

INCITE PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Jennifer Tipton

Columbia Center for Oral History

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jennifer Tipton conducted by Alessandra Nicifero on June 25, 2019. This interview is part of the INCITE Oral History Project.

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 #1

Interviewee: Jennifer Tipton

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Alessandra Nicifero

Date: June 25, 2019

Nicifero: Hi. We are here with Jennifer Tipton, and it's June 25, 2019. We are in her wonderful studio, at her desk. Should we start from the beginning, and can you please tell us where you were born and where you grew up?

Tipton: [00:00:26] I was born in Columbus, Ohio. I call myself a university brat because my father was a zoologist and he couldn't decide whether he wanted to teach at a medical school or a university. So, we moved from Ohio State to Detroit, Michigan, to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to Birmingham, Alabama, and finally ended up in Knoxville, Tennessee, where my brothers still live, and that I graduated from high school there and went to Cornell University.

Nicifero: When did you encounter dance?

Tipton: [00:01:01] When I moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. My mother was a physicist, but she said as a kid, she'd always wanted to dance, so we found a dance—someone teaching dance in Oak Ridge, [Tennessee], which was 30 miles, maybe more, away from Knoxville. And every Saturday, I went with another daughter of a person, who taught with my father, to Oak Ridge for dance.

When I was fifteen, after my junior year in high school, I went to Connecticut College, which was Connecticut College School [of] for the Dance. It was a continuation. It was the American School of Dance [American Dance Festival,], which now happens at Duke University, but in those days, it was Connecticut College. I went there when I was fifteen and really even more fell in love with dance, and that winter – I was sixteen-- my parents let me spend two weeks all by myself in New York City, [New York] taking the Martha Graham Christmas Course. So that was the beginning of dance for me.

Nicifero: How was the experience of being in the city as a teenager, and taking classes?

Tipton: [00:02:20] It was great. It was great. I stayed at the Barbizon Hotel for Women, which was right up the street from the Graham studio, so most of my life was spent in that area for those two weeks. Though I remember walking to Time Square [Manhattan, New York City] to get a candied apple or something like that. [Laughs]

Nicifero: Did you make friends with some of the students?

Tipton: [00:02:46] Some of the people studying, yes, yes.

Nicifero: And then you went to college—

Tipton: Yes.

Nicifero: —to Cornell.

Tipton: Then I went to Cornell.

Nicifero: Did you continue to study dance or—?

Tipton: [00:02:57] I did, I did. I went to Cornell wanting to be the first person on the moon, wanting to be an astrophysicist and so studying physics. But my mother said that the letter that I wrote for admissions sounded like Cornell was a dance school, and I did—the first thing I did was find the dance club. And it just so happened that the teacher was—had also performed with Martha Graham in her past, so it was still Graham technique and so I continued with that.

When I was a sophomore, I think, I decided that I wanted to be a dancer, and I knew better than to withdraw. My parents would never have let me pull out of school, so I finished and then came to New York to be a dancer.

Nicifero: Where did you live when you came to New York?

Tipton: [00:03:51] I lived on 125th Street [New York] and—well, between Amsterdam [Avenue, New York] and Morningside [Heights, New York] actually in the Columbia University [in the City of New York] area with three other women. We had a big apartment with lots of bedrooms and studying dance. And I also got a part-time job as an assistant to the bookkeeper, but—

And I joined the company called The Merry-Go-Rounders, and after three years or so, I became the rehearsal mistress for them, and I had to critique the dancers. So, I went to all the performances, I looked at the stage, and it was, there was light, and I fell in love with it, and I've been in love with it ever since.

Nicifero: The Merry-Go-Rounders performed mostly with children--

Tipton: For children, yes.

Nicifero: For children

Tipton: [00:04:44] Yes. They were adult dancers, however.

Nicifero: How was that and—?

Tipton: [00:04:48] Oh, it was great fun in those days, really was wonderful to be able to perform every week so that was exciting.

Nicifero: And then, you started taking classes with—you studied and then you became an apprentice for [Thomas] Tom [R.] Skelton?

Tipton: [00:05:07] Yes. I wouldn't really call it an apprentice. I did clean up his studio. I said, "We're looking—The Merry-Go-Rounders are looking for a stage manager to be in charge of the

lighting,” and he said, “Well, I have that person’s name, but you have to come and clean up my files to find it,” [laughs] so I did. I started working with him, but—

And then he was at a period when he knew he wasn’t going to be able to travel with Paul [Belville] Taylor [Jr.] so much, so he got me involved with Paul. There were a few years that I—our first performance was in Chicago [, Illinois] I know that, and we drove to Chicago. I got all dressed up in my white gloves and fancy coat to go get in a VW [Volkswagen] bus and ride for two days to get to Chicago. I sort of dressed up to go on tour, which I very quickly learned it didn’t—[laughs]

Nicifero: It was not necessary—

Tipton: [00:06:15] No, definitely not necessary. But anyway, so in Chicago, I wasn’t—it wasn’t expected that I would come, so there was no place for me to stay, so I stayed on the living room couch of the producer. And there was a snowstorm and not many people came to our performance in Chicago sadly. And then we went on to, and I just—Urbana, Illinois, that’s where we were. And there, Tom was still with us, but he sorts of let me do the performance and then he wasn’t with us in St. Louis, [Missouri], the next and final stop, so I did the final performance all by myself. And from then on, I was off and running, but it was his lighting that I was doing.

Then it came a time when we were—the company was to do a season on Broadway. I’m always amused to call it a season as we called it, but it was four performances on Broadway. I was

certainly not party to the decision, but for some reason, Tom was not to be the lighting designer. There was another person who the producer wanted to do the lighting, and I was stage manager, of course, but when it was all over, I said to Paul, “I will happily do this person’s lighting if you want me to, but I would be much happier doing my own,” and he said, “Well, why don’t you do your own?” So that began our relationship as choreographer and lighting designer.

Nicifero: Was that a collaboration? There was a discussion--

Tipton: [00:08:03] It’s always a collaboration. But from the beginning, I saw what Paul wanted in the dance and so there was little talk necessary for the light to be right. He was always there when I was doing the lighting and so could make comments or add them. But the main thing, he would have specific places where he wanted blackouts, so he can change the dancers, sort of, in the dark kind of thing. Occasionally, there were other suggestions but actually not often.

Nicifero: So, he was very specific initially to where the light had to be? How—?

Tipton: [00:08:53] Not in the beginning but always. [Laughs] Yes, he would make a piece knowing that at this point, he wanted it to go to black so that these dancers could get offstage and others could come on in the darkness.

Nicifero: You spent some time watching him rehearsing and teaching or creating the choreography, were you in the studio?



Tipton: [00:09:16] Not that much, not that much. I learned early on that I got confused if I didn't—if I saw a run-through that was not the final thing. I would get confused, so I would wait until the piece was finished, the piece was made. I might go to see it a couple of times, but it was always finished. So, I didn't hang out in the studio and watch him create so much.

Nicifero: You were also friends with [Robert] Dan Wagoner, and I read somewhere that you met Paul Taylor for the first time on the subway. What was your impression, and had you seen him dancing before?

Tipton: [00:10:09] It's true. I knew Dan from Connecticut College. The summer after he left the navy, he was there, and we met and became good friends. Later that year when I was in New York, I bumped into him on the subway, and he was with Paul. I knew Paul because of the [Martha] Graham [Dance] Company and so I was, sort of, overwhelmed to meet Paul at that point.

Nicifero: He is described often as a very unusual mover. What was your impression when you first saw him dancing?

Tipton: [00:10:50] He was liquid. He was extraordinary. It probably came from the swimming he did, but to have a man that large move that fluidly was quite extraordinary.

Nicifero: Did his dancing in any way influence your way of creating lighting for the company?

Tipton: [00:11:16] Oh, I don't think so. I don't think so. Of course, in those days, certainly, Tom Skelton was more of an influence in trying to find my way in the beginning, and it was Tom who had me draft the entire plot and draft the focus of each light in the plot before we went on tour with the [José] Limón [Dance] Company, which was a big tour to Asia early on for me. And so, Paul—I mean Tom then guided me with that, and it's on the basis of that that I do worksheets to this day. So, Tom was the big influence at that time.

You know in thinking about this, I always wonder if—he clearly must have been upset in some way that I took over for the lighting of the company, but I always felt that because of the—I never—if Tom had been doing it, I never would've asked Paul to take over, but since another person was doing it, I felt brave enough to do that. And I'm certainly happy that I did because—a long, long wonderful life of making different kinds of dance that I learned as much about lighting as he learned about making dances in all that time.

Nicifero: What do you feel when you see performances that you've created the lighting for, from long time ago, and you see the performances back onstage?

Tipton: [00:13:16] I mean the company does bring back things that are quite old. In fact, they've just done *Junction* (1961), which was even before my time, so they bring them back from all times, which I think is wonderful. I respect that person who did the lighting, but I don't know her. The choreography hasn't changed, so the light shouldn't change. I do have recorded information about the light for each dance, so I follow that when the dance comes back, I don't

think of—and I forget everything, so if it weren't written down, it would be forgotten on my part, so I write it down and then I do what it says.

Nicifero: So, you're never tempted to change or—?

Tipton: [00:14:10] No. I mean, occasionally, Paul has changed the choreography in which case I did change the light if it were appropriate to do that or he's requested or the costumes have changed color or something like that, so of course I've changed. Of course, there was the time that [Mikhail Nikolayevich] Misha Baryshnikov did the solo in *Aureole* (1962), and for some bizarre reason, the concept—and it's Tom Skelton's light actually and still to this day credited to him because there's a very definite concept, which is that the front and the side light was blue and the backlight was white, no color, and it's pretty much one cue for the whole dance.

But then Misha got to it, and very oddly Misha's skin does not do well in blue light and so Paul came up to me and said, "He doesn't look very good," and I said, "I know. The blue light's not good for him," and he said, "Well, change it," [laughs] so I did. But other than that, other than things like that, I've tried to remain true to the original idea of the light.

Nicifero: So beside traveling together during touring, what was your relationship with Paul?

Tipton: [00:15:38] Oh, we did occasional things together but not—you know, I wouldn't say that we were close friends, but we were friends and had dinners and such on occasion, so—

Nicifero: There were every year, at least, two new works and so you would be brought in and—

Tipton: [00:16:01] Plus the tours, plus there were months at a time that we were together, and we often had dinner on those. But Paul was very—he would get up very, very early, so he would go to bed very, very early if he could.

Nicifero: That was his schedule even on tour?

Tipton: Even on tour, yes.

Nicifero: So not much time to socialize or—?

Tipton: [00:16:30] Right, right, exactly. And on tour, you spend a lot of time in the theater, particularly the person in charge of the lighting.

Nicifero: And you were the stage manager for the company—

Tipton: [00:16:43] I did everything. I did everything except take care of the costumes, which Bettie de Jong did. But I was the only non-dancer, so I was company manager, stage manager, driver, etc. I got very good at driving, at pulling a U-Haul behind, [laughter] and I could park it pretty well too, so—

Nicifero: Well, you were also entertaining with interesting word games as you were driving along. At least, that's what is in—

Tipton: [00:17:20] What? Interesting word games? Well, I don't remember that part. [Laughs]

Nicifero: It's in Paul's book.

Tipton: Oh, right, yes. Well—

Nicifero: I wouldn't know otherwise.

Tipton: Yes. [Laughs]

Nicifero: Did you have to adjust to different theaters and was that difficult?

Tipton: [00:17:34] Of course, of course, and that's why I think that the way I learned was really terrific. I toured with Paul for about seven years, so it was wonderful. And the first piece that I did was *Orbs* (1966), and we did it at the Holland Festival, which was great because it meant that I could—[pause] You want to start over again? [Laughs.]

Nicifero: Yes.

Tipton: [00:18:07] I did *Orbs* (1966) at the Holland Festival, which was terrific because it meant—at the Holland Festival, we lived in Amsterdam [Netherlands] and then traveled to these little towns and had a performance in each of these little towns every night for a week. And what I learned then was sadly the piece *Orbs* opened on the first of those nights, but I felt the light was just not right. But in an ordinary theater, I wouldn't have been able to change. You know if we had done a week of performances in one theater, I wouldn't have been able to change where the light came from, or what color it was, easily. But since it was a whole new setup each night, I could test new ideas very quickly and easily and so I felt quite lucky that that was the first place. And *Orbs* is a pretty major dance, so it was challenging. But, at least, the lights didn't ruin it for the first performance, [laughs] and it got good reviews so it was okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Nicifero: During 1966 and that's when *Orbs* was created, how was life in New York City in the '60s? Were you able to see other dances? Were you working for other companies?

Tipton: [00:19:53] I was working for other companies and lighting other people, and going off on tour was always hard because, in the early days, I would come back from tour and have to get used to New York all over again. Excuse me. [Coughs] I didn't make much money in those days, so I lived for four years, or maybe it was three, with the four women on 125th Street. And then I got an apartment all by myself, which was like twenty-five dollars a month or something, and it was a walk-up with a bathtub in the kitchen, and I remember, sort of, spending time.

I had a job. The [Paul] Taylor [Dance] Company tried to pay dancers with unemployment, but sometimes, the weeks didn't add up so that we weren't—and I remember I had a job at FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology], and they paid like two or three months later, just the way their accounting system was set up. So, I can remember living on—I would buy a pound of beef cubes and have a cube a day kind of thing. [Laughs] If I had known about beans and rice and that they have good protein in those days then that would've been wonderful, but I didn't know about that. But, anyway, it was not easy. But I loved New York. I've always loved New York.

Nicifero: And were you impressed by other companies? Were you also going to see performances?

Tipton: [00:21:49] I was, as much as I could. Certainly, in my first days—my first years in New York, I saw—I would look in the paper to see what free performances were going on, and I went to a lot of free music concerts and weren't so many free dance concerts. But through the Merry-Go-Rounders, I started working at the 92nd Street Y as an assistant to Dr. [William] Kolodney and also as an usher. I did see lots of dance because lots of dance happened at the 92nd Street Y, so—

Nicifero: Right, including Paul Taylor, I believe, performed --

Tipton: Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Tipton: Okay. So, what was your question? [Laughs]

Nicifero: Oh, we were talking about Paul Taylor performing at the 92nd Y.

Tipton: [00:22:54] Oh yes, right. That was before my time really.

Nicifero: Yes. It was in the late '50s.

Tipton: [00:22:59] Yes. He had finished by then, and I came in '58. I came to New York in '58 but was not connected to him—with him for a while, till the '60s.

Nicifero: Many of Paul's performances, choreographies, are part of the repertoire, but are there any dances that you really liked and then they, sort of, disappeared?

Tipton: [00:23:27] *Orbs* has been done, but it's then now disappeared. *Scudorama* (1963) is coming back this season. It's one of my favorites. One that isn't done, *Piece Period* (1962) isn't done that much. I think it's great fun. So—

Nicifero: What is special for you about *Scudorama*? I just watched a run-through rehearsal—



Tipton: [00:23:53] Just the energy and the movement I think. And I've always liked Paul's dark dances best. There's a bit of darkness in it and wackiness [laughs] like many of them like *Runes* (1975) and the—I can't remember the name of the one I'm thinking of, anyway.

Nicifero: *Big Bertha* (1970) is one—

Tipton: [00:24:29] Oh, well, *Big Bertha* is one of those, yes.

Nicifero: —that has also a set design because most of the performances are... you are the one creating space and—

Tipton: [00:24:43] Certainly, the early ones.

Nicifero: —architecture.

Tipton: [00:24:44] Once that Santo [Richard Loquasto] came on the scene, there was a drop. There was usually something, but in the early days, it was—there were dances that had just a background made by light.

Nicifero: And perhaps *House of Cards* had a painted backdrop.

Tipton: [00:25:10] A painted drop, yes, but even *Orbs*. I mean, Alex Katz had the silver arc that was the sun in *Orbs*, so—

Nicifero: Did you have conversation with the set designer or the costume designer, or do you still have conversation with Loquasto and—?

Tipton: [00:25:34] Yes, definitely and get swatches and or drawings of the scenery, yes.

Nicifero: Do you help each other in making decisions?

Tipton: [00:25:45] Yes, certainly, certainly if it's appropriate.

Nicifero: And have you worked with him—with Loquasto also for other companies?

Tipton: [00:25:54] Definitely, definitely, yes. In fact, Santo and I have been together for a very long time. He was [one of] *the* first theater drama designers that I worked with, and I introduced him to Paul. Santo and I worked together with Twyla Tharp and then I guess it was Paul who asked and so I introduced Santo to Paul.

Nicifero: But it took a while, it's my understanding, for them to work together?

Tipton: [00:26:36] Yes. Because he'd had Alex Katz and John Rawlings and other people—I forget his name. Anyway, I'm sure you have it somewhere in your notes.

Nicifero: [00:26:51] Yes, there is Nancy O’Neill [phonetic] was a set designer and costume designer for Y—

Tipton: Who?

Nicifero: Nancy O’Neill.

Tipton: I didn’t understand the name.

Nicifero: O’Neill.

Tipton: [00:27:06] O’Neill? No, I don’t know. And always George Tacet, so—

Nicifero: Of course. The magic, invisible George Tacet.

Tipton: [00:27:16] [Laughs] Yes, right.

Nicifero: What can you tell me about the different generations of dancers that you must have known?

Tipton: [00:27:27] Yes, of course, there are always the ghosts in anything, particularly the old pieces. Like seeing *Junction* just recently, yes, I did. There are many ghosts on the stage, and each company brings something but also loses something. And, somehow, I always remember

the physicality and energy of the original person doing it and so there's always something—a little something missing even though I love seeing the pieces. More than anywhere – and it may change now that Paul is gone – but more than any other company that I've seen, these pieces maintain their original energy and freshness.

Nicifero: And how so? Do you think it's because of the way that the choreographies have being taught, transmitted to the new dancers?

Tipton: [00:28:42] Yes. Probably, Bettie de Jong is a big person, proponent of that, reason for that, and so—

Nicifero: There's also a very strong sense of community specifically with the Paul Taylor [Dance] Company, and I'm not sure who was the creator or the originator of that sense of community.

Tipton: [00:29:11] That maybe Bettie as well, and of course, everybody wants to please Paul, so a working relationship with him is very special to each of the dancers. When he was on tour, of course, that was its own community, and it was—we all felt very much a part of the family.

Once he stopped traveling with his company, I think then it was Bettie who really kept them together as a family. He would show up every now and again, particularly when there was a new piece that was being done.

Nicifero: He stopped traveling already in the '70s, a long time ago, but you continued to travel with the company for much longer?

Tipton: [00:30:20] Yes. I could figure it out, mid-'70s, yes, mid-'70s to late '70s maybe. So, I guess it wasn't that much longer.

Nicifero: I assume you were in the theater for Paul's last performance at BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music].

Tipton: [00:30:49] At BAM, yes.

Nicifero: And how was that and how—?

Tipton: [00:30:54] Well, of course, it was of great concern to everybody. And in those days, it was not something that was done that a company continued without its core, its artistic core, but it was just the beginning of that, so the Paul Taylor Company did manage to weather it. I don't know. It seemed to me that they weathered it without much grief, without no booking. There were always bookings, there were always tours, etc., but I'm not the one, and I don't know. John Tomlinson would know much better than I.

Nicifero: There is a moment when I've read somewhere that during the *Last Look*, which is a piece from the '80s, and there's use of mirrors, and the audience after the preview—the premiere got upset or irritated. Some of the seats were annoyed by the lighting, and so Paul asked you to

change, and you were not that open to compromise rightly to change lights for—because of the audience.

Tipton: [00:32:40] I don't know.

Nicifero: Is that—

Tipton: —where the idea that I wasn't open to it came. I changed them. [Laughs]

Nicifero: Oh, you did change the light?

Tipton: [00:32:46] Oh, yes. Oh, yes, of course. Yes. I felt it was *Last Look*. It's a raw piece and so to have light reflected from the mirrors into the audience was appropriate, I felt. But people ask for their money back, so we went into the theater and had some more tech time to change it. I changed it. I don't think it works as well as it did, but I understand his—unlike the—oh, and I forget the name of it now, [Mercier Philip] Merce Cunningham's piece that has always—that's lit by [Robert] Rauschenberg *To The Ones* [phonetic] that as the dancers go by one [phonetic], it will turn the lights on and off. And there's always a light that's focused right on seats somewhere and so it's on. Whenever it's activated to be on, it's on. I guess there could be performances when it isn't turned on at all, though I doubt. I suspect it's in a place that wouldn't be like that. But, anyway, the word is that whenever the piece is finished that those seats are all empty. [Laughs] I mean it's true. There's something an audience doesn't like about lights in its eyes, but I understand.

Nicifero: So, what did you bring of your experience of working with Paul into working for a theater director? Is the process completely different?

Tipton: [00:34:34] It's certainly not completely different, and as I say, what I learned doing all of Paul's pieces—because, of course, another thing that changed over my lifetime, the span of time that I was with Paul is that audiences were not happy really going to see the work of one person in the early days because I guess they got bored or something. It was all the same, they thought. One of the challenges for their lighting designer was to make each piece different, in that— answering that challenge, I grew and developed my own way, and so definitely, I was influenced by the Taylor company that way. As I say, we grew together. He started before I did.

Nicifero: And then you started teaching in the early '80s? Was that—?

Tipton: Yes, yes.

Nicifero: And is there a way that you teach to your students and you bring back your experience of working with directors and choreographers? Is there something specific that you've learned on the field in that—?

Tipton: [00:36:06] I went to Yale [University]and in that first year that I was there, I was determined to teach all ways, and of course, what I learned is that there's only one way I can teach, and that's my way. How I soften that is I teach them my way the first year and then

encouraged them to find their way in the second and third year that they're there. Probably, I learned to speak about light because of having students, and I would hear myself saying things, and I would say to myself, well, if I really believe that, I would change what I do. I did change what I did and became a better lighting designer because of teaching, through teaching. But the teaching is not just Paul, not just dance. It's everything, so, and I feel very lucky to have been. I mean, so many lighting designers are pigeonholed and so I've been able to do it all, and I feel very lucky.

Nicifero: You do for opera, for music concert?

Tipton: [00:37:32] Yes, even architecture now is on the horizon, so a big art installation in Seattle [Washington].

Nicifero: Oh, can you tell us more?

Tipton: [00:37:45] It's two hotels that are being built on a city block with an alley, and the city insisted that the alley be kept as an alley. So, the builders or the person who owns the block and has—is building the hotels that will be managed by Hyatt [Hotels Corporation], he wants a theatrical alley, so I'm working with a day designer and I'm the night designer and a sound designer too.

Nicifero: Will that space be used for theatrical events eventually?



Tipton: [00:38:26] No, no, no.

Nicifero: No? Just this—

Tipton: [00:38:27] It's the entranceway but in the—yes, we're lighting the—we'll see. We'll see first. It's early. We have to present the design next month.

Nicifero: So, going back to Paul—

Tipton: [00:38:49] Taylor, yes.

Nicifero: —what else do you remember of the last years and the last creations? Was he always open to your suggestion?

Tipton: [00:39:03] Yes. You know in thinking about today, I don't even know what the last one I did was because he chose to work with [James] Jim [F.] Ingalls for the last pieces that he put on the stage, so it was Jim who did the lighting for them. I did not, so—

Nicifero: And he was not one of your assistants or one of your—? No?

Tipton: [00:39:28] No. I guess it was Twyla he took on the road for me. At early point in his life, he was a stage manager, but no, he's a lighting designer of note.

Nicifero: Well, the most recent piece that we saw just recently at the Manhattan School of Music was *Promethean Fire*, and you did the lights for—?

Tipton: [00:39:56] Yes.

Nicifero: How was creating the—

Tipton: [00:39:57] Is that—? That's not that young a piece.

Nicifero: No, it's from 2002.

Tipton: Right.

Nicifero: But I believe it is the most recent that's been performed at the Bach Program.

Tipton: [00:40:07] Really? Really? Okay. So, yes, I did the light for that, and the—[pause] I don't know what you—? I mean, it speaks for itself as do all of them. I find *Promethean Fire* a particularly wonderful piece. I must say that in the middle section with the duet, when the red—I'm always of two minds. This time it's done, I turn the red up a little bit, and this time, I turn it down a little bit [laughs]. And it's my eye, you know?

Nicifero: Yes.

Tipton: [00:40:45] The paper says one thing, but it's that small detail. You put it a little bit brighter or a little bit dimmer—that has to do with an eye. It doesn't have to do with maintaining a concept.

Nicifero: That changes slightly with a theatrical context of what—

Tipton: No, it changes—

Nicifero: —was performed?

Tipton: [00:41:07]—with my whim. [Laughter]

Nicifero: It seems right as well. [Laughter]

Tipton: [00:41:17] I guess I get a little nervous about using such an intense color as red, and yet it is *Promethean Fire*, so it seems appropriate, and yet it gets—it can get to be just a little too much or whatever. [Laughs] Or I can say, “Oh, I don't see it well enough,” and so I make it a little brighter, anyway. Yes, *Promethean Fire* is pretty extraordinary I think. The costumes are brilliant, just brilliant. I did not know what to expect then. We hadn't talked at all, it was just there [phonetic].

Nicifero: So, you watched the piece once the costumes were already created or before?

Tipton: Before.

Nicifero: Before.

Tipton: [00:42:17] Yes, and then they were onstage for a technical rehearsal.

Nicifero: Are you working for some other dance companies now or mostly theater?

Tipton: [00:42:34] I do pieces with Twyla. I've done work with ABT [American Ballet Theatre]. I've done work with New York City Ballet, [NYCB]. I did Justin Peck's last piece. I'm not sure about that. He does pieces so quickly. Maybe it wasn't his last piece, but just recently, I did a piece of Justin's. So, yes, I work with other people, other companies.

Nicifero: Do you have any memory associated with Paul either traveling on tour or a phone conversation about the next work?

Tipton: [00:43:18] When I received the—it was a Dance Magazine award perhaps, I thought Paul would be the perfect one to give it to me. The imp that he is, you know he talked about my driving for most of the time. [Laughs] He played the mad fool for that. [Laughs] He was wonderful, and he was a very special man and very special to me. My life would have been very different without him.

Nicifero: Is there any question that I didn't ask and that you would like to answer?

Tipton: I don't—

Nicifero: Is there a specific work of his that you found remarkable in a different way, that touch you more, a specific one?

Tipton: [00:44:26] They're all that. You know from *Runes* (1975) to—this is where my good old brain just—I mean, I don't know. I look at this and they're—it's amazing from *Nightshade* (1979) to [*Le Sacre [du Printemps]*] (1980) to the *Book of Beasts* (1971), which *Book of Beasts* was done when there was no light coming out of the lights way back when -- and here they are in this deep velour black costumes. It was very hard to get enough light on that piece, and it's great that it's come back because they're—we can [laughter] get enough light on them now, so that's fun. The same for *Orbs* (1966). *Orbs* needed bright, bright light, and it's so nice. It was so nice when it came back and got it.

There are so many and they're so different and each—and looking at them, of course, a lot of the difference for each—from each to each has to do with Santo's work, but Santo's work is always a great challenge to me and takes me places that I never thought I'd be, so it's wonderful. The variety year after year after year of that challenge, it was just always so stimulating, so provocative and made me the lighting designer that I am today, no doubt.

Nicifero: Has the new technology somehow improved, or simplified working—

Tipton: [00:46:43] It depends on which technology. Certainly, computer control is fantastic, but the new lamps are a bit of a problem. People just seem so dead; the skin is dead Every time there is a new form of light-generating fixtures even from candles to electricity or candles to—I guess electricity came—no, gas. Every time there is—there are all of the people who are saying, “Oh, it’s so harsh, it’s so terrible, it’s so—” I think there’s something different. The light that we have today is not full spectrum and so I think that’s particularly different. But I’m also a dinosaur, as I’ve said, so I miss the old light—

[00:47:49] It’s interesting. *Post Meridian* (1965) we did in Paris first, and it’s coming back this season as well. But we did it in Paris back in the days when France was a hundred voltage. Now, they’re 220 like all of Europe. It was just 100, not even 110, just 100. And the light was so clear and so beautiful, and I’ve never been able to do it again. So, technology is great, but there’s the old stuff that’s good too.

Nicifero: Should we take a break and see—

Tipton: Sure. Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Nicifero: Well, we were talking about creating lights during movement, in between movement, and—

Tipton: [00:49:14] Yes. I feel very strongly that if you have a dance that is done in movements that the light should begin moving. If it's going to change movement to movement, it should begin at the change—at the end of a movement and happen during the break and begins when the movement starts. Now, of course, Twyla Tharp once did, not Paul, but Twyla Tharp once did a piece where she started the dance. She changed the dance in the middle of sections of music and so I said, “What am I going to do? Am I going to go with the dance, or am I going to go with the music?” This was for the Joffrey [Ballet] company. And so, I started by setting the cues to change when the dance changed and [Robert] Bob Joffrey came to me, and he said, “That doesn't work. [Laughs] You have to do it when the music changes,” but I did very strongly that it—because you don't want the light to get in the way of the audience looking at the movement.

Nicifero: Yes, and I'm thinking—

Tipton: [00:50:22] It's just changing atmosphere to atmosphere, location to location if you want.

Nicifero: Yes, atmosphere to atmosphere. It must have been challenging in some cases when the movement in—I'm thinking of Paul's choreography, when the music and the movement were not exactly going together—

Tipton: [00:50:50] Together, together.

Nicifero: Yes and together and so—

Tipton: [00:50:51] Yes. I mean I have found generally that it's probably the music that is the strongest voice and so you follow the music. But that's not a rule. It can be different in some cases.

Nicifero: Yes. You are known not to follow your own rules and to find a way to challenge your creative process.

Tipton: [00:51:21] Yes, it's interesting. For instance, Tom Skelton, he always said they've hired me because I light this way whereas I really tried to make the light appropriate to the piece. Obviously, there are things that I do that I always do or that I fall back on or—you know? I mean that's only human, but I really do try to make it appropriate to the piece and not to what I've done before.

Nicifero: So, you said that you liked particularly Paul's darkest pieces. How do you think you approached the darkness of those pieces with your light and what kind of atmospheres you created in it?

Tipton: [00:52:12] Yes. I just feel the light it's a little gutsier probably for the darker pieces. I can make pretty. I just sometimes just get so bored with making pretty that I feel that I fall back on it too easily but—and I don't believe in making ugly. I don't believe in making dancers ugly. If they want to look ugly, they can do that themselves I think—

Nicifero: With movement--



Tipton: [00:52:40] Yes. I don't want to be the one to do it. *They* should do it. The light can be sharp and harsh and shadowy and—[pause] It's interesting. When I began, Paul, not Paul—Tom Skelton had me count the cues because we had cues. We're going like this. And he had me count backwards because then if you count forward, no one knows when you're going to stop. So, if you count backwards, you always come to zero, and you know how long it's going to take. And by counting backwards, you can phrase the cues so that—and by counting you phrase the cues, so you can go a little faster in the beginning and slow down at the end or vice versa.

And then along came computers, and I was sure that it was going to be terrible because I would no longer be in control of the light. And, of course, I found it to be wonderful because you push the button and the cue happened exactly the same every time, so—

Nicifero: So, it's still under your control.

Tipton: [00:54:07] Yes. [Laughs]

Nicifero: I see. I'm reading some of the cues. I'm imagining *Orbs*. So, *Orbs* will be performed in the fall of—during the fall season? I think—

Tipton: [00:54:25] I don't think so. I don't think so. No, it's—

Nicifero: No—

Tipton: [00:54:28]—*Scudorama* (1963)

Nicifero: You don't think—

Tipton: [00:54:29]—that's being performed in the fall, but I don't think *Orbs* will be. I would love for it to be, but—[pause] Yes, there was a section in the end of it of—these were Beethoven quartets and that had four—the four planets were four. It was Dan [Wagoner] and [Elizabeth] Liz [Walton] and I forget who the other two. Sharon [Kinney] and Renee [Kimball] may be the other two. Anyway, I lit them with very special light, I've always felt, so I'm quite fond of that section, and I'll be happy to have it return if it does. I lit them with beam projectors, which are not in existence anymore, so—

Nicifero: Beam projector?

Tipton: [00:55:27] Yes. So, it can't quite be the same.

Nicifero: Can a beam projector be substituted with something similar or—

Tipton: [00:55:36] Not—

Nicifero: —the effect or—

Tipton: —similar, yes but—

Nicifero: Not the same.

Tipton: [00:55:39]—not the same. But that's happening all over now. I mean there's something called PARs [Parabolic Aluminized Reflector] that have been the workhorse. PARs were invented for rock concerts because they're a lot of light and a nice sort of sharp beam. The new situation, they're gone. They're gone. They're hot lights. The hot lights are gone. By that I mean really heat, they bring heat. So, the new LED [light-emitting diode] PARs bear no resemblance to the old PARs, so too bad, gone.

[00:56:42] It's good to have a cue like that that the BF means board fade. So that you'd take everything out except the list there. So, it's always nice. You can clean up the—but, you see, for each dance, there is a sheet like that, a concept sheet I call them, so—

Nicifero: Those are all in the boxes at the New York Public Library [NYPL]

Tipton: [00:57:16] I'm not sure of the Taylor. I kept Taylor because I knew that I would need it, and it's not easy for me to get what's in the library, [laughs] so—

Nicifero: Yes. Because it's offsite it will take a few days to get them—

Tipton: Yes.

Nicifero: —[crosstalk] that.

Tipton: [00:57:34] So I don't think I gave them anything from Paul. But Paul, the stageman, they have—some—you know Paul has them, the company has them.

Nicifero: So, you will continue to supervise the lighting for the company?

Tipton: [00:57:57] Certainly the pieces, the old pieces, yes. And I did the new—the two new pieces that were done in the Bach festival. If I'm asked and I have the schedule to do it, I'm happy to do it.

Nicifero: How was seeing a new—two new works created by two different choreographers with the same dancers that Paul was working with?

Tipton: [00:58:23] Oh, it was great. It was great to see the dancers move differently like that. They do very well. Yes, but I knew they would. It will be interesting to see the new company when these five dancers are gone and—

Nicifero: Have you worked before with Pam Tanowitz or—?

Tipton: [00:58:49] No. No—

Nicifero: This is your first time?

Tipton: —neither of them.

Nicifero: Yes?

Tipton: [00:58:51] Yes. It was a very good experience and will continue to be because it—we're still considering it as a new piece and will until it gets to the Koch [Theater].

Nicifero: So, there will be—

Tipton: [00:59:11] They'll be—

Nicifero: —new adjustment?

Tipton: [00:59:14] Yes or could possibly be, maybe. Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to see?

Nicifero: Do you have more of the notes?

Tipton: [00:59:32] Oh, I have lots of notes but—

Nicifero: Really?

Tipton: [00:59:38] Oh, here's the master list. Here's a list. And you see I work with things like this that have all the numbers. Yes, and I'll be able to tell you—

Nicifero: So [crosstalk] of works, yes.

Tipton: —what—[searching]

Nicifero: And, of course, it's a master list. It's a very long list of some of the works that have not been onstage for a long time—

Tipton: For a very long time.

Nicifero: —and some unfortunately won't return. You also created the lights for the *Le Sacre du Printemps* that he did in the—

Tipton: The what?

Nicifero: —eighties. The Sacre.

Tipton: Sacre?

Nicifero: Yes.

Tipton: Yes.

Nicifero: And do you remember when [Rudolf] Nureyev visited the company and he was a guest with—

Tipton: Yes. He did the same, the *Aureole* solo that Misha did, yes. But he takes to blue. Blue light was okay.

Nicifero: It was okay for him.

Tipton: Yes. [Laughter]

Nicifero: I wonder what the blue light—why does it work for some and not for others?

Tipton: [01:01:23] Well, I mean, I've never seen it not work. Misha's very special but then we all knew that anyway.

Nicifero: Yes. And you worked with Misha also in other—?

Tipton: [01:01:33] Yes. Misha can ask me to do anything, and I'll do it. [Laughs] [Pause] So that doesn't go to the end it looks like. Yes, I was thinking that I would find out. I would remember what my last one was, but it doesn't go far enough.

Nicifero: This goes to 2006.

Tipton: Yes.

Nicifero: Oops, yes.

Tipton: [01:02:01] I have to get the rest of it from John.

Nicifero: And do you have special relationship with dancers, some of the old dancers or not that you continue—

Tipton: [01:02:16] Well, certainly the old dancers, like Dan Wagner and like Sharon Kinney and, of course, Liz Walton is gone. It was great at the performance—the memorial performance for Paul. Renee Kimball and Danny Grossman came to it, and I hadn't seen either of them in a very long time so that was great. That was the original company, so *my* original company.

Nicifero: Linda Hodes was only in a few pieces in the early '60s probably—

Tipton: [01:02:54] Right.

Nicifero: —when you were not.



Tipton: [01:02:55] I certainly was not around when Linda was in the company, but I know Linda from Taylor 2.

Nicifero: Yes. But you didn't meet Linda when she was with Martha Graham back then?

Tipton: [01:03:09] I did meet her, yes, but I wouldn't really say that I knew her.

Nicifero: Yes. And so, of course, you worked for Taylor 2 as well?

Tipton: [01:03:22] Not really. I mean I think they used my lighting probably, which is fine.

Nicifero: Yes. But they have a different group of—?

Tipton: [01:03:30] They're not new pieces, so their lighting supervisor takes—

Nicifero: The notes.

Tipton: —the sheets, the notes and recreates it from that.

Nicifero: Yes. Yes.

Tipton: [01:03:48] Yes, it's a long list.

Nicifero: It's a very long list.

Tipton: [01:03:51] Yes, there have been a lot of dancers, and they're very special.

Nicifero: So these are the drafts produced by computer sheets, I guess, versus or—?

Tipton: [01:04:07] Yes, they're certainly not, yes. I use my own. I didn't bring my own with me, I don't think, over here from over there but—[pause] Here's another one. Or is that what you gave me? No, you brought this.

Nicifero: Yes.

Tipton: [01:04:44] Yes, So there's this. Yes. *House of Joy* was my last in 2012, so there's that.

Nicifero: So, this is the updated version. And how would Paul use the dancers to create or adjust the choreography? I'm thinking of the last pieces probably he was—

Tipton: [01:05:55] Yes, I understand.

Nicifero: [crosstalk].

Tipton: I wasn't there, so, but I understand that he would go and make some steps on a person and then, sort of, leave it to the company to put things together and—

Nicifero: Yes. So, he would work individually on one—with one dancer?

Tipton: [01:06:14] Right and then he might put some things together but then leave it to them to put other things together, and so—

Nicifero: So, the creative process had changed, of course, over the year?

Tipton: [01:06:26] Oh, yes, yes. Yes. Right. And questions like that would be great for Dan. You cannot imagine—I hope he hasn't gone far downhill, but Dan is a wonderful, wonderful person and remembers a great deal and can speak very passionately about it. He's the last one of the original ones left, so it really would be great if you could get there. Did I tell you the dates? You asked me, and I looked them up, but I don't think I told you.

Nicifero: No, you didn't, you didn't.

Tipton: [01:07:10] So it's the thirteenth and fourteenth of August with, I figured, travel day on the twelfth and a travel day on the fifteenth. But the thirteenth and the fourteenth, I'll be with him of August, so—

Nicifero: Well, let's see what the dates would look like—

Tipton: Right, right.

Nicifero: —yes and then plan eventually [phonetic]. Okay. Well, thank you very much.

Tipton: [01:07:37] Oh, certainly.

Nicifero: It was a real pleasure. And if some other question will come up, we will be in touch.

Tipton: [01:07:47] Yes, good.

Nicifero: Thank you very much.

Tipton: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]