

PAUL TAYLOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Bettie De Jong

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2020

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Bettie de Jong conducted by Gay Morris on August 21, 2020. This interview is part of the Paul Taylor Oral History Project.

The interview was conducted remotely, with Bettie de Jong watching videos of Paul Taylor's dances, "Tracer" and "Piece Period," on her computer in New York, while Gay Morris watched the dances on her computer in Connecticut. At the same time, the two were able to see and speak to each other through their computers while the videos were running. In the following text, Gay Morris's written additions to the interview are shown in square brackets and Bettie de Jong's in rounded ones.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session: 2 (video)

Interviewee: Bettie de Jong

Location: Remote

Interviewer:-Gay Morris

Date: August 21, 2020

Q: I am here today with Bettie de Jong, who was one of the earliest members of the Paul Taylor [Dance] Company. She came to the company in 1962 and is still associated with it, so is an excellent person to be speaking about these dances.

This is a second of two interviews. The first one we did was actually a year ago, which seems incredible. That was before the pandemic, so we were together in person and now, of course, we are doing this remotely. Where the first interview was a general look at your career, in this one we are focusing on two specific works, “Tracer” and “Piece Period,” which are from 1962. This was the first year that you danced with the Company, and you were part of the original casts. Just to start off and recap a little bit of what went on in the first interview, Bettie was born in Java of Dutch parentage.

De Jong: Sumatra.

Q: Oh, Sumatra.

De Jong: Lived in Java for a long time, but both my sister and I were born in Sumatra on a rubber plantation.

Q: Born in Sumatra and, after World War II, went to the Netherlands and began your training in university in the Netherlands, and then went to New York to study at the Martha Graham School. That's where you met Paul. He was a principal dancer with the Graham Company and, in 1962, he was starting to put together a group of dancers to do a tour in Europe. You auditioned and became one of those dancers.

You said in our last interview that he personally taught you “3 Epitaphs,” “Junction,” “Insects and Heroes.” Then, he created a new work for you, two other young female dancers, and himself, which was “Tracer.” I think you said also at that point you knew Paul as a dancer because of the Graham background, but you didn't really know his choreography—

De Jong: No, None.

Q: —at that point. What was it like to learn these new dances and this new movement? Was it easy? Was it difficult?

De Jong: [00:03:40] Some was very easy, but some was very easy in the way like, “This is something new,” because I started as a ballet dancer, but I stopped as a ballet dancer because I was so tall. Me on pointe, there was no point to it. When I saw the Graham Company in Amsterdam, I said, “Tall guys. That's where I have to go.” I became absolutely a Graham dancer. Five years of thirteen hours a week Graham technique. I was a Graham dancer when I joined Paul.

The “3 Epitaphs” was a Paul dance, and he had to show me everything that he wanted. “Insects and Heroes” was not so bad because I was the bug. The bug did very different things than the other dancers. She just sort of zapped people as a bug and could do it as a twosome (meaning zapped two then went to zap another two dancers).

“Junction” was very Grahamesque, so that was delicious. I had a great time with that, but “Tracer” was a new feel for me (new for my body). Thank goodness he [Paul] realized that he could set me in a spot downstage and leave me there forever.

In “Tracer,” there’s a real bicycle wheel going around at different speeds, and I once in a while run around the wheel and go back to the position that I was posted in. Then, I got a little bit to do that was very easy because it was a duet with Paul. He handled me this way, that way, that way, that way, but I am not sure that what you’re seeing on this tape is really truly the end of “Tracer” because we could not figure it out. [“Tracer” was reconstructed for the Taylor 2 company in 2016.]

We had no film for “Tracer,” and Paul recorded everything in little stick figures. Some of the stick figures faced a way that I could not remember. I only remembered there were moments—it was just a simple cross, a slow cross stage left to stage right—very calmly. It was the Three Graces. Some of the movement the Taylor 2 (or reconstruction) cast showed me felt wrong. I didn’t recognize them as steps Paul would’ve made. The rest, I recognized. My body recognized it. We made it up as pretty [close] as possible, so what you see might not be the true end of

“Tracer.” The very end is definitely the end of “Tracer,” where Paul catches the last Grace when she comes by. Paul catches her. It is an iffy thing.

Q: It is incredible that it could have been reconstructed at all considering you did it in '62. Then, did it just drop out of the repertoire after that?

De Jong: [00:07:27] Our new manager [ Charles Reinhart] didn't like the dance because—

Q: Charlie.

De Jong: Yes. By that time, “Aureole” had appeared on the roster and “Aureole” became the diamond of our performing. Everything was about “Aureole” and maybe “Junction.” Also, “Insects and Heroes” was dropped. “Three Epitaphs” never was dropped because typically, we dance to American music. It's very special.

Q: It [“Tracer”] wasn't brought back until 2016?

De Jong: That's right.

Q: Why did Paul want to bring it back at that point?

De Jong: [00:08:28] Paul liked the dance, but I think in the beginning he didn't want to fight Charlie Reinhardt. Paul was into new things (dances) and he didn't care what he dropped (from

the repertoire). Only there were dances that he knew he shouldn't drop, like "Aureole." Like "Scudorama." Like "Piece Period." They were needed in our repertoire because the repertoire was very small at that time.

Q: I wonder why he decided at such a late date to bring it ["Tracer"] back. Just because he liked it? Were there other things that he brought back years later like that?

De Jong: [00:09:15] Yeah, he brought "Fibers" back. It was earlier than any of these dances, and "Fibers" is very interesting, at least to any of the Taylor dancers, because it is a lexicon of movement that appears in every single dance that Paul made. It is absolutely fabulous. You get to go, "Oh, I've seen that one. Oh, I've seen that one in some dance." Never the same sequence, but he stole from himself like crazy and he was very open about it, that he stole from himself.

Q: I suppose it is his forming a vocabulary of movement, as well, at that point, so that was also important. Tell us a little bit about "Tracer." It is certainly different from "Insects and Heroes" and "Junction." It is quite different.

De Jong: It is a very smooth, lovely, slow dance. Lovely music. I will call it, in a concert, like an interlude. It is not too long. You cannot get bored. It is very pretty. The costumes are gorgeous because they were done by Robert Rauschenberg, and the little bicycle wheel keeps you spinning. [Laughs] It is just one of those little treasure dances that you can use as a bridge to something more violent or something funny, but Mr. Reinhardt didn't like it. Then, it got forgotten and then, all of a sudden, it was very possible for Taylor 2 or a smaller company [to

do], and they got it back. Not even Taylor One got it back. It's too short of a dance for the main company.

Q: I can see that, and good for a small group, too.

De Jong: It is only three girls and Paul.

Q: You said, I think, in our last interview that when it was premiered, it was premiered in Paris, and the stage was so tiny that even those four dancers couldn't be in a straight line across the stage—

De Jong: No, you couldn't.

Q: —it was so small.

De Jong: [00:12:05] In my bug costume, during “Insects & Heroes” they knew all the time where the bug was because my quills were sticking out of the wings. The dancers were at one point across the stage, flat across the stage with their arms out, all four of them, but they could not be in a line. They had to stagger, otherwise they didn't fit. I must tell you, though, that “Fibers” was not done on that program. You have “Fibers” here, in your questions. It was “Tablet.”

Q: Oh, “Tablet.”

De Jong: With music by, what was his first name? William Tenney?

Q: No, that's "Tracer." James Tenney.

De Jong: James Tenney was the music of "Tracer." I do not know what the music was for "Tablet." [the music for "Tablet" was created by David Hollister].

No, that was the costumes. The costumes of "Tablet" were done by Ellsworth Kelly, and that was a duet. That was initially choreographed for—what was the German lady?

Q: Pina Bausch?

De Jong: Pina Bausch and Dan Wagoner [According to Angela Kane in her list of Paul Taylor dances in *Dance Research*, vol. XIV, 1996, the original 1960 cast was Aikiko Kanda and Dan Wagoner. The following year "Tablet" was revised for Pina Bausch and Dan Wagoner]. Then, when Pina Bausch went back to Germany, Liz Walton did that woman's part. It was a short duet.

Q: "Fibers" wasn't done on that tour?

De Jong: No, no. That was before. "Fibers" is older than any of those dancers.

Q: Except "3 Epitaphs," I guess.

De Jong: Yes.

Q: Still, that was such a variety of movement. I would love to see those dances together again. It would be a fabulous program.

De Jong: We performed under the auspices of the Theatre of Nations festival. Paul got an award for “3 Epitaphs,” so it was very special because no one had seen anything like that ever. Cover dancers up with mirrors on their heads? Forget it. Especially in Europe where ballet was still so prominent.

Q: I just look at the variety of those dances and how each one was so—

De Jong: Different.

Q: Yes, and so much itself. Especially coming out of Graham. As you say, there’s Graham vocabulary in there, but they do not look like Graham works. You would never think those dances were done by Graham.

De Jong: “Junction”, for instance, was done a lot for all the years. That was before Graham dance was done a lot throughout the years. The other dances were dropped, but “Junction” always was kept in the repertoire. It was a Bach cello suite, and a friend of my father who was a chemistry teacher, he owned a Stradivarius and he went through Europe playing with quartets. When he saw the dance, he said, “Now, that’s a dance that you hear the music by just seeing the dance.”

Q: That's really true.

De Jong: The dance is really doing the music. He was excited.

Q: It ["Junction"] is a fantastic piece, and how it captures the pulse of the music, the energy of it. It is amazing. I am really glad that I got to see it. I saw it when the Company did it last year, so it was great. We could look at "Tracer" now and maybe talk about what seems familiar, what seems right, what seems maybe new, or had to be done again.

De Jong: The whole beginning through the duet for my part looks right. The very, very last cross is perhaps not what we did, "an iffy for me."

Q: We're going to watch it now?

De Jong: Yes, I think so.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Video of "Tracer," performed by Taylor 2, 2016, is started]

De Jong: [unclear]The person on the floor is me

Q: Was this you, Bettie? Would this be you? [Points to girl in video who is lying on the stage when the curtain rises].

De Jong: Yeah, that was me.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: First of all, I am thinking of the Rauschenberg, the bicycle wheel, itself. Was that there from the beginning? Did he choreograph around the bicycle?

De Jong: Absolutely. The bicycle traveled in my suitcase.

Q: He created the dance with the bicycle wheel already there, so you knew it was an obstacle that you had to dance around.

De Jong: Definitely, it was very, very well meant to be there.

Q: I thought maybe that it was one of those things you didn't see until the very end [after the dance was choreographed].

De Jong: [00:29:14] No, it was there from the start. We didn't have a chair standing there. We had a bicycle wheel. Anyway, it might not have gone on different speeds. They may not have figured out how to do that, but the bicycle wheel was definitely there.

Q: Were you the first dancer? The girl who's blonde [in the video], was that your role?

De Jong: [00:29:37] No. I meant to tell you, I forgot it was my part. They were the Taylor 2 dancers that brought it ["Tracer"] back. [the Taylor main company] never got it back. We never did it. What happened to us [in 1962] was after that one week at the Sorbonne of our performances [at the Theatre of Nations festival], we traveled in Paris to a little theater on the right side of the river, and we did a whole month of performances. Then, we went to Italy to— what is that place to the north? Whatever. They had a very good television place there, and we did "3 Epitaphs," "Tracer," and "Insects and Heroes."

The director of this project had been a captain of a ship, and when he saw this, he said to Paul, "I do not know anything about dance. You go ahead and direct it." They were beautiful films, but at that time when a film was not shown on television for a year, they destructed them.

Q: Oh, no.

De Jong: Yeah, and so we have no first recordings of "Tracer." None.

Q: Which part was yours?

De Jong: The one that starts on the floor. The blonde girl was doing my part.

Q: That's where you were downstage. The other thing I was thinking about was the music. It was very modernist music. Was that typical of what he [Paul] was doing? Was that the kind of music he was mostly using at that time, or was that unusual?

De Jong: No, because the Bach for "Junction" is baroque.

Q: I was thinking of "Insects and Heroes."

De Jong: [00:32:06] "Insects and Heroes" was written by [John Herbert McDowell] a friend of Paul's, a musician. I think this music [for "Tracer"] of Tenney's was sent in and Paul just liked the mood of it. He just wanted to make something with the new women. It was just sort of an accident that he got a hold of that music.

Q: In that work ["Tracer"], did you dance to the music or to counts?

De Jong: Counts.

Q: Because it looks like you're dancing to the music. I mean, it looks like everything is coming out just in the right places.

De Jong: [00:32:52] That's Paul. Paul always did it that way. You can pretty much forget about the counts after you learn the dance. You just go with the music unless you have something like

“Last Look” where you have music cues that you do something on. Usually, you dance to the music when you dance with Paul Taylor.

Q: I wanted to ask you about his solo [in “Tracer”], which looks like it would be so hard on the knees, and those pliés, that in-and-out thing.

De Jong: That was Paul.

Q: I was going to say he never spared himself, did he?

De Jong: [00:33:46] In the next dance, (“Piece Period”) the very first dance is a solo for Paul, and you will see. You will recognize that he was a swimmer. As a swimmer, you have to use everything, and he could move everything. That for him was nothing. Just recently, that solo of Balanchine (“Episodes”) was repeated. He was in second position for five minutes. Paul had that kind of body, that kind of stretch. He told us that for six hours a day, he was in the water.

Q: But it must be hard for other dancers to do those dances.

De Jong: Yes, Definitely.

Q: Especially, I am thinking of the ballet dancers like Nureyev, who did some of his work, and Baryshnikov. It must have been so hard for them because they didn’t—

De Jong: That's why they wanted to do it. As a test.

Q: He was just incredibly flexible. Why don't we move on and talk a little bit about the reconstruction. You could figure out everything but the ending, is that right? I thought what would be hard would be the transitions in between the major movements or positions, but you felt confident in that?

De Jong: I think Paul just let us know where they were musically, let us hear them.

Q: I mean in the reconstruction. In reconstructing the dance.

De Jong: [00:35:54] No, they're very clear. If we had a question, we went to Paul and said, "Now, where do you want us to step in?" He was always willing to show you because he was always there. Not on the reconstruction, but by that time, his stick figures already said where we did something new (the next step) and it's obvious if you follow the changes in the music. [Without hearing the music] most of the time, Paul said, "I forgot." It is one of those things. He was Mr. Forgot. Then, when you put the music on, he never forgot.

Q: Was he involved in the reconstruction at all?

De Jong: [00:36:54] In this one, they may have asked him a little bit about the stick figures, but mostly they (Taylor 2) figured it out. They showed it to me, and if it didn't look like Paul Taylor, I said, "Forget it."

Q: Did he see the dance? Did he see the reconstruction?

De Jong: Yeah, he did, and he gave notes.

Q: He did?

De Jong: He gave notes. He OK'd the dance.

Q: [Returning to the 1960s] You did that season on the tour. Then, you came back to New York, and you started to prepare for a November season at Hunter [College's Kaye] Playhouse, which was going to be done in November. You spent the end of the summer with your family in Europe, and then you came back. In that period, he did "Aureole," but you were not there.

De Jong: [00:38:04] Yeah, I was in Holland because my father was very sick and died actually, of heart problems so I never was involved with "Aureole."

Q: Then, when you came back, the new work was "Piece Period?"

De Jong: Right

Q: Tell us about "Piece Period." What kind of dance is it?

De Jong: [00:38:30] I have not the slightest idea of how I can tell you how that came up. He [Paul] had a friend, [John Rawlings], who was six-foot-ten. Both guys went up, and up, and up, and up, and up. John Rawlings said, “Make a dance on all kinds of different music with different characters,” and that’s what Paul did. Every dance uses different music with multiple different countries. John Rawlings also egged Paul on, on doing different things. He was very musical. He played the piano exquisitely, but he wanted Paul to do different things, so it was really about different countries.

The first dance was about Spain. The second dance was about Spain again. The third dance was Germany, and so forth. I do not know this for sure, but I am sure that John Rawlings was the one that picked the music. He also designed the costumes. Then, he would say to Paul, “Why do not you do this? Why do not you do that?” This man had so many ideas that Paul would pick one of them. They were friends for a long time until John passed away, unfortunately very young.

Q: It is, again, very different from all these other dances. He just did “Aureole,” and now he’s doing this, which is, again, totally different. Yet, both use baroque music, but in a totally different way. I am just amazed at the variety of the repertoire at that point. It is not just that the themes are different or the music is different. I mean, the whole approach to the dance is different.

De Jong: [00:41:05] Yeah, I am thinking about this baroque music. I think those were the days that modern music was not as popularly played live, and Paul really wanted live music. I think that’s why they came out with baroque music, because every pit on Broadway can play baroque.

Don't quote me on that for sure, but that's why I think it is all baroque music in "Piece Period."

Later on Paul gave in and made "Scudorama," the next piece, which has no baroque music.

Q: Nothing pleasant about it.

De Jong: [00:41:58] He started with Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps," and in the beginning, you can actually do that dance on that music. All of a sudden, he said, "No, I want bathroom music." Then, he had somebody compose it [Clarence Jackson] so that it could be played by an orchestra. Paul wanted live music.

Q: "Piece Period" is a really humorous work, while none of the other earlier works were funny in the same way. Let's look at it. [Video: Paul Taylor Dance Company, 2006. The video is paused after each dance to allow for comments]

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This is Paul's dance [the first solo], correct?

De Jong: [00:45:48] Yes. This is Paul's dance, but it is not Paul dancing.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: I just want to establish for someone who's reading a transcript that this is Paul's dance.

De Jong: Yeah.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This looks like it is a little slower than it actually is danced, at least the video that I am seeing is. Would you have seen this danced before he was done, while he was choreographing it?

De Jong: Oh yeah. We rehearse all together.

Q: This was not something that he created in private and you saw it when the whole work was done?

De Jong: He, himself?

Q: Yes. He rehearsed with you, and so you had seen this dance before opening night,

De Jong: Oh, he saw everything before it went on stage.

Q: No, I mean you. Did you see the dance?

De Jong: Absolutely.

Q: When I talked to Sharon Kinney, she was saying in some of the work she was in, they really didn't see his solos until the work came together towards the end, that he worked on his own and they didn't see his particular solos until the whole work came together towards the end of the rehearsal process.

De Jong: [00:49:00] That might have been, but I saw everything. She might have been involved with her marriage and her babies. I saw everything.

Q: The next dance [the "Spanish ladies"] is your dance, right?

De Jong: Yes.

Q: You want to tell us something about that before we see it?

De Jong: [00:49:31] I do not know. That's Telemann music. I think Paul thought of me like a praying mantis, and he wanted me off the music as much as I could. That whole dance is four sixes and then another, four sixes He made me dance four fives and a left over four. Four fives and a left over four, which is so difficult because the melody does not go that way, so I was trying my best, but I looked like a stick figure. You will see.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Video is restarted]

De Jong: [Looking at video] This is Lisa Viola. That was not me. She did good. [Laughs]

Q: But she is much shorter than you are.

De Jong: She is. She's also much better than I am.

Q: Oh, no. I don't think so, but the impression, especially on that backbend, when you do it because you were so much taller, it makes a much different impression.

De Jong: [00:53:30] She has to rest on somebody's back. I didn't need to. I was standing on my head.

Q: [In the original version] there were just two women in black, right?

De Jong: [00:53:42] Oh, yes. There were just two Spanish ladies, and then Paul knew more women. This was just a good place to let them dance.

Q: Did he give you any sort of idea about who you were supposed to be or what you were supposed to be?

De Jong: [00:54:04] No. [Laughs] No big ideas of Paul Taylor, what you were dancing about.

Q: What were you thinking about when you were doing this dance?

De Jong: [00:54:16] Count out of my skull. Five then sixes, and it made me look very sort of limp. My legs look longer, my arms look longer. I looked like a praying mantis.

Q: Did you think of yourself as a character? You're dressed in a particular kind of way.

De Jong: [00:54:44] I did not have any time to think of a character. It was so difficult to play music and hack it off in the middle, then start a new phrase in the middle of the music, then end it on the middle of the music, and then start a new phrase. I didn't think of anything.

Q: Just doing the steps?

De Jong: Exactly, and that's exactly what Paul wanted.

Q: It's odd, because when you see it with the costumes, it looks like a historical dance in some way, but I imagine when you were learning it, it just didn't have those associations at all probably.

De Jong: It was torture. [Laughs]

[INTERRUPTION]

De Jong: This was a German version.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: This dance [second male solo] was [originally] Dan Wagoner's dance, wasn't it?

De Jong: Right. But I think that it wasn't Dan in this video. I think it was Danny Grossman (also billed as Danny Williams).

Q: Oh, it wasn't Dan Wagoner?

De Jong: No, I noticed it was too long for Dan. Dan was stockier. Danny was a little longer.

Q: The movement is so different from Paul's own dance. This looks much more staccato, a little bit different movement for a different kind of body.

De Jong: [00:58:31] Very much Dan Wagoner. I think at that time, Dan already had left the company to make his own company.

Q: In 1962?

De Jong: No, this is not the version of 1962. Definitely not because in '62, I danced the Spanish lady dance. Lisa Viola joined the company much later—

Q: I know this is not you dancing, but the dance was created for Dan.

De Jong: Right, it was for Dan Wagoner. Yes.

Q: Dan was one of the early members of the company.

De Jong: That's right.

Q: I am always interested in the fact that Dan's body was so different from Paul's body, but Paul seemed to really understand Dan's body and the way he moved.

De Jong: [00:59:39] Yeah, Paul always said. Dan moves through water, which he much admired in Dan's dancing. He loved Dan's dancing. It was slow-mo, and he liked that.

Q: He [Dan] also seemed to have understood Paul's sense of humor, too.

De Jong: Absolutely. Dan was smart like crazy.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Who was this dance for [female solo with garland and bucket]?

De Jong: I do not have the slightest idea.

Q: No, not the dancer here. Originally, was that for Liz Walton?

De Jong: That was Liz Walton, yes. Definitely.

Q: Is she supposed to be a little dairy maid?

De Jong: [01:02:13] That's right, and she is supposed to take care of that garland. She snips off her last flower of the garland.

Q: Oh, that's what that is. I could never understand that [from only watching the video, where the movement is unclear]. Does she put the flower in the bucket and then leave?

De Jong: [01:02:35] That's right. Then, she gives the bucket to the next dancer, and the next dancer comes on with five buckets.

Q: Right, and that was Sharon Kinney's role

De Jong: Yes. Let's see who this is.

Q: Except for Lisa, I don't know any of these dancers.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Video starts again, showing the "hand dance"]

Q: Was that dance hard to learn?

De Jong: [01:07:18] It was very hard to learn, and especially at the premiere. We premiered it at Hunter College, and in the back of Hunter College, they have a whole wall of glass so we could see each other. That was not a help because if one went off, the other went off. It was just torture, but it all came from “hand,” [signing used by the blind], so it all means something.

Q: I can imagine how hard it is trying to get three people totally synchronized.

De Jong: Thank goodness the music was keeping us going. Beethoven used the flute.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Video starts again, showing the skirt dance]

Q: Were you in that dance originally?

De Jong: Yeah.

Q: Were you the one in the long skirt?

De Jong: [01:12:22] No, that was [Liz} Walton. Paul immediately wanted us in skirts, so he grabbed out-a bunch of bedsheets. Sharon’s [Kinney] bedsheets immediately ripped to a short

skirt, and he said, “Oh, perfect. Short skirt for Sharon.” Then, the next girl (Liz Walton), she had a metal chain in the bottom [of her skirt], and she kept on flipping over it. He said, “Oh, that’s good. Just keep on flipping over that chain.” Then, it was me and Ruby Shang. Ruby Shang was the second pink one and I was the second yellow one.

Q: Where did that movement come from?

De Jong: [01:13:34] Paul wanted us to slide in with those back bends. It was hard to do. He made all of them up, and he came somewhat prepared, but if it didn’t work, it was not shameful to change it all and do something different.

Q: Was he right in there choreographing? Was his body there with you?

De Jong: Oh, absolutely. He worked with us all the time. He never sat down.

Q: He never directed from the front.

De Jong: That’s right.

Q: He was always hands on.

De Jong: [01:14:26] Yeah, and when he was dancing in the same performance, he always watched from the wings in his blue bathrobe. Everybody was terrified of his blue bathrobe, but I

always felt so secure, if he watched us, because he didn't watch us dance. He watched his dance rather than us dancing it. He was evaluating his work and not the way we did it.

Q: The way he visualized it?

De Jong: Yeah, that's right. I always felt very safe with him standing there.

[INTERRUPTION]

[Video starts again]

Q: That still holds up very well, the humor in it.

De Jong: [01:17:36] Yes, it does. You have to have people who can do it straight faced because humor you cannot stress (over emphasize). You cannot make humor. It just has to be from believing in it. Paul was very strict about it, and he can have just no face when he does it. His first solo is absolutely delicious because he just does it like his ligaments do not belong to him. Off this goes, and he looks at it like it does not belong to him, and it is very funny.

Q: And his timing is so perfect.

De Jong: [01:18:38] Every time, it is a little different. That's the wonderful thing. That was always the wonderful thing with dancing with him in a duet or something because he always let

you know, “I am about to do it just a little different,” but it was very clear what was going to be different. It was always very easy to follow and it was always exciting.

Q: How did he make it clear?

De Jong: Just touched you. We’re going this way, not that way.

Q: You had to be on your toes all the time.

De Jong: [01:19:19] Well, you were, anyway, because those dances had so many different directions going. Some of them were very strict, like “3 Epitaphs” is, boom, one thing. If you do not do it that way, it is no good, but other dances, there are very many ways you can do Paul’s dances. You have freedom in those dances, and I think that’s what’s so attractive to us. It has to be in the same mood and the same idea, but it does not have to be exactly the same thing. He loved that variety.

Q: That keeps it alive, too.

De Jong: Right, and it was delicious to dance his dances. Can’t do it anymore, but they still enjoy it though.

Q: He’s also so musical. You just feel the movement and the music go together perfectly.

De Jong: Yeah, it is very driven by the music. It is wonderful.

Q: It's my understanding that "Piece Period" was not danced between 1979 and when it was revived in 2006. But it apparently didn't have the same issues that "Tracer" did about reconstructing it.

De Jong: [01:21:19] No, no. I think Paul just didn't have it on his mind, and he had so many other pieces he was choreographing. I think it wasn't revived in a period where he did all these major pieces, so he didn't need the dance. Then, all of a sudden, they say, "What about "Piece Period?"

What's not shown on this film is that massive chandelier of ping-pong balls that makes an entrance, also a cover for a costume change. Again, a John Rawlings idea. But it ["Piece Period"] wasn't needed. He had many funny pieces already. It was maybe for the thirtieth anniversary or something. He [Paul] needed something old to bring back, and it hadn't been used. "Let's get it out of the trunk." And everybody loved it.

Q: It still works really well. Sometimes, things that are funny ten years later aren't funny, but that one holds up very well. Yet, it is a little bit different humor than some of his other humorous works. It doesn't look like other things. Actually, I like the chandelier because it is such a ballet cliché to have a chandelier lowered, but of course his chandelier doesn't stay aloft

The last thing I wanted to ask you about was in the essay you wrote for *Remembering Paul Taylor*. I was so struck by how sensitive it was. It is so obvious how well you knew him and how you could see really deeply into him in a way that maybe other people couldn't. You had known him for so long and you saw the complexity of his personality, that he was never just one way. He had both that dark and light side. You said, "He was a snake and an elegant prince at the same time," and I think that really gets to his personality, that he was capable of such a range.

De Jong: [01:24:39] We spent a lot of time together—especially in France. He hated France. He hated France, and so, every morning at ten o' clock, I got a telephone call, "Are you up?" "Yes, I am up." "Can we have breakfast together?" I spent a lot of time that way, going back and forth in that way. I got to talk to him a lot, and I think Dan got to talk to him a lot, but they didn't talk about serious things. You get to know people when you just talk. It was always I would make an order, and he said "the same thing with a glass of milk." That makes a statement about who Paul is. "The same thing and a glass of milk." It was a very, very rich life he gave me. It is really amazing. I've been here so long. We're missing him very much, though.

Q: He wasn't always easy, I guess.

De Jong: [01:26:13] No. Those people are never easy. They're just so inventive, you have to stick with them. Just too delicious, not to notice, because there are so very few people that are that way.

Q: In his memoir [“Private Domain,” Knopf 1987, p. 122], he called you his muse, so that’s the way he thought of you. Do you have any feeling about what it was that he saw in you that inspired him in some way that other dancers didn’t?

De Jong: [01:27:02] Not really. We brawled a lot. We were like brother and sister. “I can’t do this, I could do that.” But he always trusted me that I was going to do what he wanted and that he always could count on me. I never said “no” on anything. Never. Wouldn’t. I couldn’t. How can you say no to these dances?

Q: Did you feel that he created certain kinds of dances for you?

De Jong: Oh yeah, definitely, periodically.

Q: Were they a certain type?

De Jong: I would think so. I never was in lyrical dance. Never. No, never. I was dying to be in a lyrical dance, to be pretty Never, ever.

Q: Maybe if you had been around, he wouldn’t have created “Aureole.”

De Jong: [01:28:24] Maybe not. He said he saved some music for me. I didn’t know Paul very well at that point because I had just joined the company, but I knew that he was never going to

make another section for that dance when I saw it. That dance was complete. You do not fiddle more with a dance like that, no. He apparently saved some music for me to be in it.

Q: It didn't happen.

De Jong: I got to do the duet ( in "Aureole") for a while, yeah.

Q: You were in "Esplanade," weren't you?

De Jong: Yeah.

Q: Maybe that's not lyrical.

De Jong: [01:29:11] I was in the beginning (first section), and then, he saw the strictness of the Bach music, and that needed eight people, not nine people out there. Then, out de Jong. But then he put me into the slow second section we call " the conversation." That was a beautiful section, so I got to do all of these other things, and they were all so delicious.

Q: He also gave you some dramatic roles like "Big Bertha" and "From Sea to Shining Sea," where you were a particular kind of character.

De Jong: [01:29:58] I didn't know who Betsy Ross was (when he made "From Sea to Shining Sea"). I learned so much from those dances about American history because, in Europe, they do not teach American history, so I learned a lot. I saluted this way [she demonstrates, palm out, the European way].

Q: [Laughs]

De Jong: [01:30:24] In Europe, we [salute with the palm out to] show there are no weapons in your hand. Then, he started laughing, and everybody laughed. When [the British dancer] Eileen Cropley was put into "From Sea to Shining Sea," she saluted the same way as me and I said "See!"

Q: I think the other thing that you captured in your essay was that you felt Paul was a lonely person.

De Jong: Yeah, very lonely.

Q: Maybe highly creative people tend to be that way.

De Jong: [01:31:01] He needed friends, but not enough to have them all the time around him. He got bored with friends. He had very good friends, but if they were around him too long, he was out. He was really on his own way. He was very happy to be on his own. He had time to think, time to fantasize about ideas.

Q: Maybe that's what it takes to be a creative person.

De Jong: A lot of inventors are lonely people. My father was finding out what was ruining the potato crop, finding out what was ruining the rubber crop. Those people are always working. Pleasure comes very far, late in their lives. They like to have about half-an-hour company, and that's it. Then, he was always very clear, "Go home." It wasn't in that many words but it was very clear.

Q: Do you have something you would like to add?

De Jong: Not that I can think of at the moment. The first vacation in my life, you know.

Q: Now? Well, we are all on vacation whether we want it or not.

De Jong: I know. We had very little vacations as dancers.

Q: I worry about the dancers a little bit.

De Jong: Me, too. It is not good.

Q: It really isn't. You can be a painter and do quite well in this, or even a writer, but a dancer—

De Jong: Musicians, same thing. They have to practice. They have to play. We try what we can, but it is very hard. Especially the ones that just joined. They feel so isolated. Very hard.

Q: We will hope for the best for the future.

De Jong: You too. Stay happy and safe. Nice talking to you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]