Arlene Rothlein or Lucinda Childs in a way, it was sublime. It was sublimity surrounded by the crap. I mean the acting OOB. Whereas you could go across the street to the West Side Theatre to see a little Off-B'way show, where the acting is all... trained and for the most part boring. To me. Competent, sometimes more than competent, but the limits that teachers have set on acting is sad.

SJB: Is the same true of playwriting? Sublimity surrounded by crap?

AC: No I don't think so. There was a lot of crap, but I think that for the most part the playwright held his or her own more evenly than the actors, so there was less crap and there was more excitement, and also genius.

SJB: Do you think those plays stand the test of time, beyond the OOB context?

AC: I think some will survive. I think some of Sam's, some of Lanford's, some of Irene's, some of mine, some of Rochelle Owens, will survive. There'll be periods of pallor, but then they'll suddenly come to life again.

SJB: Perhaps the predominance of the one-act form OOB will limit the potential for revival in future -- people don't seem to mount one-acts except in schools these days.

AC: That doesn't bother me at all. I mean who knows what theatre may be in a hundred years? It may be a minute, or it may be all video, or it may be all... but these plays, whether they're one act or four act, will survive.

SJB: Some people have suggested that modern performance art owes a lot to OOB developments.

AC: I don't know. I don't like performance art for the most part, I find it self-absorbed and conceited, and therefore I'd hate to think that it owed its reality to people like Joe Chaikin and Larry and Irene. No. No, I don't think so.

SJB: Who are the other people from that time that you feel people should be taking particular note of?

AC: Yvonne Rainer, as a dancer and as a performance person. She was in a couple [of plays too]. She was in *What Happened*, the Stein play. She's been an important figure in my life for some reason; her integrity and her... whatever. Catherine Litz, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, all have been important in terms of dance and movement, and in terms of expanding movement. The father of it all is finally John Cage, there's no-one to touch him, I mean I hardly agree with him about anything - musical or anything else - but he is the godfather of the avant-garde dance, the avant-garde music, the avant-garde theatre and the avant-garde painting, in a strange way... Because he somehow stumbled... he didn't stumble... he knew how to ask the right questions. Whereas everyone else was saying - Why is it Tuesday?, he was saying - Why isn't it Monday evening? And that made all the difference, to all of us.

SJB: He had this emphasis on the what was happening in the present, in the now...

AC: Exactly, exactly. The I-Ching and all of that. I mean I never bothered with all of that but it was just his incredible openness to... to life in all its grandeur.

SJB: What about the popular culture influence in OOB. There seems to have been this odd combination of sort of high brow avant-garde ideas and pop culture junk. I mean that's even apparent in the eclecticism of your own composing, right?

AC: Well the roots of that are with Roy Lichtenstein and artists like that. All of a sudden when Roy did a panel, a playwright would see it and think - Gee, I could do that in a different way, you know. And some of the most heart-wrenching and touching moments of my life have been kind of... conscious relationships between popular culture and art... not art... and theatre. It's not like Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn and all that, it's that the Grade B people in the movies have supplied Grade A people to OOB.

SJB: The despised is raised up?

AC: That's right. Right. Like Bonita Granthall [?] or Deanna Durbin or...

SJB: Maria Montez.

AC: Maria Montez. Exactly, sure. Tyrone Bain...

SJB: How did Grade B become Grade A, how did it become so moving?

AC: Andy Warhol. Andy Warhol understood... whether he understood painting or not I don't know, but he understood framing. He understood the frame, and he knew how to frame experience in a way that turned anything into something quite ravishing.

SJB: Is that a description of Judson too?

AC: In some ways it was, in a way...

(phone call interrupts)

SJB: Was there an identifiable politics to OOB, do you think?

AC: Politics has nothing to do with theatre. There is theatre that is political, just as there's theatre that is religious, just as there's theatre that is classical, but for the most part I feel they're two separate areas of activity, yes. And yet I'm unhappy with that, I wish it were different, I wish that Wagner had been not anti-Semitic, and that Artaud had been a gentleman, and all kinds of stuff like that but.. the world isn't like that. At least not so far. I don't think they have to do with one another.

SJB: Didn't you do some acting yourself? Father Shenanigan in Home Movies, for instance?

AC: Oh yes, yes, and I played Winnie the Pooh, and I played two roles in a play by Derek Walcott because an actor got sick. No, I acted a good deal.

SJB: Were you good? Modesty aside?

AC: Given the right role, I'm a good actor. I played Walt Whitman in Peter Parnell's play at Playwright's Horizons, and that was a perfect role for me, I did quite well. I could do Lear, I could do King Richard II, but I don't have either the training or the instinct to simply... be an actor.

SJB: You got rave reviews for Father Shenanigan.

Yes. But that was because I was a real minister, because I had written the music, and because... I was funny.

SJB: Could you summarise how you would go about composing for a pre-written piece. Say Promenade, with words already on a page.

AC: My inspiration for composing comes from so many sources. I remember being in a dentist's chair, and he was drilling, and all of a sudden there it was! And he had to stop drilling so I could jot down the melody. So, you know... I remember the workshop I did with Sam, he came up with the line 'What about Scallions? Do you like them?' And he said - set that to music. And some muse said (singing high staccato note) 'What about Scallions, do you like them?' And I don't know why. I have no idea. But it's like... most of my things I've done collaboratively, but the inspiration comes from a fly or a bird or a picture or a piece of turd or anything.

SJB: An instinctual thing.

AC: Right. Right, it's instinctual. Walter Kerr said that I wrote from instinct and joy, and probably there's a way.

SJB: That sounds like a good place to leave it. Thankyou so much.