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Interview with Sears Eldredge, Professor of Theatre

Sears Eldredge

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Oral History Project

Interview with: **Sears Eldredge**
Professor of Theater, 1986-2007

Date: **Thursday, June 14th, 2007, 1:00p.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Edited interview run time: 1:43:14 minutes

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Subjects

	Personal background
01:08	Background before Macalester and how came here
06:16	Heading Dramatic Arts Program
	Previous drama staff and faculty, state of program prior
11:26	Size of Department when first came
	Faculty-student relations, curriculum, bringing Dance in
19:11	Early years establishing Department, funding and staffing
24:18	Growth in Department
26:14	Courses taught
28:15	Impressions of campus, particularly theater and library
31:16	Financial pressure, hiring freeze, competition for funds and affect on community
34:59	Faculty-administration relations
37:50	Student engagement and issues in the late 1980s and '90s
39:16	State of the Theater Department in the 1990s: changes, etc.
40:25	Number of shows per year, January Interim session and multicultural theater festival

45:38	Diverse, multicultural theater productions: performances by Japanese and British theater companies, <i>Zeami</i> , <i>Silence</i> , Ola Rotimi and <i>The Gods Are Not to Blame</i>
51:59	Standout plays: George Walker's <i>Escape from Happiness</i> , <i>India Song</i> by Marguerite Duras
57:48	Choosing plays, move to having a theme for a year's plays
1:01:02	Time commitment to both teach and direct
1:03:26	Chairing the Department
1:04:07	Having to justify Department, but benefits of Theater
1:08:30	Performance space and new Campus Center
1:10:59	Recent work since MSFEO Writing and premier of play <i>Return to Kanburi</i> , based on the book <i>Railway Man</i> , research for book on theater in WWII POW camps
1:21:44	Changes in the student body
1:23:30	Changes due to technology in the Theater Department and in teaching
1:26:43	Current state of the Theater Department, changes in curriculum
1:28:56	Future outlook for Department
1:30:52	Favorite memories: improv mask classes and "Trip to the Grille"
1:37:44	Biggest disappointment: lack of faculty and staff support and attendance

Interview with Sears Eldredge

Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer

**June 14, 2007
Macalester College
DeWitt Wallace Library
Harmon Room**

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi and I am a new graduate of Macalester College, conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Thursday, June 14th, [2007] and I am interviewing Sears Eldredge, Professor of Theater, in the Harmon Room in the DeWitt Wallace Library. To start if you would just state your name, and where you were born, and...

SE: Social Security number? [Laughter]

LZ: And...how old you were, and what year it was when you—well maybe what year you came to Macalester.

SE: When I came here? Oh, ok, how old? I can tell you that because that's kind of interesting [laughter]. I was two [laughter]. No. My name is Sears Eldredge. And I was born in Chatham, Massachusetts, so you're going to hear that, still, they tell me, in my speech. I came to Macalester in 1986, and my wife claims that that was how I handled my...becoming fifty years old. Changing jobs, so... So anyway, '86 so I've been here, what? Twenty-one years?

[01:08]

LZ: Just to begin, what is your educational background, and kind of what steps led you to come to Macalester?

SE: Ok. Educational background, my undergraduate degree, my B.A., is in English and Communications, which means—the Communications part meant at that time radio and television. And that was from Barrington College in Rhode Island. And then after graduation, I went in the Air Force for three and a half years. And I...we were required to go in the service at that time. It was universal military training they called it, so everybody had to go. So I was in for three and a half years—should have been four, but I was in a branch of the Air Force which was called the Security Service, which dealt with intelligence issues—electronic intelligence. And I was analyst for that, for intelligence—electronic intelligence. And stationed on the island of Crete. This is not bad duty, right? So, when I finished that, when my time was up there, I had six months left in the Air Force. And they told me you're absolutely no good in the United States. You know what you do is not going to be done in the United States. So, we're going to let you out free, you know early. So that was good. So...I got of the service. I got married, and then got a job, and decided I wanted to go on for higher education. And got accepted into Boston University School of Theater. And I went there for my Master of Fine Arts in Directing. And in my last year of that program, the school I had graduated from—Barrington College—the Head of the English department came up to see if both my wife and I—she was a graduate in the English Department, she had gotten her Master's in English at Brown, so... He came up to see if we would come back to teach. So we did, we both came back. Then I started commuting to Boston to finish my degree. And I'm trying to think when that happened. Oi, I don't have my resume here, and it's not in my head. So anyway I got my MFA in Directing from Boston

University. Continued at Barrington for a few years teaching. And I became the Artistic Director of a college community theater there in Barrington, Rhode Island. And then decided if I was going to stay in education, I needed a Ph.D., because many of the administrators that I had to deal with did not understand the Master of Fine Arts as a terminal degree. It's an old story that's still going on. So I was very interested in non-Western theater, particularly Asian theater. So Michigan State University had the finest program at that point. I was accepted at Michigan State for my Ph.D. work, and went there. And we were there quite a few years. I got my Ph.D. in 1976. And at that time I was also teaching in the experimental liberal arts college on campus at Michigan State. In their wisdom, Michigan State decided they no longer needed an experimental liberal arts college, and I was one of the first people to be let go. And I ended up at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. And I become Chair of their Theater program there, and also taught in their Japanese Arts Program, which they're very well known for. So, after eight years there, chairing a two-person program and directing at least two shows a year, I was exhausted [laughter]. I really was. It was like, I can't continue to do this. So I started looking around, and there was this job posted for Macalester College. Macalester had decided to establish a new department in Dramatic Arts. It had been, previously it had been part of...Speech and Dramatic Arts had been two, and then they decided to separate Speech Communication out and Dramatic Arts, into two separate programs. So they were looking for a person to head up the new Dramatic Arts program. So I came and interviewed, and got picked. So I'm here, I've been here.

[06:16]

LZ: What was that like starting basically a new program at a new college?

SE: Well it had already been going on. And it had, in the past it had had some really wonderful “glory days” I call them, under Mary Gwen Owen, who is extremely well-known. And what was his name...I have it over here...Doug Hatfield. Doug Hatfield was... But the program had fallen on hard times, really hard times. Mary Gwen Owen had retired. The two other tenured people in the program, Doug Hatfield and a man whose name I can't remember, had over a number of years had had a falling out. So the last two years, they had refused to speak to each other, and they had offices next door. So the only person who was the go-between was a young technical theater person, designer. That's Dan Keyser, who's still here in the program. So the program, the students weren't taking the courses, it was a disaster. This caused this falling out between these two, I mean who were the tenured two, caused a disaster for the program. And I never met either one of them when I came to interview. Doug Hatfield was in a nursing home. He had had a series of strokes and was incapacitated. And the other man had been...they had bought out his contract. They felt, at least, President Gavin who was president at the time, decided that if they were going to have somebody new come in and chair the program, they couldn't have this other person there. Because—whether this is right or wrong—I guess it was understood that he was a great deal of the problem. So it was a very, very smart move, expensive, but a smart move on Gavin's part to buy out his contract. So he was gone when I came. So I interviewed with Dan Keyser, with students and with—there was a high level search team, since I was coming in as Chair of this new program that had to be put back on track. So, anyway, so it was a bad story there in the department, which was really sad for the students. When I came and interviewed with the students, it was clear that they were—there were lots of students on campus that were hungry to do theater, be involved. The courses were bad. You

know, people weren't taking, the students weren't taking the courses that were being offered. The production program was not good. And yet there were all these students anxious to take, to be involved in theater. So I thought, you know, great. I think there's something to build on, from the students. I heard the story that there was at the time a clique of theater students who were always being cast. So a small clique, which happens periodically. And so, after I... When I got the nod, and I accepted, in my own head I said to myself, "Well, that clique has to be broken up." Students have to know immediately that there's more access to all of them to the productions. So I wanted them to choose a large cast show, rather than keep doing small casts, that this clique had been doing. So I chose—I have forgotten how many were in the cast—but it was a large cast show, an ensemble show, called, *Holy Ghosts* by Romulus Linney. Not one of the top American playwrights, but very well regarded. And this was a fascinating script of his that dealt with snake handling in Appalachia, a snake handling cult. So...the students who auditioned for the show had to know that they were going to learn how to handle snakes because we were using live snakes in the show. And they did, we all did. I did too, because I couldn't ask them to do it without doing it myself. So we all learned how to do that from a professional. And the show was a great success. And I've thought since, that it was a crazy decision on my part. Did I really want the job, or did I not? That I should have... It's like, wow, that wasn't a very safe choice. But it's the show I thought was best to do, and they did a wonderful job of it. So that was the beginning.

[11:26]

LZ: About how many, how big was the Department, student-wise, at that time?

SE: Oh, it was bad. I mean I don't know if we had any majors at that point. It was really, really bad. And the students were totally demoralized. The Department, when I came, we had two full time people. Dan Keyser, who was the designer, tech person, and myself. We had hired a half time person, a person to come in part time to help us out until... I didn't want to go into an immediate national search my first year. I wanted to get a little more understanding of the program and the college before we did a search. But I had permission, well we had permission to search for another full time person, a tenure-track person. So we hired Carolyn Levy, who came in and was hired for a few years. And then... We survived the first year, but just. I did three productions the first year, which was crazy, to look back on. But the program needed to be kick started. And my sense that there were a lot of students out there who wanted to be involved in theater on campus needed to know that there were going to be offerings that they could get involved in. So it was like ok, so you're going to do more than required to get this program kick-started. So I did three, and Carolyn did one, so we did four shows. They had been doing one each semester before I came. So there wasn't enough, there wasn't enough activity. Where was I going with that? So anyway, so for the first few years, I worked overtime, anyway. Because I taught more than I should have, just to get the program started. And it was a great time. It was a fun time. Because the program had nowhere to go but up. Nowhere to go but up. So it was fun. And so that energized you, you got energized because, it's like my God, you know, we can do something. And the students were enthusiastic. It was like ah finally there's a program for us. And so one of the first things I instituted was having three students, yeah three students, sit in on every faculty meeting. They had been... One of the complaints that I had heard about when I came for the interview was that they had, their ideas, their thoughts weren't being taken into account. Nobody was listening to them. So I thought, that's gotta change. And at Earlham

College where I had been... Earlham is a Quaker school, and very, very focused on participation. Everybody participates, everybody has a say. And so I brought that kind of heritage. It was one of the things I valued at Earlham. And I brought that here and I said, "The students have to sit with us in our weekly faculty meetings." We had weekly faculty meetings, and they sat with us. There was a student who represented the majors, there was a student who represented the non-majors, and there was a student who represented Dance. So that was new. And I think that's still fairly unheard of on campus. So the students... That's still going on in the Department, still being valued—that kind of participation. And it's invaluable. I mean yeah sometimes the students can drive you nuts with their concerns. You know that. But at the same time, they're participating. And that's terribly important. The other thing that happened in the first year was a lot with the curriculum. Wild year. The Dance program at that time was part of Physical Education, alright? They were there, although their rehearsal space was in the basement of the Theater Building. But they were assigned administratively to Phys. Ed. Now that's...at that time that was quite usual. Carleton has just removed them from Phys. Ed and moved them into a Theater program, so it's not unheard of. But, I spoke with Becky Heist, who was head of that program, she still is, and I said, "How would you be interested in bringing the Dance program in under Dramatic Arts?" And she was thrilled. So I went to the Provost and said, "We'd like to do this, and what are the procedures for doing this?" And actually I don't remember probably writing anything more than a letter to that affect, requesting that, and it was done. So that was a significant move. So Becky is now, has an office there with us. And you know, has become quite... It was called immediately, the title got changed to Dramatics Arts and Dance Department. Now the title has been changed again to Theater and Dance. Anyway, that's how that happened. As I said the program had nowhere to go but up. That was the, the

good part of it was that everything was progress. But the bad part of it was there were no...there was no handbook for anything. It was all..."Do you remember, how this was done?" And Dan, Dan was the historian because he had been here for so long. And it was like, "Oh we did it this way." But things changed, you know, ok, so there was nothing set in cement. So it was like one of the first major tasks was to develop a handbook for the Department. In two parts. And the first part is about the academic program, and what are the requirements for that and all that stuff. And the second part is about the production program. Because as you're probably aware, students have huge roles in the production, other than being on stage as actors. And then what are the expectations of each of those roles, you know the stage manager, of the technical director, of the student technical director, of the lightening person, whatever. None of that was down anywhere. So I...collected as many handbooks from other schools as I could get a hold of. And we started out to develop our own. And that took a couple of years, but it was done, finally. But that was a huge task. And I've always said it was like lifting an elephant, because how could you move forward without some kind of agreement about what the curriculum is, and how student proceed through it. And the same with the production program. So that was huge.

[19:11]

LZ: Were you aware of that coming into Macalester?

SE: Not totally. [laughter] Not totally. No, I mean, you know when you come in, you have...you look into all this stuff and... That doesn't always come out in an interview. I mean the people who are interviewing you don't always put that out there, right? So that was what happened. I said the first year was difficult to get through, and it was. It was an exciting year,

but at the end of it I said, this can't continue. We cannot continue with... And I was particularly concerned about Dan Keyser. Dan Keyser was designing all the shows. He was trying to handle costuming as well, and being Technical Director. And so I thought, we can't, this can't continue. And yet I knew there was a hiring freeze on staff. I mean we all knew no staff could be hired because there was a freeze. So I thought, "Well how do we do this?" I was told to kind of create a program for Macalester, but the Theater program should be from Macalester. So how am I going to do this? Well, when I came up to interview, one of the things I was asked about was this fabulous restricted endowment that had been given to the Department by this woman who was at Macalester for a semester. And she had given the department a restricted endowment, which meant the money, her monies could only be used in certain ways. And that money had sat there. So when I came up, they asked me, "Well, what would you do with this?" And it was like my God, this is a godsend! What campuses, small schools like Macalester, get this kind of opportunity? So I had all sorts of fancy ideas. And the college had done nothing to match this grant that she had given. She had given it at a beginning amount, and then there was more to be given on a matching basis. And then it sat there for two years with nothing being done. So after my first year, and I realized we can't go on like this, Dan can't keep doing this, he's going to die doing all these jobs. And so I said, "We're going to have to hire some part-time staff people." And yet I knew, hiring freeze, right? But I did it. I didn't ask anybody. I just went out and did it. Not a smart idea. But I guess I was still in my honeymoon phase, and they with me. So I did it. We hired a shop foreman, part time. And we hired a costumer part time, which freed Dan then to focus more on teaching and design work. So I thought, "Well this is going to be interesting," you know. At some point the "you know what" is going to hit the fan. So I waited, and waited. And then the phone rang one day and I picked it up and it was whoever was in

charge of the personnel office at that time, and I said, “Here we go.” And he said, or she said, I can’t remember now who it was, “You know, you have to hire these people in the right way.” So it wasn’t an issue. It was only getting them hired properly. I was not being barred from hiring them, because I was using this endowment money. We used the endowment. Which allowed for...you couldn’t buy any equipment with it. But you could do add-on programming needs. So this was how I categorized these two people that we needed so desperately. So that—now if you look at the department, that half-time position in the shop foreman is now a full-time Technical Director. The costumer who was—Lynn Farrington, the person that I hired back then half-time, is now full-time. The secretary, the secretary Jeanne Arntzen, we shared with Speech Communication, so she was half-time and half-time. Well our program began to take-off. And it was like ah...you know we’re asking a lot from this half-time person. So I don’t know how it happened now, but somehow I convinced the administration to give Jeanne to us full time. So the department started to grow.

[24:18]

LZ: Was that because more students were coming in basically, did you really see the numbers shoot up?

SE: Oh yeah, oh absolutely, oh yeah. It was fabulous. It was wonderful, very exciting. Which was what everybody hoped for. The administration was very, very pleased.

LZ: Was that just basically because more shows were being done, and more people were being involved?

SE: Yeah. We revised the curriculum very fast. Very early on we revised the curriculum, which had been set up as a kind of smorgasbord approach, which means you could take so many credits in this area, so many in this area, so many in this area. Well, I didn't think that that was a very smart idea. And I believe in a much more structured program, so I you know helped us through to a very structured program with different tracks. If you're design person, you're in the design track. If you're an acting person, you're in that track. If you're interested in history, theory or criticism, you're in that. So it had different tracks. And also instituted before anybody in the rest of the college did this, we instituted the senior project requirement. So the students had to do...because it's absolutely perfect, a senior project. So they could be in acting, or directing, or design, or history, theory, criticism. Each of the tracks you could have a senior project in. And then the college came out with, "Oh we're going to require this." We were already doing it, so that was fine. It was nice to be ahead of something. But that meant again the handbook had to be worked through in terms of what are the requirements for each step of that. So it was a lot work, but it was very, very exciting.

[26:14]

LZ: What types of courses then were you teaching?

SE: Was I teaching? Yeah, well my field is in—I have such a wild background. My work at Boston University, my MFA was in directing. So acting and directing. I was teaching acting and directing. And my Ph.D. work was in Asian theater, so... And at Earlham I had taught in their Japanese Studies program. So I was teaching—I introduced Asian theater to the program

here. And my doctoral dissertation was on mask training for the actors. A very unusual technique that was started in Paris in the 1920s, and it was only being taught in this country at the very prestigious professional schools like Julliard in New York. Well I had done my Ph.D. about this whole training method. And I had instituted the course at Earlham. So I brought that here, too. So I'm kind of all over the map in terms of things. And, so those kinds of—you know, so we had different levels of courses of acting and directing and a history of theater sequence. Now had a separate course called Asian Theaters, which dealt with—from my background, India, China and Japan. So that came into the program. So it was an exciting time.

[27:52]

LZ: Did you find that you were able to incorporate your own special areas easily into the curriculum?

SE: Yeah. Since I was Chair it was very easy. But you know you gotta watch it. You know, is this necessary, is this needed? And so I mean it was. Anyway the students seemed to like it.

[28:15]

LZ: To shift the focus a little and talk about your first impressions of the campus as a whole outside of the Theater Department, when you applied to Macalester did you know anything about the school?

SE: I had never heard of the school. How's that? I had never heard of it.

LZ: So what was then your first impression of the campus?

SE: Well when I came, no, I can't say—I had never heard of it. That's a shocking revelation, I guess. But I had not. And I was at another liberal arts college, a very well known liberal arts college, which is in another grouping. It's in what is called the GLCA group, and we're in the ACM group. I don't know if you've ever heard of this, if this makes sense to you. Anyway, well I came to campus, I thought it was a nice campus. Very much more traditional looking than the Earlham campus, which had a more...Midwestern or New England-y look. And this is more red brick and stuff like that. But I was amazed at the Theater Department. At the stage. I could not believe that there was a campus, I mean a college that had this theater. Because it is an extraordinary theater, where you have three theaters in one there. That main theater, it can be changed into a thrust stage, into a theater in the round and full proscenium stage. Amazing, amazing. And I thought, "Oh wow, I would die to have this." I would die to be able to direct in this where you can change the configuration of the stage. And there was a great facility...great storage space, which is always a huge problem for props and furniture and stuff like that. And support spaces were ok. But...that I was very, very impressed with. The rest of the campus, fine. The library was awful. It wasn't this building of course, it was another. You wouldn't believe it. It was where the administration is now. And the stacks were so—nobody went there, it was so awful. Nobody ever wanted to go to the library to do anything. It really was awful. So that wasn't too impressive. But the students I met were very smart, bright, engaging students. Very much like the Earlham students that I was dealing with. Faculty too, I was very impressed with the people that I met.

[31:16]

LZ: You had said that there was a freeze on hiring new faculty and that was kind of—

SE: Staff.

LZ: —staff, and that's kind of the period when Macalester was coming out of this financial crisis.

SE: Yeah, I guess.

LZ: Did you see...I mean how did, other than not being able to hire new staff, were there other places that you saw that money wasn't available for things?

SE: Well as I said we were—the department was so fortunate with this restricted endowment. I mean, we could dream. And we had the money to dream with. Whereas many of the rest of the other departments had no such opportunity. Yes, it was...there was...this was—I learned this pretty fast. And this is not one of the good things. That there was so little money, that all of the departments were competing for that money. And so therefore, you can imagine what that did to the environment. And that...that doesn't disappear easily—that way of behaving with each other. Earlham College is quite isolated in its setting. And a wonderful school—small school, about a thousand, twelve hundred students—smaller than Macalester. And it's isolated. So all of the focus was inward. Alright? Everyone knew everybody else's business. And...so...but it was a community. And people didn't just talk about community, you were living community,

alright? Macalester was not that. And that was a shock to me when I came here in my first year. It was not...it's like people came here to work, and then went off. Macalester's situation where it is—in the midway section between the two cities—it means everybody's focus is kind of outside the campus. I mean they do the campus stuff. But they have associations, and their life outside. That wasn't, you ready didn't do that at Earlham. So that was quite a shift for me. And there's a good side to that. Because the downside of the Earlham experience was everybody was there, knowing everything. It was like, "Ugh, you can't get away from this." Here the downside of the other side of it was there's no sense of community. And though we have gone through periods of talking about community and creating community at Macalester, I don't think they know what it really means to be, because it's different. What do you think?

[34:35]

LZ: Well, I think there's a lot of talk about it and not necessarily enough action.

SE: Yeah. Right. And I think a lot has to do with environment, you know. It's placement, in the city, in the Cities. I always got amused when they talked about, "We now gotta create community." And you don't have a clue what that means. Maybe you don't want to have a clue what that means.

[34:59]

LZ: What kind of relationship then existed between the faculty and the administration, or even students and the administration?

SE: Depended on the administration and at what particular point. Gavin was President when I came, and Jack Rossmann was Provost, who hired me—the provost who hired me. Then he, the next thing I knew, he was not the provost, and there was somebody new. And I was a little panicky about—I'm going to be working with a person I don't even know. That provost—but he was wonderful. He loved theater. I mean that's unheard of in a provost [laughter]. But he didn't last. He did not survive the first year. So then there was another provost, and I don't know how many provosts I went through. You don't know about this, but there was a revolving door situation here in provosts for quite awhile. And it was disruptive to the whole campus you can imagine.

[36:03]

LZ: Did you see that start to change as your time at Macalester grew?

SE: Well yes. You had to have a provost who was in there a considerable length of time, and as I said, there was a revolving door. But Dan Hornbach was a Provost who lasted—I don't know how many years now. Then he was out of being provost, and he came back to be provost. So there was a continuity there. As a chair of a program, trying to build a program, I was so dependent on a provost being with me, supporting me. So it was, it was interesting I guess [laughter]. It was very interesting [laughter]. But you asked about the atmosphere. As I said, when—until Macalester inherited all this money, as I said there wasn't a lot and every department was fighting with every other department to prove that they were the ones who needed the money. So it was a very tough time. It was not—I mean people were civil. But it was... Anyway it was... I'm glad it's past.

[37:29]

LZ: You might not know the answer to this, but was there a reason why provosts were just coming in and out?

SE: Oh sure. I certainly do know the answer to that, but I'm not sure that this is what we should be doing [laughter].

LZ: That's fine, not a problem.

SE: I happened to be on the key committees which had to deal with this issue.

[37:50]

LZ: Not a problem. Macalester students have traditionally been, and even today, very engaged in issues of the time. What were those issues in the late eighties and nineties?

SE: Yes. Oh boy. Racial issues...social economic issues. And that was not new to me.

Earlham College, being a Quaker school, was very involved in social concerns—what they call social concerns. So that's, I just shifted over to another school interested in the same things. So that was good. There were issues. Certainly gender. I mean all the same that is still here.

Although they were more, shall we say incipient? I mean they grew, in focus, emphasis, in the time that I was here. But I think they've always been there. I don't remember when they were not. But we all become more aware. And we grew, all of us grew in our understanding of what

needed to be changed in the college and what needed to be changed in our own thinking as we became more aware.

[39:16]

LZ: To talk more about the Theater Department, in the first, say ten years after you had started—in the mid-nineties—what was the state of the department at that time? How had you seen it...obviously it had grown, but were there other significant changes that you saw?

SE: I don't know. I mean the program grew. At one point, I believe we had like thirty majors, which was a lot. And whether that could be sustained, I don't know. So I think that was just kind of first blush, and it was like oh there is this program at Macalester. And everybody was kind of excited about what was happening. And so that pulled in a lot of students. And then the programs settle in, you know? So my sense is, even while I was Chair, we began to kind of go through cycles of more majors and fewer majors and more...it kind of still goes through that.

[40:25]

LZ: How many shows were you then doing? Did that number kind of come...did you continue to do four a year?

SE: Oh yeah. And we had lots of arguments about this over the years. Should we cut back? We couldn't do more, so it's still in place—that we do four main stage productions and two dance concerts. So that's a lot. We did have when I first came a January term. So that...that was a time for the students to kind of experiment, and to do—well, some kind of crazy things.

Just experiment, without a lot riding on it I guess. But it became evident that there were a lot of courses that were just kind of for the fun of it, and not serious, intellectual courses. And so the faculty decided at some point that we shouldn't continue this anymore. That was quite a struggle at the time because there were many people in favor of it. We used to do a show during January. But as you know now there's no J-Term.

LZ: What was your personal reaction? Had you had, I mean, a pretty good experience with it?

SE: Yeah. Because we did a show, and it gave a chance for the students to be totally involved with the show, rather than on top of a day of studies, doing other things, and things like that. So it was a very different kind of an experience. It was a very wonderful experience. I don't think we ever tried to do any busy work courses. I think we tried to do something valuable to the students. One thing that did happen—I got the dates. In this whole thing about multi-cultural concerns, because the college was getting more and more interested, concerned about what could they do to that. So to me, the arts are perfect for exposing people to a multicultural world—to different points of view, to different ethnic positions. So I went to the president, and I said, “I have an idea for January. Could you give us money, provide money, for us to do a multicultural festival?” We would bring in professional performers to present a Latino piece, or a black piece, or a feminist piece, whatever. And so Gavin was still president at that time. And so he came up with some money for me. And I knew that—this is the flyer for the first [pulls out flyer] the poster for the first series. It was a series we did. And I knew that I couldn't do it on top of my—the responsibilities I already had. So I hired a person to be the, to kind of get this together. So Joel and I worked together to present this festival of—this was African-American, Asian-

American, Latino-American, Native American—that was the first series. So we had money from the President’s Office to do two years of this.

LZ: And what year did that start?

SE: ’91. ’91/’92. You can see that it’s January. All during that month. So that was a little different than doing a show. We presented, the department presented this multicultural festival. And to me, that’s what, that’s one of the gifts of the arts to the rest of the institution is we can do it so easily, because we’re involved in it constantly. So you know, we’re ideal placement—site—for that kind of activity. And we had, it was a wonderful, extraordinary—people look at the program and say, “Oh my God, how did you get these people?” And so we had two years of it. Then the money, there was no longer any money. And it was very disappointing because we were interested in continuing, but no one had picked up the ball, shall I say, in the administration, to find money to have this continue. Very interesting. It’s about talking about it, you know? The issue, the difference between, saying the language—we want multicultural stuff. But never, but not really... And we were very disappointed because we thought this is a great series we started and then...

[45:38]

LZ: Have you been able to bring more diverse, multicultural shows to the main stage productions?

SE: Yeah, yeah.

LZ: Maybe this is a good time to talk about some of those productions.

SE: Yeah. Well I made notes, because I wanted to be sure of my dates. While I was chair, we had visitations—this sounds like a religious group [laughter]. We had on-campus performances by companies from Japan and from Great Britain. And so we had the Institute of Dramatic Arts in Tokyo come, and brought forty—, a company of forty people from Japan to do this show. Very few of whom could speak Japanese [English]. And my Japanese is limited to just a few phrases. And the star of the show was one of the major stars of the kabuki theater in Japan. So here we, this landed on our lap. We got this offer, “Would you be willing to have them come?” It was like, “My God, this is wonderful.” So we had the Institute of Dramatics Arts. And they did a show called *Zeami*. Zeami was a theater person who was the founder—he and his father were the creators and founder of a traditional theater form called noh theater in Japan. Back in the end of the 14th century. And it’s still going on. And this was a play about his life, Zeami’s life. Staring Koshiro Matsumoto, this kabuki actor. And so they were here. So we did that, and because of that association, they, we got another offer from them. They were fully funded from Japan—didn’t cost us, maybe five-hundred dollars. Didn’t cost us anything more than that to have them come. And we got another offer from them. They were on another tour, and they wanted to come to Macalester. And this time it was a co-production with the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, where there was a group. They had formed a company of half Japanese actors, and half Milwaukee Rep actors. And they were doing a show called *Silence*, and could they come and present it at Macalester. And it was like a godsend. So we had that. They came twice. Then, because of somebody I knew, we got an offer from the National Theater of Great

Britain to present a touring show that they had going, coming to the United States. And so they came to Macalester. They were only a small company. I can't remember now, no more than eight people. And they did *Macbeth*. And the other piece I can't remember. It was a modern piece. And so they came, we had them. Because of the association with Japan, one of the associate directors of *Silence* was here. I was able to get a Humphrey grant, and he came for a semester to teach modern Japanese theater. And then he directed a modern Japanese play that had not been done outside of Japan. Translated for us, and done with our students. He directed that show with our students. That was Ganshi Murata. So the students got a course in modern Japanese theater, we were able to offer that special course. Then I happened to get a telephone call from the man who had been my graduate advisor in my MFA program at Boston University. He was now Dean of the theater school at DePaul University in Chicago. And he wanted to know if we had any room for a playwright, director from Africa. Ola Rotimi. Ola had been, had graduated from Boston University the year I started my Master's program. So I never met him there. But Ola, who had become one the well-known African playwrights—Nigerian playwright—had to leave Nigeria, to get out of Nigeria, because of political change there. And he was in danger. So he had called his old mentor, who had been my graduate advisor, and said, "Could you help me out?" So they had him there at DePaul for a year. And so then this guy called me, and I said, "I'll see what I can do, it would be great to have him." So again I went to the Provost, and we were able to offer him a two year appointment. So Ola came here for two years. And he taught a course in African theater. And each year he directed a show, one of his scripts. The first year, it was a play called *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and any survey of African theater, contemporary, modern African theater, you will find this play. It's very, very famous. And he was able to sneak back into Nigeria and have the costumes made. Oh, unbelievable stuff.

He got it back here, and so he did that. So we had that. So, and then, I mean I've always been interested in international theater. So I've done Russian plays, I did an American premiere of a Russian play by a Russian female playwright. It's just, they're all over the map. I did twenty-two shows, and they're all over map.

[51:59]

LZ: Is that unique for a theater department to have such a wide, international array of plays?

SE: Yeah, very, very. Well most programs would love to have that opportunity, but... We're very lucky.

LZ: Have there been plays that you've directed that have stood out in your mind?

SE: Oh sure, the problem is choosing them. I mean, sometimes I love, I remember most or love—you have to love the child that didn't quite make it as well as the others, you know? The ones that you went, "Oh, well, that was interesting," but you know, didn't quite get there. But yeah, there were—I was looking at this today, because I just directed my last show in the Fall. So, in the program I put all of the shows I directed at Macalester—all twenty-two. So there are some that really stand out. George Walker's *Escape from Happiness*—George Walker is a Canadian playwright who is not as well known in the United States as he should be. He's a wonderful, wonderful playwright. And I've two of his shows. I really like his work very much. It's very edgy, controversial, edgy stuff. No one—I did the first American premiere of this piece by Marguerite Duras, one of the great modern, French playwrights. *India Song*. It was a play

commissioned for an opening of one of the theaters in the National Theater, in the new National Theater when it was...years ago. And it never was done. It was commissioned to open in one of the, the proscenium theater, and it was never done. Well, it's hard to explain. But you might understand. There's only one—it's got a large cast, but only one sound comes directly from the stage during the whole evening. How does that work? So what you have to, what we did is we had four live—you have two women who are in conversation with each other about memories of an event. The event is what you see on stage. And their memories are sometimes right on, and sometimes faulty. And then in Act II, two men join them, also talking about memories of the same time. And their memories are somewhat different. But what you see—so you have to hear these voices. And they have to be live because they have to be responding to what's happening on stage as if they can see it, in their memory. Because the French are always interested in memory, right? Desire and memory. Well the play is all about desire and memory. And so we put them in the light booth, and in the stage manager's booth and the light booth up in the theater. So there were live mics. And so they had to be rehearsed separately. And then we had to put them together in this group of people on stage, who just moved. And she wrote a scene that took place at an embassy ball, but the embassy hall was off in the wings—stage left. You never saw it. All you did was see people come from the ball, and look back in and talk about what was going on in there, you know? And that's when their voices were also recorded. So it was a very—nobody had done this show. And I loved this show, and I thought, "We're at Macalester, you know, we have an opportunity to do wild and wonderful stuff," right? We don't have to pay for our productions through the box office. We financed to do these kinds—we should be doing these things. So we did it. And there was a symposium on Marguerite Duras that we got people, national people, to come in who were experts on Duras to come in. So that

one really sticks in my mind as—it was a very challenging show. The students who were in the show loved it. And most of them were young, like first or second years. It's like very odd to get them to kind of engage with this kind of theater. And I'm sure we put some people in the audience to sleep, but that's OK. But other people said they have never forgotten it, never forgotten it. And one of the students who was in the show—I have to tell this because this is such a good story I think. I mean it says something about us. She went on to do her doctoral work at Yale University in theater. She went for an M.A. and then did her doctoral degree in theater. And she was in a class, in a literature class with a very well known professor, who was talking about contemporary theater. And he mentioned *India Song* by Marguerite Duras. And he said, "No one's ever done it." She raised her hand, said, "We have, yes we have." She told him that we'd done it. He couldn't believe it.

[57:48]

LZ: We were talking about the plays that you've done. And I'm curious, what is the process for choosing a play? Is that kind of your personal choice, or is that...

SE: Yeah, well it's a mix. We...we always ask students, "What are you interested in doing?" But also it must be something that a director is interested in doing, because you have to devote your life to it that semester. And so it's kind of hashed out. It's kind of—finally I think it comes down to like two choices, or two or three choices, that you say, "Ok, we got it down to this." And usually the director gets to choose, because it involves so much of his or her life. And you have to have a kind of, there's some connection with the piece that you have to have. Otherwise you can't direct it very well. So there's that. Now, they've changed if you've noticed. They

now have a theme. This wasn't true when I was chair. But now there's a theme for the year. And last year it was science and technology, and this year coming up its religion I think. But they've chosen to select the shows based around a theme. So they have a theme over that year, that each show is supposed to illuminate some aspect of that theme. And that's, it's not unique to Macalester. It's been done at other schools. It wasn't what we did when I was chair.

[59:36]

LZ: Was there a reason for implementing a theme, or just...

SE: You'd have to ask Beth [laughter]. I wasn't involved. That was after I had left, or stepped down. I was Chair for, as you probably know, I was chair for fourteen years. And in the fourteenth year, I said, "You know what? I don't think I need to do this any longer." And I wasn't having fun anymore. And I thought this is no good for the program if I'm not having fun anymore, and I don't need to do this. So I decided that I would step down as being chair. Beth was made chair, and I was still in the department full time for a couple of years. And then I decided to take advantage of this MSFEO option because it was there. And I had this research project that I had been working on for a number of years, and... I just wanted to devote more time to that. So I went on MSFEO, which reduced my teaching load to—I taught one course and directed one show a year. So I was doing two assignments a year. And then had more time to work on this research project.

[1:01:02]

LZ: Was there ever a time that you were teaching and directing a play at the same time?

SE: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And if I'm teaching directing—the poor person who teaches acting or directing has to do a show, too. Direct a show, too. Because acting classes meets six hours a week. You're in the classroom six hours a week, right? Because it's good to be like a lab course. And the directing classes meet at least four hours if not six hours a week—I don't know what it is now. I think they were meeting six hours a week. So you could be teaching acting, or you could be teaching directing. And maybe another course that was like history of western theater, which only met three one hour sessions a week. And then directing in the evening. So you were for—depending on the show—the shortest time you would be in rehearsal would be maybe six weeks. The longest time, like doing *Hamlet*, there was never a time during the semester you weren't in rehearsal after your show was cast in the second week. It was a, it's an enormous commitment. And I don't know—I'm sure there are things like it in music, you know, it's a performing arts issue. But theater is... I'm not sure many other faculty understand what you are asking yourself to do. Because—in the sciences you have labs of course, but you also have usually lab assistants to help teach those, right? That's not true—you don't have an acting assistant to teach your acting course and you come in and look at the results. So it's a huge commitment the people in the theater make to the students and to each other. It's an enormous commitment, and it consumes your life. Plus you're out of school, which also consumes your life in terms of committee work and that sort of thing. After fourteen years, it's like I don't think I need to do this.

[1:03:26]

LZ: That's a long time for a chair.

SE: It was that. I began to wonder if I was chair in perpetuity [laughter]. Well I had—I was brought in as chair, so that's a little different. And no one ever said, "Your time is up" [laughter]. So... And you know we were going along fine, until it's like, I'm sorry I can no longer write another report about justifying the theater program to a new Provost who hasn't read the old report I wrote for the last Provost. It was like, I can't do this anymore. I don't...you know...

[1:04:07]

LZ: Has that been a problem, justifying the Theater and Dance at Macalester?

SE: Absolutely. Absolutely. It is—and this is, you could ask any of the schools around us. It's not a unique Macalester problem, unfortunately. It is a problem that the arts are not seen as necessary—I'm putting it in my words. No administrator will ever say this. Not seen as necessary to the curriculum as other parts of it. That's our feeling, and of course we're feeling we're on the receiving end let's say. The arts have always been uneasy in liberal arts education. How do they fit in? What do they actually teach that's worth anything? Right? It's like, come on, they're just frou frou, people go over there and play. An acting class? Give me a break! You know, what is that? Play time activity. It's very hard to convince administrators who may be scientists or historians [laughter] that this is not—I mean you're dealing with human...feelings. And the worth of human feelings, and thoughts that are all bound up with those feelings. And the gift of theater, or the gift of an actor to theater, is to expose himself or herself on st—expose the inner life. Right? To be vulnerable on stage. So that everybody else

participates in that vulnerability. So you're trying to illuminate something about humanity, something about the world we live in. The social and political conditions of the world we live in. I mean there's all different ways to—but theater can... Theater isn't going to change the world, but it can help make us aware of the need for change. But that's hard to—when you're talking to other people who think that their discipline of course is at the center of the curriculum [laughter] and is important. We live in a country that doesn't—you know look at the money going into the arts, compared to say, some European countries who really fund the arts, governmentally, really well. So it's part of the ethos of being an American, I think. It's not unique to Macalester. But it's always seemed a shame to me that somehow here you are in the midst of all these highly educated people, who many of them have no sense that the arts have any value whatsoever. They would never say that. But, when you're in a curriculum meeting, and you want to get a certain course through, there can be questioning, "What's the value of that, what's the worth of that?" When you're in a funding meeting, "Why should we put money there?" I mean that's where it appears. That's just the way it is.

[1:07:43]

LZ: Before talk about your personal research, in kind of looking in your background there was a program called the Empty Space Program?

SE: I saw that. Where did you find that? I have no idea [laughter].

LZ: Oh, ok. I've been going through *Mac Weeklys* and that's where that had come up, and so...

SE: The Empty Space Program? I know, I saw that question, and I went...

LZ: Yeah, I don't have a date for that.

SE: I wonder if that...somebody put a name on something that I don't think ever had that.

Empty Space? I have no idea.

LZ: I think it was an attempt to bring in more involvement from people who maybe typically wouldn't get into theater, that's kind of what I gathered.

SE: It doesn't ring a bell. I'm going...I don't know what that's about.

LZ: OK. I'll probably check...

[1:08:30]

SE: You know, I thought, is it about the new—well, at the time when I was involved in looking at the new student center, what's it called now? Campus Center. Used to be the student center. Campus Center. Because those of us in the arts got involved in that, saying what was needed there for the students, and unfortunately it didn't appear [laughter]. [Unclear] Well, Mac Players from our perspective. I mean the music people wanted a music room—a rehearsal room—and argued for a rehearsal room. Because they couldn't handle all the requests for rehearsal rooms by student music groups. So they said, "Please put a music rehearsal room." Is there one?

LZ: I think the Trads, and the Sirens, and Scotch Tape.

SE: Interesting. But not bands.

LZ: Oh, no.

SE: No, no, no. But that's what we were talking about at the time. Yeah. So that died. For those of us in theater, we always got requests from Mac Players to see if they could use any of our spaces. And we said we're so...we can't do that because our programming is so full. So we argued for them to have a theater space, a performance space there. And I thought—I didn't know this until I went in the building—and I went into the John B. Davis. You know, and I thought, "Oh, what a nice little theater." That back wall must open up, you know the wooden panels, and I said, "Oh that must open up, and there'd be a nice little stage there." And I went up to investigate. That's it. It doesn't open at all. So they didn't get it. But what they did get was this Mary Gwen Owen Stage.

LZ: Right.

SE: Woo-hoo. That's a horrible space. Acoustically and everything, that's a horrible space. And I never met Mary Gwen Owen, but I heard enough stories about this woman who had ran the theater program, speech, communication and theater here. She was a force to be reckoned with on this campus. And I thought she would not believe it, that her name had been put on that

space. She would just not believe it. But anyway, these are not stories you want to hear, right? [laughter]. This is the other side [laughter].

[1:10:59]

LZ: Now let's talk about where your interests have lied while at Macalester, we've kind of touched on that. And what types of things that you did while you were here and then what you've done since MSFEO.

SE: I had—this is back a few years now—a sabbatical leave coming up. And I had read a book—I was teaching Asian theater. I had always been interested in the kind of culture clash between Asian and Western culture, and especially the colonial issue. And so I happened upon a book called *Railway Man*, which was the story of a—it's biography—of a POW, who had been a POW—prisoner of war—of the Japanese in Thailand during WWII. And he had been on this Burma-Thailand railway project, it was called. So I got a copy of it. And I read the story about this man. And he—I'm trying to make this short because I'll go on forever—he had been involved in hiding a secret radio. And the Japanese found out about it. And so he was interrogated by the Kempeitai, like the Gestapo. And he was tortured as well as interrogated. And there was a young man—young Japanese man—who was present as the interpreter for that session, those sessions when he was tortured. Anyway, again to cut the story short—he survived. The British officer survived this ordeal. And survived it, and after the war, many years after the war, he could not—he had a burning hatred for this interpreter. Not for the guy who tortured him, but for the interpreter. Very interesting kind of displacement. So, he wanted to find out who this was. So he tried to, he was going to research sources, and was going to find

this out. Meanwhile—and he had terrible bouts of post-traumatic stress from what he'd been through. In Japan, the young interpreter also suffered post-traumatic stress for what he had been involved in, and tried to commit suicide twice. And he said he wrote a little monograph, in which he said, "I've never forgotten this young British officer. I could never forget this moment." Well—I'm really compressing this—they found out about each other. The Brit found out about the Japanese man because there was an article published in the English language *Japan Times* about this man. And so they made contact. And first of all, it was the wife who made the contact—the Brit wouldn't do it. The man wouldn't do it. But then over time there was a communication, you know letters written back and forth. And so the POW started to write. And it was coming up to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, and they decided they would meet again. These two, who had been enemies, they would meet again at the same place in Thailand where these events had occurred. It's called the Bridge over the River Kwai. They said they'd meet there. And the Brit was in counseling and they told him "Don't do that, we can't guarantee what will happen to you, you know mentally or anything, please don't do this." But he was they say a very stubborn man and so he insisted. And so, they met there, both. And there wives, too, came together. And the Japanese man asked for forgiveness, of what he had done. And over their time together in the next days there, in Thailand, and then the Brits flew back to Japan because the Japanese man wanted to show them Japan. It was cherry blossom time and it's such a beautiful time. So they went back. And then in a hotel room before the Brits left, Eric said, "I want to meet with Nagase alone." And so the women went on a shopping trip. And so they sat together in the room, and the Brit had written a little message because he was concerned that he couldn't say it. And he had written the note—he handed it to the Japanese man, Nagase, and it said, "I can never forget what happened, but I forgive you totally." So there

was this story. I was so struck with this story of how these two people who hated each other were able to overcome that hatred, and find something common. And they've been in contact ever since. They became close friends! So I thought, "Oh my God, this is unbelievable." So I had a sabbatical coming up, and I thought, "I'd like to try and write a play about this." So I did. And I was one of the last people to get a full year's sabbatical at full salary. Can you believe that gift? Unheard of, and it's unheard of since [laughter]. They decided they couldn't that. So but anyway—and so I had time to research. I went to Japan, my wife and I went to Japan. We met this man and his wife. We went on to Thailand and I had this communication. I got permission from both Eric Lomax, the Brit, and from Nagase Takashi, to try and put a play together. And so I did. And we did it here.

[1:17:44]

LZ: Oh you did?

SE: Yeah. And it's, style-wise, it's very much—I love Japanese noh theater. I mentioned *Zeami* earlier. I love noh. It's a very unusual style, and it's very slow [laughter] going. And so I wrote it in that style. So it's very Japanese, but it's really meant to be a cultural piece. Well while I was doing the research for this piece, I was reading all of these diaries of men who had been POWs there in Thailand. And I kept coming across these references to "the play we put on" or "the musical we put on". You know, "we had to get the costumes ready for tomorrow night". What? I go, "What is this about?" Because I've only heard these horror stories about those camps. So I kept little notes to the side. And then decided, oh I can put together a short piece from one of these—I can create a show that they would have done in a POW camp. I can

replicate something here. So what I did, between the two acts of the serious piece, I put this little comic, humorous piece, which is exactly what the Japanese would have done anyway in there. noh theater, what's called kyogen, the comic piece in the middle. So I put this little POW show. So we did this piece. And then afterwards, I thought I've got to follow up on this. I've never heard—nobody knows anything about this. So I started continuing on that research and Macalester was fantastic. They kept giving me research grants to go off and interview somebody—to go to Australia to an archive or to Britain or to the Netherlands to do research. I gathered together this enormous amount of research about things that people know nothing about. That's what I'm now writing a book on. So that's...

[1:19:49]

LZ: What year was the play premiered at Macalester?

SE: Oh, I have to look at my notes here. It was called *Return to Kanburi* and that was May, we put it on May 1999.

LZ: Oh, ok, so not that long ago.

SE: And it was in the year 2000 that I said, "I no longer need to be Chair" [laughter]. So you can see I was already, you can look back and see the turning onto something that was taking more of your focus and interest. So I'm in the middle of this book, that seems never to let go of me.

[1:20:27]

LZ: Is that what you'll be doing primarily, now that...

SE: Yeah, I've been writing now for over a year, and I still am.

LZ: Do you imagine that you'll direct anytime?

SE: I don't know. I don't know. I can't do anything at the moment until this book is out of my life. I'd like to direct again, but I just can't because that is so time consuming. Directing, you know, is so consuming, I can't do the two at the same time. So in the Fall when I came back to teach the one course and direct the last show, I thought I could keep the book going but that was impossible. I had no time to do that.

[1:21:09]

LZ: Well I have one last little section.

SE: One last question.

LZ: Not one last question. We've been wrapping these interviews up with kind of looking at the changes, kind of very broad changes, and so in your time, in the twenty-one years that you've been here, have you seen significant changes within the student body, or the faculty? Is there anything in particular that really stands out as a contrast from when you first started?

[1:21:44]

SE: [Pause] Um.....yes and no. I think the—I'm not sure now with the student body. There was always a huge international contingent of students, and I think there still is. We have always struggled to get more students of color on campus. I still think that's going on. So I don't know the figures. I'm aware that there are many more women faculty than there were when I first came. There are...well are there? I'm not so sure there are more faculty of color than there were. I think some, but I'm not sure how many more. Change in...?

LZ: Have you seen a change in maybe the types of students that came to Mac?

SE: No. They were always bright. Bright, exciting, ornery. I mean all of the things you want in a good student body. I don't think there's been a huge change. Certainly I mean there weren't iPods when I first came [laughter]. Styles have changed, and you know, what they wear, and that sort of thing, that's kind of changed. But my sense is they're still bright and challenging.

[1:23:30]

LZ: In mentioning the iPods, made me, questions bring up about technology, [how have] changes in technology played out in the Theater Department?

SE: Yes. Yes. Well, I think they're working on that still, of course. Because it has a huge impact on say, lighting. Now you have lights over there you can control remotely, which can do things like this, which wasn't true in my day. You had to have, if you wanted a light up there and a light down here you couldn't push a button and that light would travel up there. You had

to have two different lights. Now they've got a few lights that can do that sort of thing. It all comes from rock concert stuff, where lights are doing all that stuff. But they're not as expensive now as they used to be, so we've been able to afford some. In the classroom...I remember—I know that in my time, in my tenure, I moved from showing slides, to videotape, to dvds. So there's that transition. And teaching Asian theater, it was impossible to teach Asian theater without showing film first of all, but then video or dvd. Because everybody, all the students would read the script—of let's say this Indian play—imagine it as if it was performed on our stage, without—not in it's style but as the style that you would know. So you have to show them how it's very different, performed very differently. So that was crucial to teaching something like Asian theater and other performance forms. And I know now—this is amazing—you can put something in video on a kind of closed circuit net, is that right? So students can get this in their, on their computer in their room or something like that. Is that called Moogle?

[1:25:44]

LZ: Moodle. I've never actually used it personally, but I know of professors...

SE: Yeah, I've heard of it. Wow, because now they don't have to—it's like, ok the tape is on reserve over in this...do they ever get there? You hope, you know. But probably wise not to check the list of who showed up to see if they saw it or not. So yeah, it's so much easier, that stuff is just amazing. And then I cannot handle, I refuse to handle—I have refused to handle—processing grades online. No, I have to have a sheet of paper. I'm sorry, I'm not going there. But if I was still continuing to teach, I would have to, right? But not to have a piece of paper, it's like, oh!

[1:26:43]

LZ: What is kind of the state of the Theater Department now, in terms of not only majors but in the rest of the campus population that it draws in?

SE: Whew. I...you know I've been out of it for... I went, when I went to half time status four years [ago], I pretty much tried to stay away. I'd been Chair for fourteen years, so this was not an easy thing, you can imagine. But it was like, this is not good for me, and not good for them if I'm around too much. So I don't know all these answers here. I couldn't tell you. Maybe there are—I don't know, it's probably not wise to say...I was going to say ten to twelve majors. I don't know. They're in the process of changing the curriculum again, they had been in the last few years. I know that. And so, courses that emphasize theory and criticism are much more prominent than they used to be. They're more theory orientated because—it's not surprising to you, right?—because this is true across campus, I think. So it's being brought in line with that. Asian theater is gone from the curriculum, because it went with me. And we did hire someone who we thought could teach it, but he's no longer with us. So, that's gone. And they've now hired a new person, and she is not going to bring that back. She will bring her own stuff, but not going to bring that. So that's gone. So things change. I mean they change with personnel, they change with what's changing in the educational world. You know, what I judged was important for students to know and they had to know, is not perhaps the same thing that's judged now as most important to know. And, so...

[1:28:56]

LZ: Do you think that the theater or dance major would ever be in danger of—probably not being cut, but reduced from a major to more of a minor or core concentration?

SE: Oh. I can't...who knows? I mean, you know, who knows? It's happened at other schools. But I can't, in the foreseeable future, no I can't see that at all. They now—it took us years to justify to the administration why we needed a fourth full time faculty member, tenure track. And we've had a devil of a time trying to get someone in that position, who we wanted to stay in that position. That's another story. But anyway, it's been difficult. And now they've hired this person. I hope the department can settle down, because it's been in flux. And that's never good for a program. Not good for the students...they don't, you know... And it's not good for the faculty. And since our faculty and staff have to work so closely together—we're in each others' lives because we're creating shows together—it's not just ok come in and do your hour and then go home. It's, you know, you're so intimately involved with each other. So anybody coming into that world has got to **fit** in that world, you know. And it's been difficult. So I hope this new person will fit very well, and the department can kind of, ok, now, we're here. Because you build the curriculum around the people you have. So it's always a combination of what the students **should** have, and then what extras the different faculty bring—their specialties—they bring into that.

[1:30:52]

LZ: I have one final question, and I was just curious if you have a favorite memory or a favorite—

SE: I saw that.

LZ: —time that... I mean I know that's tough.

SE: And I want another question, if I may.

LZ: Oh please do.

SE: What's the biggest disappointment, alright? That question I want to answer. This sounds odd, but I think it's important to be on tape. Not because it's so personal, it isn't. Ok, I'm going, "What is the fondest memory or something like this?" I have a lot of them, and they're connected with shows of course, because you get so close to the students in a show. Well, I taught mask work, this improv course mask, which has been pretty successful. And one of the final assignments in that class was for the students to develop what was called their complex character mask, their final mask. They had to sculpt it in clay, and then they had to make a papier-mâché copy of that. And then paint that. And then my exercise was, ok, so now we've got these characters. We have to know about them. We create a group, we create a family, or we create an old folks group on a bus together, something like that. Somehow you hold the whole group together. And then they had to get costumes. And they have to be dressed from the underwear out, of that character. And many times you have women being male characters, and male students being female characters here. Right, right? So this is always interesting. Then we got then. Then we have the improv together, just kind of getting to know whose who, these characters and their relationships. And we also create secrets within the group, you know,

because it's just like this in real life. So then the final exercise is ok, there's a day set aside where we take the two hours of the class. You get to class, you get into mask, you get into costume, you get into character. And then we'd go to what was called, it was called the "Trip to the Grille", but there's no Grille. It's now the student cafeteria over here. So you make a trip to the student center. So they have to leave the building [laughter] and they have to go across campus, right? And you have to totally live your character, right? For two hours. And so you're made to confront whatever is happening, and other students were coming up to you and saying, "What the hell is going on here?" And you're made to keep your character alive for those two hours. Well, I have two favorite memories connected with that exercise. One, is when I taught it in the Fall, and so the exercise came late in the semester and it happened to fall on the date of the all-college holiday party. Which was in the old building. It was in the old campus center, which had a large, big ballroom there. And they had tables spread out. It wasn't a sit down thing, it was you know tables with food and cookies and drinks. And people just follow it. So we crashed that party. They didn't know we were coming. We crashed that party. Oh...and I had in that group of students... Well, here's this wonderful, lovely woman, who was the head of the box office for so many years—this is a student—so many years. She is now the most awful teenager that you can imagine. I mean this is her character. She's terrible. She—here we are in the middle of this party. [unclear] At some point, she was on the balcony with a cup of coffee, pouring bits of it on peoples' heads! She was awful. It was awful! I had awful people in that—I mean awful characters. They were awful to deal with. And then others, I found out, had licked the frosting off the cookies and put the cookies back. It was awful [laughter].

LZ: I just love the idea of all these...

SE: And there was one guy who was a woman. His character was a woman, a very shapely woman [laughter]. And it's really wonderful. He ended up winning the contest for the poinsettia [laughter]. And then in another one of these—this happened every year—in another one of these, we were going over there. So we always walked across campus from the Theater building to what was called the Grille, the student center. I noticed that one of that gang was missing. One of the group was missing. I thought, “What happened to him? Where did he go?” Because I was, you know, I'm there trying to keep track of everybody. And it's also being videotaped at the same time, so this is all on videotape. And so I wonder, “What happened to him?” Well, lo and behold, he shows up with the *New York Times*. And he said—this is not when it was delivered on campus daily—but he said, “I wanted the *New York Times*.” His character wanted the *New York Times*. And he said, “I knew that the President got the *New York Times* daily.” So he went over to the President's office, and met with the president and ended up with the *New York Times*. Anyway, there were lots of those kinds of stories. Those are very fond memories of—and there are just tons and tons of those. It's just, as I look back on it, I was very unbelievably fortunate in the students I had, in what we were able to do in the department, in the support that we were given by the administration at that time. It was, you know, sure there were rough times and bad times and stuff. But I was unbelievably fortunate in the time I had at Macalester. But I have the other question.

LZ: Right.

[1:37:44]

SE: Disappointment. Biggest disappointment. And it goes back to an earlier little discussion. And the biggest disappointment I think—no, it's not I think, I know—has been the inability over the years—and it's still going on—the inability over the years to really...crack into, break into the faculty and staff on campus, and say, "Come to our theater, it's important." It's a way of not only supporting the students, but what we're trying to do—the shows we're trying to do we think are meaningful and important to your life perhaps. Some of them will just be fluffy, and a good time. Others will be challenging, and you'll go away, "I hate that show! I don't agree with that at all." I mean that's the kind of, we should do all of that. And yet...we've never been able to do that. We can't seem to get the faculty and staff to own, you know, that this is our theater and we need to support it. And you can ask the Music Department, and they will say absolutely the same thing. Now that's sad. That's the biggest disappointment. We have tried over the years. We have tried so many techniques of doing that. And they're still trying them. And I think that's one of the reasons for this theme approach. Because I noticed last year, the Science and Technology, they had a reception for all the science faculty in the lobby to kick off, and they talked about the season. And I know they got scientists—well I remember the last show was *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*—no, that's the poem, isn't it? That's the...of *J. Robert Oppenheimer*, right? Based on a...taken...er a take-off on the poem. And I know they had scientists involved in that, because they did a talkback session. And that's great. I don't think that translated though into other scientists coming. They came to the show where they were pulled in, because they were asked to do a talkback or something. And that's been, it's been such, it's been so discouraging over the years. Because we have not... As I said the Music Department has the same problem, same problem. The college hasn't seen—the faculty and staff haven't seen their way to saying, "This is ours, and we need to support it." And then find in that

support how much they're given. Now I know that there have always been faculty who have come. Very few. And so that, that doesn't help create community. At Earlham, I must say in contrast, the faculty and staff fully supported that theater. Of course, we were the only game in town, right? And so it's different here. And I understand that. But it's like...[sigh]. I know it's discouraging for the people who are there now. It's like, "Why don't the faculty come?" And the students do well, I think, for us. But it's that we can't get to that, and it's...well that's the biggest disappointment. And as I said, it's not personal. Music suffers the same way. And they still, are trying to deal with it, trying to figure out ways to entice the faculty and staff to come. Anyway.

LZ: Thank you for saying that. As a music major...

SE: Oh! Were you? Ok. So you know that.

LZ: Oh, yeah.

SE: But, I have to be honest. I have to say, how many music events did I go to? And I can't say—I mean it's like a few. I guess I [could say] "Well I was in rehearsal." Well yes that was that semester, but what did you do...it's like, there's a different ethos here. And that's been true since I came. So, but it's...I don't know. Anyway. I think maybe that's an ending, huh? I don't know if that's a downer ending. It's too bad, I don't want that to happen, but...

LZ: Those are my questions and I think—have you felt we've covered everything...

SE: Oh lord, I mean I could go on forever, as you can see. But yeah, I think...I think the most important things have been covered.

LZ: Alright. Thank you very much.

SE: Oh you're welcome. Thank you very much for asking me. I appreciate it. You're a very good interviewer.

LZ: Thank you!

[End of Disc 1:43:14]