

*"Everything was a Stage"*

*An Oral History with Ruth Solomon*

*Founding UCSC Professor of Theater Arts and Dance*

Interviewed by Tandy Beal

Edited by Irene Reti

Santa Cruz

University of California, Santa Cruz

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## **Interview History**

Ruth Solomon arrived at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1970 as a professor in the theater arts board and an affiliate of the brand-new College Five (now Porter College). At UC Santa Cruz, Solomon created a visionary program within the theater arts board that synthesized dance and theater. She taught at UC Santa Cruz until 1995. Solomon also founded and coordinated UCSC's prestigious Summer Dance Theater Institute from 1972 until 1980.

Solomon arrived at UCSC already an accomplished dancer, choreographer, and arts administrator. She was born in 1936 and raised in New York City's Manhattan borough in a family she describes as "somewhere between middle class and well to do." She began studying ballet at age seven with Mikhail Mordkin at the Master Institute of Arts and later attended the High School for Music and Art, a public school for the arts founded by Fiorello H. LaGuardia. Despite being valedictorian of her high school, because of Jewish quotas she was denied admittance to dance school at Pembroke College (now Brown University, then part of the Rhode Island School of Design). Instead, she began dancing in Broadway shows such as *The Music Man* and *West Side Story* and toured with Sarah Vaughan and the Crosby Boys. Some nights she worked as a cigarette girl at Birdland, a famous jazz club in New York City.

In 1953 Solomon entered Bard College's dance program, where Jean Erdman became her teacher and major mentor. While still at Bard, she joined the Jean Erdman Dance Theater and danced with Erdman's company until 1970. Erdman was ultimately to recommend Solomon as the right person to found a new dance program at UC Santa Cruz. At Bard College, Ruth met her future husband, John Solomon. She worked with

many well-known composers such as John Cage and Lou Harrison. Her oral history captures the milieu of the dance world in New York City in the mid-twentieth century.

In 1960, Ruth and John married; John joined the army and the pair moved to Puerto Rico, where Ruth started a dance program on the military bases on the island. After a couple of years they moved to Hawaii, where Ruth began a dance program at East-West Center in Hawaii and formed a dance company. In 1967, Solomon and Jean Erdman established a dance program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts (then called the School of the Arts), where Solomon served as assistant director until she was recruited by UC Santa Cruz in 1970.

"The major that I designed, the dance major within theater arts, had to include acting courses. We insisted that all the actors had to take movement classes," Solomon recalled. Her oral history vividly conjures the flavor of the early UCSC campus. "When I first came, there were no studios. There was nothing. I taught my classes in Stevenson Dining Hall in between meals with them setting up for the next meal," Solomon explained. This Wild West atmosphere sometimes inspired enormous creativity. While Solomon was closely involved in designing dance studios at the Performing Arts building and at College Five, even helping to lay the floor of one at College Five, some of her stages in those early days were much less standard. "Everything was a stage, everything you looked at was a performance space. If it had steps, it was a stage. It was the way the sixties developed and I came here right at the end of the sixties. I would find these secret places on campus, this limestone kiln, which is a place nobody knew about, and we put dancers in the bricks in the limestone kiln, speaking the poetry of MacLeish. That was one scene. One section was in this huge oak tree, where all the dancers hung from the tree."

In about 1980, Solomon widened her interests to include dance medicine. "I really needed to know what we were doing in class that could cause the damage we were seeing. Why were dancers having hip replacements? Why did they have knee problems? Why did they have back problems?" Solomon reflected. Since that time, Solomon has completed annual three-month "residencies" under the direction of Dr. Lyle Micheli at the Division of Sports Medicine, Harvard Medical Center, Boston. She tenaciously attended night school at Cabrillo College after a full day of teaching dance at UCSC, and became a certified medical assistant. After her retirement from UCSC, dance medicine grew into a major focus of her career, although she continued to choreograph productions in a diversity of locations.

Ruth and John edit the *Journal of Dance Medicine and Science* and she has served on the board of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science since its inception. She conducts dance medicine studies utilizing the dancers of the Boston Ballet as participants, teaches workshops in dance technique and injury prevention, and produced a popular video on the subject. In 2010 she was named Honorary Fellow of the Division of Sports Medicine, Children's Hospital Boston, Harvard Medical Center.

Solomon has also published broadly. Her books include *Preventing Dance Injuries*, *The New Faces of Dance Scholarship*, and *East Meets West in Dance: Voices in the Cross-Cultural Dialogue*. The Sixth Edition of Ruth and John's *Dance Medicine & Science*

*Bibliography*, covering the literature in the field for the last 53 years and containing 3,649 citations, became available in January 2014.<sup>1</sup>

The Regional History Project conducted this oral history in March of 2014 as part of the University History Series and a recent endeavor to expand our collection of oral histories with pioneering faculty in the arts. Tandy Beal, herself a highly accomplished director, choreographer, and performer, conducted the interviews.<sup>2</sup> The two sessions took place at Solomon's home in Santa Cruz County. As director of Regional History, I would like to thank Tandy Beal for her exquisite listening skills and for being a pleasure to work with. I transcribed the interviews. Ruth Solomon and Tandy Beal both carefully reviewed the transcript for accuracy and made a few editorial corrections, which are reflected here.

Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnet, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

—*Irene Reti, Director, Regional History Project, University Library*

*University of California, Santa Cruz, October 1, 2014*

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Ruth Solomon's publications and career see her website <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/solomon/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.tandybeal.com/> Also see Wallace Baine, "The Teachers Who Built the Santa Cruz Dance Community Come Together To Swap Stories in Prime Movers," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 23, 2013.

## Early Life

**Tandy Beal:** This is March 1, 2014 and I'm sitting with Ruth Solomon in her beautiful home. And we want to start at the beginning, although I know we want to jump into a whole lot of things. But if you wouldn't mind talking about where you were born, when you were born, what city, and what your family life was like.

**Ruth Solomon:** Okay. I was born and brought up in New York City, in Manhattan. And my family was fairly well to do, I would say, middle class to well to do. I was in public school. My brother was in private schools but I always went to public school. I was guided by the principals and vice principals of those schools. They were very much mentors for me and guided me into the arts.

So I wound up in the High School of Music and Art, which was called the Castle on the Hill on 135<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, but now, of course, is part of the LaGuardia schools and is part of the Lincoln Center Complex.<sup>3</sup> That was not so when I went there. It was a school of very select music people and art people—fine arts, design. We were cherry-picked from every public school in New York. It was a really exciting environment. I

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<sup>3</sup> "The High School of Music & Art was founded by Fiorello H. LaGuardia in 1936. As the mayor of New York City he wanted to establish a public school in which students could hone their talents in music, art and the performing arts. In 1948, a similar school, the School of Performing Arts, was created to harness students' talents in dance. The schools merged on paper in 1961 and were to be combined in one building. However, this took many years and it was not until 1984 that they moved to a new building in Lincoln Center. Prior to the building's completion in 1984, Music & Art (a/k/a "The Castle on the Hill") was located on Convent Avenue and 135th Street in what has since become part of City College's South Campus." Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiorello\\_H.\\_LaGuardia\\_High\\_School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiorello_H._LaGuardia_High_School)



graduated from that high school in 1953. I was ahead of myself, so I had to wait a half a year to go to college. Also, while I was in high school I was dancing. I danced from the time I was seven.

**Beal:** And can you talk about what got you to dance at age seven?

**Solomon:** My mother. She took me on the bus up to the Master Institute of Arts, on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and Riverside Drive. There I took ballet classes with Mikhail Mordkin, who was [Anna] Pavlova's partner. He had just come from Russia and opened the school with his wife, Bronislava Nijinska.

**Beal:** Wow!

**Solomon:** So that's where my training started, at the age of seven.

**Beal:** Was your mother a dancer?

**Solomon:** No. My mother was not anything close.

**Beal:** What did your parents do?

**Solomon:** My father was a bookmaker in New York City. He was a kind of Damon Runyonesque figure, very, very well known all over Broadway. Everybody recognized him. And I grew up in that environment, with many bodyguards and protectors that followed him around. My mother was very genteel. She never came out of that mix. My father actually graduated Columbia with a law degree, but could not make a living. And he went into bookmaking. (laughs) I always kind of knew that. It was an accepted fact and it didn't seem to matter to anybody as long as we had food on the table. And he

adored me more than anything, *anything* in his life. I never entered a department store in my entire young life. Everything was bought wholesale from people who bet with him. (laughs) I would get clothes instead of him being paid off. They would just pay off in clothes for me.

**Beal:** And was this betting on anything, or was it horses?

**Solomon:** Oh, everything. Everything. Prize fights. Football. Everything and anything.

**Beal:** I grew up as an actor's daughter, but it was totally normal. There was nothing different. That was your childhood. That was it. But was there anything that strikes you about your childhood that was unique?

**Solomon:** I thought this was normalcy. We always had people in the house, a lot of people in the house. When one of those prizefights occurred, like the big Joe Louis prize fights where everybody bet on it, we'd have our living room set up with a hundred chairs. And everybody came to watch the prizefights because my father had one of the first televisions, one of the first six televisions in the United States. It was one of these where the tube is in it and then you lift the top and it's a mirror. So everybody would come and watch a prizefight in the apartment on this enormous Motorola television—it was a huge thing in order to encompass this big tube.

So we always had people. And I had to call everybody uncle. They were all uncles, no matter who they were. (laughs) So I felt I had a very big family. It was different than most children.

**Beal:** It was your mother who guided you into the arts at a young age. Was that because that's the thing to do for young girls, or because she loved it?

**Solomon:** No, I don't think either. I think it was just clear that I wanted to dance, somehow. I don't remember how that became clear to her. But finally, after a year or so at the Mikhail Mordkin Ballet Institute, all I had to do was get on the Riverside bus myself, at the age of eight, take it up to 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, take my classes, go down to Riverside Drive and take the bus back, at night. I did that for years and nothing ever happened to me—New York was so safe at that time that it was perfectly all right for a child to do that. I never thought twice about it and I was never frightened. No. It was just beautiful.

**Beal:** And your home was in Manhattan?

**Solomon:** Manhattan. It was on 89<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Drive, so it wasn't that far. It was a bus ride and I had to get on the bus usually with the same driver.

**Beal:** Do you remember your first class in dance?

**Solomon:** The thing I remember was many classes in which my legs were not straight enough or tight enough and Mordkin had a stick. It was a heavy dowel. It wasn't just like a twig. It was a heavy stick. And he used to whack me in the calves to tighten my legs. I never showed my parents the black and blue marks. I would cover them up so I could go back to class. I figured if they knew that I had been whacked a few times, it might have been a problem.

**Beal:** But the whacking didn't destroy your love for dance, which it could have easily.

**Solomon:** No, no. I figured I wasn't doing it right. Whatever it was, I wasn't getting it. So I needed to be whacked. Although I don't think either of my parents ever raised a hand to me in my entire life. I mean, that just wasn't part of the culture, ever, ever, in our family. So this was strange.

They thought I had flat feet, for some reason. My parents took me to a podiatrist, who told them that I needed arches. He put steel shanks in my little shoes, and I would walk around with these painful steel plates. Then I'd go to ballet class and I'd have this enormous arch. And the big dancers, the real stars in the classes, they couldn't understand why I had these steel arch things in my shoes. They were so painful. The only time I didn't have to wear them was in dance class. So that was a relief.

**Beal:** Did you know then that you were going to become a dancer? Was that in your heart? Or was it just what you did.

**Solomon:** It was just what I did. And then when I went to Music and Art, I really thought I was going to be a visual artist. I was a good designer but I wasn't a fine artist, and the school was filled with really amazing fine artists. I was more into the design aspect. I designed fabrics; I designed costumes; I designed all kinds of things. But my fine art work just wasn't at the level of some of the others. We had to take all the fine arts classes, of course, and it was really clear to me who the really good fine art students were. But I was dancing all the time.

My dream was to go to Pembroke [College] (now Brown University) because it had an affiliation with the Rhode Island School of Design. So I was going to go to one of the best universities but I was going to be able to do my art. And at that point I was the

second highest in my graduating class at Music and Art. I was valedictorian and the second highest in the regional scores and everything. Everybody said there would be no problem. I didn't apply any place else. Well I didn't get in. That was because in those years there was a "Jewish quota" and they only took a very, very few—like four—Jewish people from all over the country. I didn't make it. It was because of the quota.

### **Dancing in New York**

So I had no college to go to. There I was, graduating from school. So I had a half a year, because I graduated early, and I was dancing in New York. All this time I was getting into show business. At the age of seventeen, I was already dancing in Broadway shows. So my background was Broadway shows. But I was much more interested in concert dance. I was doing the Broadway shows so that I could make money. And I was touring all the time, as a seventeen and eighteen year old. I was on the road in show business.

**Beal:** And what were some of the shows that you were in?

**Solomon:** I was in *The Music Man*. I was in *West Side Story*, as the swing girl in *West Side*, so I had to do a different part every night. I could remember movement better than anybody. That was the only reason I got that job. Not because I was a better dancer, but because I could really memorize movement quickly and keep it.

And a lot of fair shows—you know—there were fairs, and you got all kinds of work, nightclub work. I did a lot of nightclub work. I toured with Sarah Vaughan and the Crosby brothers, etc.—

**Beal:** Wow!

**Solomon:** But I always felt, even though I was living at home, that I had to make my own way. I always felt I had to somehow make my own money. I never wanted to ask my parents for money. So at night I would work at [the jazz club] Birdland as a cigarette girl. Things like that. Until five in the morning and then go to rehearsal, or audition, or whatever. That was the way a lot of my youth was spent.

**Beal:** And your family was okay with that?

**Solomon:** Yeah. My father, I remember when I had the Birdland job, which was, for a whole six months, one of the musicians, like Jimmy Smith—I made friends with all of the musicians—would drive me home at night, in a big white Cadillac. I'd look up at the twelfth floor—and there my father would be, at five in the morning, hanging out the window, waiting for me. (laughs)

**Beal:** (laughs)

**Solomon:** So I'd quickly get out of the car and go up in the elevator. But you know, I was young and I was very innocent in that environment. Nobody ever offered me drugs. There was no drinking or anything. I was just very innocent, strange, plunked down in a place where I just worked.

**Beal:** You said you were getting more interested in concert dance. What is the first concert dance you saw? Because that was a rich time.

**Solomon:** Yes. I think I saw everybody. I saw Martha, of course, Martha Graham. I think this is a little ahead, when the concert dance really came into my life.

## **Bard College**

That's when I went to college. Because I didn't have anyplace to go to college, and my mother found Bard for me. She was the motivator; in her quiet little way she made sure that my brother and I went to good schools. My brother went to Colgate, and then to Yale Law School and graduated summa cum laude. So we had to produce.

**Beal:** Had she gone to college?

**Solomon:** No.

**Beal:** Now, Bard College had a very strong dance reputation then.

**Solomon:** Yes, but I went there as a drama major. I was a drama major. It was what I wanted to do. I did not think I was going to be a dancer, even though I always danced. And then, I found that I could do drama and dance at Bard. So I did a double major, which was really hard at Bard in those days. It was excruciating.

**Beal:** Why was it hard?

**Solomon:** Because it was two full programs. So you had to do your theater and rehearse all night, or you had to be in your dance classes. And the acting, of course, was very involved with the literature and people like Theodore Hoffmann and Eric Bentley all were there. You know, big names in theater were there, Larry Arrick, John Olin Scrymgeour. They came through as professors.

## **Jean Erdman**

In dance, the thing that changed my life the most, besides Theodore Hoffmann—who was the first influence—was the next influence that happened in my first year, Jean Erdman came to teach on campus. She was hired and she *was* the dance program. There was only one teacher and that's who we took from, because at that time there were only two hundred students at Bard, altogether, literature, sciences, music. It was two-hundred total.

A group of us were dancing at Bard and Jean was forming her company in New York at that time. She was leaving Martha [Graham], or she had left Martha. She was married to Joseph Campbell and was forming what was called the Jean Erdman Dance Theater. And she invited me to be a dancer in it. But you have to note that it was called dance theater. It was not dance as a solo entity. She had left Martha, as Merce [Cunningham] left Martha, to make their own way and have their own voice. And hers was very much in theater, in dance theater, as we want to say now.

And that was my main influence: that dance did not have to be a pure movement form, in which you didn't speak, in which you didn't sing, or you didn't do anything else but dance in silence. I was also in the theater, so this was a perfect mesh for me. The pieces that Jean made, through my entire career with her, were dance theater pieces. We spoke, we had text; or we didn't have text, but we had sound. We had vocalization—Whatever it was, it was never pure dance. And always there was a major composer who worked with us. Of course, John Cage and Lou Harrison worked with us.

**Beal:** Morton Subotnick?



**Solomon:** Morton was at NYU and I worked with him and Jean, because Jean took over the department at NYU School of the Arts, and Morton Subotnick was there. John Cage composed pieces for us, Teiji Ito, and Lou Harrison. That was where I met Lou Harrison. He was in New York at that time and he came to the studio and he composed one of the main pieces that I danced. I danced a major role in a trio that Jean made, and ultimately I wound up dancing all three parts at different points of my career, depending on whether I was more mature or less mature. Or whether my leg could go higher, or I could jump higher. Whichever attribute I had at that moment was the role I played. But that was Lou Harrison's piece. It was called *Daughters of the Lonesome Isle*. And it was a beautiful piece.

**Beal:** Did she form her company while you were still in school?

**Solomon:** Yes.

**Beal:** And then, when you graduated you were working with her.

**Solomon:** I was working with her. We also had field periods at Bard. The month of January through most of February, when we were off from Bard. So we were in New York, working. That was where I got a lot of my jobs. I would be doing Broadway shows at night and rehearsing with Jean in the morning. That was the schedule. She'd have rehearsals starting at nine and I'd be barely awake.

**Beal:** So how long did you stay working with her as a performer in her company?

**Solomon:** Until I came out here in 1970. I was with her a very, very long time. When I went away to teach in other places, I always went back when she was doing concerts. So

even if we were in Puerto Rico, I went back to New York and did a concert with her. When we were in Hawaii, I went back to New York and did a concert with her.

### **New York University School of the Arts**

And then, ultimately, John and I went to Bloomington, Indiana, so he could finish his PhD, because he was an Indiana resident and it was relatively inexpensive for residents. And then Ted Hoffmann called me and said, "I'm starting the School of the Arts, and would you come and work with Jean?" Jean was going to be the head of the dance program, design the dance program, and I was going to come and work in both theater and dance, teach movement for actors and teach dance.

**Beal:** This was at NYU.

**Solomon:** NYU School of the Arts, which is now Tisch School of the Arts.

**Beal:** And what year was that?

**Solomon:** 1967. And that was the beginning of the School of the Arts.

**Beal:** That must have been a thrill. And at that time you didn't have to have an MFA?

**Solomon:** Nothing. I had my BA, which is all I actually still have, at this point. None of us worried about that kind of thing—Jean didn't even graduate Sarah Lawrence [College]. She married Joseph Campbell and left Sarah Lawrence. So she was my role model. But also, because I was dancing, there was no idea of going back to school. I couldn't do that at that time.

**Beal:** It must have been an astonishing feeling that you are starting a program at NYU that's going to be multi-arts, and it's coming out of the tradition that you believed in and experienced.

**Solomon:** Yes. Well, everybody who was gathered there had the same vision. It was a theater, arts, dance, design entity. So we worked with the designers; we worked with the theater people. We choreographed their shows. We used the actors in our pieces. I taught movement for actors for the four years I was there, and also taught the dancers. So that was very much a part of what I wanted to do. And Jean actually started teaching the movement for actors, in which I always assisted her. I learned everything from her about that.

**Beal:** What do you think is the most important thing for actors to learn about movement?

**Solomon:** How to move. (laughs)

**Beal:** (laughs)

**Solomon:** How to move and speak at the same time. It was also the thing that I wanted musicians to do. It was finding the movement life of a character. That's what I really taught, that you could generate a character from discovering their movement life. We used Laban [Movement Analysis]. Irmgard Bartenieff taught for us also. We had only the best people on our faculty.

**Beal:** And Nenet Charisse was there, right?

**Solomon:** Nenette taught the ballet classes. She was my other right arm. And every day I went up to ballet class with her, uptown. I'd leave the School of the Arts at noon, at lunchtime, take the subway with Nenette, take ballet class, run back, and teach my classes. And that was the way every day went.

**Beal:** And Gladys Bailin was there as well.

**Solomon:** Gladys and I became really good friends at that time. She was out of [Alwin] Nikolais. Jean strongly believed that every single style of dance had to be taught, which was totally unique at the time. At that time you either did Graham or you did Cunningham. Or you were part of the Judson [Memorial] Church movement. But you simply did not vary in your style. If you worked with Erick Hawkins, you worked and lived and ate in that studio, and you never ventured out, or you'd be killed. Jean was exactly the opposite.

And it was just so rewarding for all of the students we trained. Because we had the Nikolais technique with Gladys. We had Laban Movement Analysis with Irmgard Bartenieff and Forestine Pauley was also there. I remember one of the Judson people, Yvonne Rainer, did a running and walking piece, based solely in pedestrian movement. She taught for us for a while. Gus Solomons taught. We had Cunningham people; we really had everybody who was anybody in the New York dance world teach for us. *Nobody* was excluded. It just depended on the semester. If you went through the program you were exposed to everything and everyone.

**Beal:** So this was really a hothouse experiment. Because also, the dance programs around the country weren't really in existence. And to be at a seminal one that also was integrating styles, as well as art forms—what a basis for you to develop in.

**Solomon:** That is the key to my foundation, I would say, various styles, so that you never get bogged down in one style of movement. And we never denied a student who took to one style, where they just couldn't stand the Graham and had to do Cunningham. That was never denied. That was okay. If you really couldn't handle a style because aesthetically it did not move you—we tried to be understanding to a point.

**Beal:** Did you still have to take it, though?

**Solomon:** Yeah, you had to take it, but it wasn't forced down your throat. We didn't say, "Oh, well, you're being bad because you're not willing to open your mind." We said, "It's fine. It's just, take this too; take that too." And eventually nobody really isolated themselves very much. I don't remember anybody—and you know how students are. They love to glom onto a teacher. And so, they'd try—if it was Gladys: "Oh, she's the only thing that's important to us." And we tried to avoid that. So nobody became a star in the program. Nobody was the big deal. We were all equal.

**Beal:** And was it a very collegial atmosphere as you designed this?

**Solomon:** I don't remember any difficulty. I had one moment of difficulty, which will never leave my memory. And that was when I was going up and down in the elevator—I had choreographed a piece. It was about to be produced, we were almost

open, and the design element wasn't finished. The designer, Robert Rabinowitz, who was the wonderful director of the design program, simply didn't finish the lighting, or the scenic design. And rehearsing the movement on the set was crucial because it was ramps and it was slopes that had to move. It was a whole thing that had to be perfected. I was choreographing on the flat stage surface, imagining what movement would be like coming down a steep ramp. I remember the only moment of disagreement I had was yelling at him in the elevator, "I need the set! Please do the set. I can't go up there and have them run around flat and think that on opening night they're going to be okay." So that was the only moment I ever remember of having a bad time there. I can't think of a better place to work.

### **Meeting John Solomon**

**Beal:** What great modeling of how everything works. So somewhere in here you two must have met: John [Ruth's husband] and Ruth, I realize.

**Solomon:** Yes, we met at Bard, which was 1954. John came in '54. I was there in '53. We met almost immediately upon his arrival and struck up a friendship and it just developed from that point on. John was from Indiana, which was really strange to me. But we managed and it's been great ever since.

**Beal to John:** What was your field of study at that time?

**John Solomon:** I started out as a philosophy major and then I became a literature major. By the time I was halfway through Bard, I was a lit major.

**Beal:** What a long relationship.

**Solomon:** John was a lit major and we had big figures in literature at Bard. Saul Bellow and Ralph Ellison were there, Keith Botsford, William Humphrey, who wrote *Home from the Hill*; Andrews Wanning, the big Shakespearean scholar. Jack Ludwig, all very big literary names at the time. Tony Hecht, the very big poet.

**Beal:** So you were in a very rich milieu together, both in college together and then being in New York at this astonishing, seminal time.

**Solomon:** Well, from college we got married. Not right away. It was four years after college that we got married. I was 24.

**John Solomon:** I was in New York too. I went to Columbia from Bard. Ruth was off dancing. We had a little kind of hiatus and then in 1960 we got back together and we got married.

**Ruth Solomon:** Yes. And then we went on a honeymoon in Europe to just wander, with no money, nothing. And John was called into the army about two months after we got there. So then he wound up teaching English as a second language in Puerto Rico. So we went there. Then he got a job a couple of years later at the University of Hawaii, so we went from island to island, all the time, with me going back and forth to New York.

### **Teaching Dance in Puerto Rico and Hawaii**

**Beal:** And were you involved in dance in Puerto Rico and Hawaii as well?

**Solomon:** Yes.

**Beal:** And what were those experiences?

**Solomon:** I started the dance program on all the bases in Puerto Rico. I taught children. I taught wives. I taught anybody who would come to class. It was just a ridiculous bunch of business. I went from base to base. My class would be on Saturday morning here and Sunday morning there. I just taught and I didn't mind teaching little children, although I knew *nothing* about it, and that was the hardest. I admire anybody who can teach children. It's the hardest thing in the world.

And then, when we were in Hawaii, that's where I started the dance program, at the East-West Center in Hawaii. I also taught at Punahou.

**Beal:** And could you describe Punahou?

**Solomon:** Punahou is a very upscale high school in Honolulu where all the rich kids go. And they had dance, of all things. So I was hired to teach dance. The East-West Center was just being developed. I kept trying to convince the powers that be that they needed a dance program. Luckily, Carl Wolz came out there right at that time. And Carl danced with me.

I formed a company, actually, in Hawaii, a real dance company. And we did performances and Carl danced in my pieces, and Carl started choreographing. He was a wonderful choreographer. Of course, I danced in his pieces. He was the scholar because he was studying Chinese, he was studying Japanese, and he was the key for me to the East-West Center. So between the two of us we got the dance program going in the East-West Center, which was Asian dance. And then I did the modern part at the University of Hawaii.



**Beal:** Where did Betty Jones and Fritz [Ludin] fit in?

**Solomon:** They were not at the university when we were there. They were in a private studio. They were very well known as private teachers and very well respected, but they didn't have anything to do with the university.

**Beal:** And then Jean Erdman came out, as well, right? Did you bring her out?

**Solomon:** Jean was born and brought up in Hawaii. Her family owned land there. So she would go back there quite often. She would come and of course teach for me, and be a guest artist, and we'd do pieces together there. She and Joseph Campbell bought their own place in Honolulu, on Oahu. They kept going back and forth all the time.

### **Joseph Campbell**

But all the time that I was at NYU, and that was when we were long out of school, after John and I were married, and had traveled and were back in New York, Jean and Joe [Campbell] were both of our mentors, in a way. We had dinner with them almost every other night, and Joe would espouse these philosophical theories and mystical religious seminars over dinner every night. He never made you feel stupid. You could ask a question. He had this enormous capacity to make you feel important enough to tell his stories to. That was like a gift from God. That time was so precious, because not only was I doing all the teaching and theater at NYU and working with Jean, there was also Joe, who would come in and critique the pieces. And that was deadly.

**Beal:** And why was it deadly?

**Solomon:** Oh, we'd have been rehearsing a new work Jean had choreographed, for maybe 6 months. And we'd know Joe was coming that night. This was performance, in the studio. He'd just sit there watching, no expression, nothing. He'd go home with Jean and apparently hash over the thing. We'd never hear anything. And the next day Jean would come in and say, "Well, this has to go and this has to go, and that's not working, so we need to re-choreograph." Sometimes Joe would be there when this terrible moment would happen because she'd be so devastated. She was sure everything was perfect. And his expression was, "Well, my dear, you have to murder your darlings," Meaning cut this and cut that. Usually her favorite parts.

**Beal:** A great man and a man of great insight, but was it also artistic? Was he right when he gave those critiques?

**Solomon:** Always. Oh, yes. He knew what didn't sell. And he knew, if somebody wasn't dancing well, he said to Jean, "She should not be in the company and you can't use her."

**Beal:** Wow.

**Solomon:** Jean was just so kind that she couldn't ever do that. So she'd give them a job, you know, "Please run the studio. Please do something, but you can't dance in the piece." But that was what went on. It was a crucible of creation and killing.

**Beal:** Well, how extraordinary, to be in the milieu of one the world's greatest thinkers, and such a broad thinker, as well as such a yeasty, artistic milieu.

**Solomon:** Yes. It was interesting. One phenomenon with Joe was that John had to do his qualifying exams. We had left Indiana so that I could take the job at NYU School of the Arts. But he needed to do his qualifying exams, so he needed an auditor.

**John Solomon:** I was teaching in New York and I couldn't go back to Bloomington to do the exams, so they allowed me to do it by mail, with somebody to oversee me, whatever that title was, and Joe was that person for me.

**Ruth Solomon:** So Joe oversaw his qualifying exams. Every morning John would go to their apartment, sit down, and do his exams. Joe would be in the other room writing. And then at the end of the day, they would get together for some Irish whiskey. Joe was big on Irish whiskey. (laughs)

And they'd have their drinks. And then the next day, same thing. And this went on— for the better part of a week.

And the funny thing was, Indiana University had to approve your auditor. And so they wrote, "Well, please give the credentials of your auditor/advisor." What did Joe say?

He said, "Just have them look me up in *Who's Who*?"

**Beal:** Wow. So how long was this period of time that you were in New York, with this richness? I mean, you grew up in New York—

**Solomon:** Yeah. But that period of time that we're talking about was four years.

## **Coming to UC Santa Cruz**

**Beal:** So with this kind of richness of artistic life, what made you leave New York—how did you get here [to Santa Cruz]?

**Solomon:** That's so funny. (laughs) Not easily. John hated New York.

**He** was ready to leave. And just at that very moment, Jean Erdman was one of many people who were consulted as to who should start a dance program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "Ruth Solomon," she said. So Jim Hall, who was the first provost of College Five, as it was then called, came to New York to interview me. And our interview took place in a restaurant called The Villa D'este, or something like that, and it had fountains in it that changed colors of water. I remember shooting fountains, and we're sitting there, and I'm being interviewed for this job. I had never done an interview in my life, quite honestly. I had just somehow always gotten jobs and I didn't know how to interview, and especially an interview for a university. I was at the University of Hawaii, I just got hired. I was at Puerto Rico, I never did an interview. So I had no idea. I just went there and I did my thing, whatever it was. He must have liked me enough, I guess, but maybe of the fountains more than anything—

**Beal:** (laughs) Why do you say that?

**Solomon:** He selected the restaurant. And based on that interview and my credentials they brought me out to UCSC for an interview. John did not come. I came back and I said, "It's the most beautiful place." But at that time I had applied for a position at Westbeth, where all the artists were to be ensconced. It was to be an artists' enclave.

**Beal:** Westbeth is in New York City, right?

**Solomon:** Yes. Westbeth is in New York. And a number of dance artists were going to be there, visual artists, theater people. Everybody was going to be in this huge building which had been the Ma Bell building down on the west side of New York, right by the Hudson. So I was up for a place in there. And I was out here for the interview. Don't you think I get selected in both places!

**Beal:** And Westbeth—that was a living place or are you talking about some kind of an artistic enclave?

**Solomon:** Both. Living and studio space. We just didn't know what to do. This was a big dilemma because I really wanted to choreograph. In Westbeth I would be given a studio, plus a place for my two children and John to live. And I was going to be in this artists' enclave. What could be better?

Well, I went to see the studio at Westbeth. It had two pillars in it, big round pillars in the middle of the studio. I kept saying, oh, God, all my choreography is going to be done around these pillars. And even my teaching classes in this studio was going to be bizarre, because I couldn't do across the floor or anything. Anyway, that was part of it. And then, of course, there was this gorgeous studio on the top floor that Merce [Cunningham] got. Merce was up on the top floor with all the windows and everything and I was on the ninth floor. I think that building was sixteen floors, if I recall. And I was on the ninth floor, there wasn't a lot of light, and it had pillars.

I came out to Santa Cruz. There weren't any pillars. (laughs) There wasn't anything. There weren't any studios. But it was beautiful. I knew John very much wanted to leave New York. It was also time for our kids to change schools. And my whole salary was going to Walden School, a private kindergarten in New York. It cost at that time something like \$37,000 a year for Rowan to go, which was my NYU salary. The whole salary went for his kindergarten class. We were looking at that for the next twelve years. I couldn't imagine how as a dancer I would make money, even with John teaching in the college or a university. We could never make enough money to put two kids in private school in New York. Mardi, our daughter, was in public school but she was about to graduate the sixth grade. So the move was really a total consideration of practicality and also the enticement of starting a new program.

**Beal:** What was the vision that was either presented to you, or that you could see, in those early days when UC Santa Cruz was still kind of a twinkle in the eye?

### **Starting a Dance Program at UC Santa Cruz**

**Solomon:** When I met Dean McHenry it was clear I could do anything to make a program. He wanted a dance program. And Jim Hall wanted a dance program. But Jim Hall didn't know anything about dance. Neither did Dean McHenry. They didn't know that you need a dance studio. They didn't know that you need dance students. They didn't know that you need at least a couple of faculty to do a program. I was willing to start it and do it all myself until we got going. But there was no idea here what that meant.

**Beal:** Why do you think they wanted a dance program then?

**Solomon:** I have no clue. Absolutely no clue. There was Althea Short, who was teaching at the Field House, a wonderful teacher from Humphrey-Weidman School of Dance. And Theater Arts wanted to have dance as part of their identity, because there was a Theater Arts Board of Studies. They were all English. It was Michael Warren, who was in literature, the provost of Stevenson, Glenn Willson,<sup>4</sup> who was very English [he ultimately went back to England], and Audrey Stanley.<sup>5</sup> So we had three English people. I'm trying to think if there was anybody else on the board that interviewed me at the time. I think Joanna Harris was teaching some classes for the board, some movement classes, history classes. Joanna was very much out of a Cunningham background.

They put out this position search, and they were clear that they did not want to hire Althea because she was teaching at the Field House. It was total snobbery: you can't be teaching P.E. and be teaching for Theater Arts. So they weren't going to hire her. Joanna lived in Berkeley. I think she wanted the job but she was clearly not a strong technique teacher at that time. So they brought me out. And ultimately I got hired.

**Beal:** So was it College Five who brought you, or theater arts?

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<sup>4</sup> See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *F.M. Glenn Willson: Early UCSC History and the Founding of Stevenson College* (Regional History Project, UCSC, 1989). <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/willson>

<sup>5</sup> See the forthcoming oral histories with Michael Warren and Audrey Stanley.

**Solomon:** Both. Your appointment had to be a dual appointment. So I had to be approved by College Five. All of their faculty had to vote, and the provost, and I had to be approved by the Theater Arts Board. At that time you did not have a single appointment. You did not just belong to a board of studies.

**Beal:** What was the value of that?

**Solomon:** Oh, it was wonderful because you were a part of a college that was a conglomerate of all fields. So our best friends became the social scientists, and the literature people, and the scientists. We were all ensconced in College Five. The faculty who were in academic residence there represented virtually all of the boards of study on campus, the theory being that the students of the college should have an advisor close at hand no matter what their major.

**Beal:** In your experience, did that resonate throughout the years, or did they start to erode the relationship of the [colleges and boards]?

**Ruth Solomon:** Oh, it clearly eroded. It took quite a long time because Dean McHenry was there as chancellor and that was his vision. It was based on the Cambridge-Oxford, English system, and that's what every college structure was. Stevenson had the same. They had a mesh of all programs, as did Cowell. Then the fourth college was Crown. We were College Five. They all were built on this same principle. Mostly [the changes were] motivated by admissions, in that a lot of people couldn't understand [the college system].



The campus, as I recall, wasn't drawing the number of applicants that they thought was healthy at that time.

**Beal:** In those early years, there was a level of student that was very bright and very high.

**Ruth Solomon:** Very high. We only drew the best students. The kids that I had in my dance class, I actually had them reading. I was surprised (laughs) when I looked at the syllabus, that anybody took the class. But they were so bright. They were a pleasure to teach.

In the early years it was exciting to be here. It was also exciting because we were growing and we could make what we needed to make that growth happen. So, you could make a dance program, whereas you can't really do that now. You have to scrounge around.

**Beal:** What do you think that difference is? And can you talk about the vision you had for creating the program.

**Solomon:** Well, the difference has to do with money, of course. But my philosophy, and I think one of the reasons why I was hired by theater arts, was that I was a dance theater person. I was not just a dance person. I didn't come from a straight dance background and my work, even my choreography, grew out of Jean Erdman's concepts of theater.

We had to work with the lighting designers, the musicians. Everybody was involved, not just dance. You don't just make your dance and then put your dance to music. It was much more the way you worked with Nikolais.<sup>6</sup> But it was his vision. It was his creative vision. Whereas for me, I needed a lot of people. I needed a lot of help. I needed a brilliant sound technician who could put together the scores that I had in my head but I didn't know how to do. I needed lighting designers who could make things I imagined happen on stage and be magical.

**Beal:** Sometimes there's a great pitfall when dance moves into a theater program. It's kind of the big fish eating the smaller fish. But your vision was to be able to integrate them. However, at the time that you were running the UCSC program, the seniors could—I remember three of them—do a main stage senior project.

**Beal:** So in a way, even though you understood that you wanted the vision of the connectivity of all the arts, you also gave tremendous energy and made space for the dance people to be dancers.

**Solomon:** Technique had to be taught and technique was the core. If you didn't have the technique, it didn't matter whether you did theater or anything else. So we had to have really high-level technique classes. I brought in people who could do that. Every

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<sup>6</sup> During the editing process, Tandy Beal provided the following explanation, "Nikolais was what was called a 'total theatre' person—he had a concept that would encompass music, costumes, props, lighting—and movement. He had collaborators who helped manifest the idea but his vision encompassed all the art forms and how they meshed together."

person that I hired was a super teacher of dance. I was so proud of the people who came here to work with us. I would teach every day until I dropped, because it was so important. So out of that base you could do other things if you wanted.

Choreography, in my mind, was a key to how to develop the art form. If you couldn't choreograph, and you didn't have that skill, you only wound up dancing for someone, or being somebody's puppet. You had to have your own creative spirit going. So that's what I tried to do, and I brought in people to teach choreography, people like Betty Walberg and Robert Dunn, people who really could teach about a lot of things besides dance steps.

**Beal:** Can you talk about the sequential vision that you had for how a student took classes.

**Solomon:** They had to take acting class. The major that I designed, the dance major within theater arts, had to include acting courses. We insisted that all the actors had to take movement classes. Whether they took the dance class or a movement for performers class, which we would mount, it didn't matter. But they had to take a movement class. So a lot of the actors were in dance class, which was wonderful! It made for the most wonderful environment. Maybe they weren't in the advanced dance class, but they were in dance classes.

**Beal:** What you established early on was a five-day a week class for two hours a day, which has been shifted quite radically now. You had gradated levels. There was the beginning technique class, an intermediate, and an advanced class every day.

**Solomon:** Right. That was a dance program. (laughs) Duh. It wasn't like brain surgery. You needed levels and there were certainly tons of people who wanted to take the class, and you couldn't put them all together into a jumble. They each had to develop at their own level and within their own capacity at that time, in their growth or in their creative spirit. So there had to be levels. There were levels of choreography, and in my mind, coming from the tradition I did, you had to dance every day. There just wasn't any other way. I remember thinking back to Nnette Charisse. It could be Washington's Birthday and she said, "Your body doesn't know it's Washington's Birthday. Your body knows that it's supposed to dance today." So it's not a day off.

**Beal:** What do you think is the value of dance in an academic organization, the gifts and the pitfalls?

### **The Relationship Between the Dance Program and the Theater Program**

**Solomon:** Well, I'd like to go back to answer one question that I didn't finish: the pitfalls. I insisted that dance stay in theater arts. That was probably a major mistake at the time. It was fine for the first ten years, maybe even longer than that, maybe almost twenty. But as the board shifted and had other ideas about what they wanted from dance, such as, we were told we were only supposed to support the theater productions and I was to do choreography for the theater productions, which I was more than happy to do. But that wasn't all that we were. We needed to do dance productions. If you don't put what you make on stage, you haven't gone through the full art form. It may start in the studio but I was not interested in making "studio dancers." It's an art form that is a performing art that has to reach performance level, and that doesn't

happen unless you have an audience, unless you're speaking to them and presenting your spirit and your work to them. So we had to develop that arena, and the theater arts people simply weren't interested in us doing our own productions, which, by the way, had drawn tremendous audience support.

I don't want to talk about negative things, but there was a rivalry. The dance productions were quite good. The theater productions, at a certain period, were not. People weren't coming to them. But everybody filled the house for the dance productions. And it did not go over too well with some of the theater folk. Then, when an FTE, a faculty position would come up, the theater faculty out voted us, and we would never get to grow. Each year our people left to get a better job because they weren't hired into an assistant professorship position. People were lecturers for years, and they'd stay as a lecturer, kind of being promised that they could move onto the ladder, but the board never would promote any of the dance faculty.

So our top people, like Martha Curtis, went off to develop and chair her own program at Virginia Commonwealth, a beautiful program. Another, Gregg Lizenbery, who was with us for a long time, held in there hoping something would happen, [then] went off to chair the program at the University of Hawaii. Doug Nielsen now is at the University of Arizona. All of our really good people are in top-notch positions and this university would not give them a ladder position where they would have any security. They were on a year-to-year contract, and that was demoralizing for both them and me, as I kept losing wonderful people.

**Beal:** But that didn't happen in the theater program.

**Solomon:** No, because the theater program had the votes in the board. There were five theater members. There were only one or two dance people who had voting privileges. So whenever an FTE came up, the board voted for a theater person, not to put in another dancer. It was simply a matter of numbers. We knew we couldn't keep the program developing against those odds. At one point Mel Wong applied for a position, and the only way that he got hired was through affirmative action. If he hadn't been a candidate through a Target of Opportunity (TOP) recruitment he would never have been hired. He was hired on that basis only. It never came out of theater arts numbers. It was just a free appointment. Then the board—this is all the negative stuff of how the dance program went into demise—the board then brought in non-dance people. If a dance position became available, they brought in a person who had no dance background. The candidate had published something in dance, and they were the people who were supposed to teach choreography, or were supposed to teach technique, and they were not equipped to do so. They were terrible. I mean, ghastly. So the kids wouldn't come. They would complain and they wouldn't take the class.

But film, on the other hand, was a great example. Film saw the writing on the wall, that theater arts was never going to give film its due, even though they had great student numbers, but they were going to keep it in its little box. Eli Hollander and Chip [Lord] came on and they moved film out of theater arts. They made a separate major; it got approved, and they moved it out. It taught me a great lesson. At that time I should have made the move. I could have done it, if philosophically I believed that that was the thing to do. But I kept hoping that somehow, hoping against hope, that the philosophy I dreamed of and believed in was going to work. Well, it worked for a long, long time.

## **Collaborative Work with Other Artists**

**Beal:** When it worked, you had colleagues like Andy Doe and Keith Muscutt.

**Solomon:** Yes.

**Beal:** I also know you reached out to the music community as well, because you always were reaching into collaborative work with fellow artists.

**Solomon:** That was, to me, the most exciting thing about being here. I worked with Gordon Mumma. He composed pieces for us. At one point he was on stage in a piece. I'm sure it embarrassed him to no end, but he was so game. Sherwood Dudley as well—we did a whole orchestra piece in which I made the orchestra move and they just were riled about it. But the piece was a success, even though it caused a great brouhaha for a long time, because musicians don't want to move, as you can imagine. They want to sit in that chair and play, and you can't blame them because they think something's going to happen to them or their instrument. However, we moved the whole orchestra. Sherwood Dudley was a collaborator with me for a lot of pieces. He was in the piece with Gordon Mumma. I put them on the rig that goes up and down—and Sherwood was up there in his underwear, it was a costume. (laughs) Gordon and Sherwood were rolling around the stage on this platform. It was so funny. It was a real kick, and Gordon had composed the entire score.

There were others. David Cope composed a number of pieces for me. He was the finest person to work with. We went to New York and performed his piece. When I first came here, Eric Regener, a person who was here in music just when electronic music was

beginning to be a part of the music program on campus, this man, Eric Regener, who was brilliant, and we did pieces together. Keith Muscutt, of course, who was a masterful lighting designer—when he left it and went into administration it broke my heart. But it was more secure. He made a living with security, whereas he had none as a technical director or lighting designer. The Theater Arts Board kept him at the Lecturer level for years.

Those collaborations were memorable. I did a piece called *Wood Stone*, with another composer, Bill Brooks, way out in a remote locale in the back of Cowell [College] that nobody went to, where we built a whole village with rock and stone and huge logs we transported on log trucks to this remote location. This wonderful music composer was out there. It was a shared course we did together, and we did this outdoor piece that developed over 3 days, building a Kiva.

Then there was *The Journey*, which was the first piece I did here, right after I arrived. I think that was 1971. I arrived in 1970 and then in 1971, that summer, I did *The Journey*, which used musicians traveling all over campus and wound up in the main Quarry. We travelled all through the back woods of the campus and under the bridges with the musicians, and whole sections took place in trees; other sections took place in the Lower Quarry. It was done with twenty-five dancers and about fifteen musicians, and the audience travelled with us from scene to scene. So everybody had to travel, and we cut steps where the audience actually came down on the rocks on these steps. That's how John slipped his disk the first time. He cut the steps with a pick axe into the rock quarry for the audience to be able to move down into the Lower Quarry. The whole piece was done to the text of Archibald MacLeish, and it finished with MacLeish's—*Epistle to the*



*End of the Earth*— in the main Quarry, with one figure up on one mountain and the other figure way up on the hill behind the Quarry, with a huge, long pipe blowing like a shofar. It was one of my fondest memories, because it was with community people. Twenty-five community people gathered to do this every day of their summer, and at the end of summer, we put on the production.

**Beal:** So it wasn't UC students?

**Solomon:** A few who remained on campus. But it was mostly dancers from around [town]—a lot of Cabrillo people were in it.

**Beal:** Stephanie Galino or Debbie Taylor-French.

**Solomon:** Yes!

**Beal:** It sounds like the explosion of your own creativity happened at the same time that the university had this enormous openness to possibility and collaboration.

**Solomon:** Yes, I figured, whatever I could think of, I could do here.

**Beal:** Wow.

**Solomon:** Where do you ever have that experience? But coming out of New York, where the Judson Church Group was performing in environmental venues, I knew that theater just shouldn't be in theaters at that time. I was looking at environments differently. Everything was a stage, everything you looked at was a performance space. (laughs) If it had steps, it was a stage. It was the way the sixties developed and I came

here right at the end of the sixties. So it was natural to make that happen here because it was all possible, and what more beautiful environment could you be in to make work?

I would find these secret places on campus, this limestone kiln, which is a place nobody knew about, and we put dancers in the bricks in the limestone kiln, speaking the poetry of MacLeish. That was one scene. One section was in this huge oak tree, where all the dancers hung from the tree. There were all these limbs and you could put twenty dancers up in there, the audience was all below, and the musicians surrounded the audience. One whole poem was done there.

One of the pieces was under one of the bridges that crosses campus, and I sent my poor dancers down there having no idea what poison oak was. Coming from New York I didn't know about poison oak. All the dancers came down with poison oak for a few weeks, from doing this section. We choreographed it in the poison oak. Finally I was able to logistically move it out of the poison oak. (laughs) I had no idea. They didn't tell me. They just did it. So those were experiences. Those were just marvelously inventive times of great experiment and fun.

**Beal:** In your creativity, is there an overarching theme that you keep returning to? I heard somebody once say about novelists that they really only have two heroes or two ideas, and they work it out in many different ways. I wondered if you felt that. I feel like one of your hallmarks was that you were always reaching into collaborative work.

**Solomon:** Yes, I always felt I needed somebody else. I couldn't do the thing by myself.

**Beal:** But I think there's something else in there.

**Solomon:** Yes.

**Beal:** It was a theme in your work with Jean Erdman, in your work at NYU, and in your own creative work.

**Solomon:** Yes, and even now that I've moved into the medical aspect, it's all collaborative. I mean, my God, you're dependent on everybody, and interdependent. So I do think that you've picked up on one theme.

The other thing which is peculiar to my sensibility and different from almost any dance artist that I know, is that most dance artists, like Martha Graham—you see her piece and it's a masterpiece and then it's done again, and then it's done again, and it lives in repertory forever.

I never saw a work I did like that. It doesn't exist in my mind. It's ephemeral. It exists for the period of time it's created, and then I pretty much don't want to do it again, because I want to move on to whatever the next thing is. It may not be as good or as interesting, ultimately, but I don't think I ever re-did pieces. If I had to take a piece with David Cope to New York, which I did, by the time it got to New York it was really different, because the stage was different, the whole situation was different. Even when I've had to perform a piece a number of times, once it's done, it's done. I know that that's silly, in a way, because a lot of pieces I think—out of however many I made, there are probably some good ones in there that were worth redoing, but why would I?

**Beal:** But I think that's the choreography part. I know for me, the choreographer in me never wants to go back. The performer always wants to just keep going vertically in the understanding of something. The choreographer wants to just go to new territory.

**Solomon:** That's a very good point. Because I think as a performer I might have wanted to—when I did the *Witch Dance*, I wanted to do *that piece*. That was just so much in my gut that I knew it and I could do it. It was bloody hard, physically, but I felt I could do that. It was the kind of solo that relied only on whether *I* could do it or not. So that was a piece I could have redone a little more than I did. *Talking Will Be At A Minimum*—the big piece on the sculpture that was suspended from the batons and swung out over the audience—that piece I also liked a lot, and I would have done more. But because it demanded the sculpture, it demanded a whole stage rigging that could move it up and down may be some of the reasons why I didn't, I think was because pieces I choreographed required so much support, either a set or lights or whatever—

**Beal:** Right. And when you had a very strong crew with Keith [Muscutt] and then when Tom Corbett was in and Norvid [Roos] and Elaine [Yokoyama Roos]—

**Solomon:** Right!

**Beal:** You had a huge support team that was equally creative.

**Solomon:** Exactly! I mean, Norvid [Roos] made that sculpture that is on the hill out there [pointing outside of her house]. I've never let it go. I painted it with copper. It's the dearest thing to my heart. He worked on that. He put together pipes with bolts as a mock up and I had to figure out with him what shapes worked for me to move through

and swing out on. For a long time in creating the piece I would work endlessly swinging and rocking in space, getting violently nauseous, until I trained myself to handle the motionality of the piece.

**Beal:** This is Norvid Roos.

**Solomon:** Norvid Roos, who was head of the design program in theater arts for years, just used metal pipes that had threads on the end and put them together with clamps and then would wrap rags around them so I wouldn't cut myself on the bolts and the ends. And we'd try all the configurations. I'd make some of them work with this and I'd say, "Oh, this works but I need a bigger hole to get through here." He would work with me in the rehearsal to understand what I needed, and out of that very geometric form he made this amazing sculptural piece. Understanding design in the way that I don't think anybody else could have collaborated on that kind of a work.

**Beal:** Well, it was another artist who you challenged to dig into his own depths, and he was incredible as an artist.

**Solomon:** At that moment in his career, he was right on—And he came out of NYU. I was responsible for bringing him and Elaine here to theater arts, originally. That was a big fight and I got them both on, because I knew it was going to help me. In a way it was a little selfish because I wanted a good designer and I knew he had the background. He was an NYU School of the Arts person.

## **Functional Anatomy and Dance**

**Beal:** We've been talking about the creative aspect of teaching of dance and of designing a program, and yet early on, you were kinestheologically savvy like most dance people were not. Now that has moved into a whole other arc in your career. I'd love for you to talk about that and also the fact that in so many universities now there're kinesiology programs, but not here. And yet you kind of pioneered, in many ways, this approach.

**Solomon:** I never could get them to hire a person to do what we'd call, not anatomy, but "functional anatomy." I could ask the dancers to take an anatomy course but it didn't make any sense. I needed functional anatomy, so I had to teach it. It was the only way. I tried to teach it through the technique classes as best I could. I had them read. I made them have texts.

Because of my own work with Jean I knew how important this aspect of the work was. She made us all go to Joe Pilates's studio in the early 60's. Talk about being beat on in the early days, when Joe Pilates and his wife were there, they beat you up on those machines. You didn't go out of there lightly. Now, of course, it's a whole different gestalt. Those were tough days, but Jean believed in it immensely. She brought Andre Bernard to NYU. I brought Andre Bernard out here to teach neuromuscular facilitation, and also John Graham, to teach Feldenkrais, because somatics training at that time was just emerging. There was Laban Movement Analysis, but it really hadn't caught on that much. Only Irmgaard Bartenieff and a few other practitioners really knew how to teach that material. So I was trained, in a way, to respect every aspect or what was being

taught. Andre Bernard, of course, came from Barbara Clark, the very basis of that movement.

**Beal:** *The Thinking Body* by Mabel Todd.

**Solomon:** Right. Thank you. He was out of that base. So I learned about that material from him and that's what I made the students read. It was important that they know that material, in order to move safely and efficiently. I couldn't understand how you could just throw yourself around in the studio, doing steps, and not understand the basic principles of kinesiology.

**Beal:** Where did that start with you? Was it when you were at NYU and you were doing the Irmgaard Bartenieff work, or when?

**Solomon:** I think it was earlier, with Jean, when she made me go to Pilates. She was hurt. I think she injured her shoulders with Martha [Graham] and wound up in Joe Pilates' studio, and she really believed in him, because he helped her recover. She had a few gurus that were questionable. Some we didn't take to. But some of them were right on as far as expanding your area of knowledge. It may not be something you did, as teaching. I didn't intend to teach Pilates but I needed it to feed my technique.

Also, I don't ever think I was that good a dancer. As a performer in New York my leg didn't go up the highest, but I could jump higher than anybody. That was a big thing. But what I relied on was my kinetic sensibility for movement, the flow of movement, discerning the qualities, and understanding a role from the inside. I had to figure it out for myself because Jean never would explain it. Whatever you danced, was never

explained to you. You had no idea what you were supposed to think about in a role, you were never given any clues.

**Beal:** And did you follow that in your own teaching and directing?

**Solomon:** Ah—

**Beal:** Or did you give clues to people?

**Solomon:** I don't think I gave the clues. No, I know I didn't, because philosophically, I believed if I choreographed it properly they would understand how to express it. If they weren't getting it, it was because of my choreography. In other words, I hadn't done the thing in the organic way it needed to for them to bring it out of themselves. If the movement was properly choreographed and the structure was properly designed, then the intent would inherently be there.

**Beal:** Now, this is maybe not about you or UCSC, but it is interesting to me, because the movement for somatics work is so strong now, especially in university. At the same time, the technique that's most prevalent is really kind of body destroying.

**Solomon:** (laughs) Isn't that interesting?

**Beal:** And it's at such a speed, I almost think they need those somatics classes simply to be able to feel, because it's going so fast in the technique classes that nobody has time to experience, which is the heart of the dance art. It's not just: how fast, how hard, how many, but how do you experience it?



**Solomon:** Yes, I wrote an article way back, way back when this started. It was called, "Dance 'til you Drop, Must We?" That was the title of the article.<sup>7</sup> It was published in *Dance Teacher Now*, a lot of years ago. But it was all about this killing yourself, without a thought about what you were doing.

**Beal:** (whispers) I know.

**Solomon:** That really upset me and that was one of the reasons why I stuck with this whole idea of having to know more than steps in a dance class. If a dance class was only about steps and how fast you did them, what you and I call "Sweat and Shower" classes, I wasn't interested in teaching them. Yeah, they came out of class huffing and puffing, but that wasn't the point. That absolutely could not be the point of class.

**Beal:** It's very tricky if you don't have people five days a week, to come to any depth experience.

**Solomon:** Yes, and the theater arts board never understood that, that I had to have them in class two hours a day, every day. Because of the way I taught, it took two hours. The warm up I designed was a half hour to forty-five minutes of class. So that was strenuous enough and that was the whole gestalt of getting the class in the rhythm of the sound and the voice and the drums and everything working together along with the body getting into the flow of things. It took that much time. You couldn't make all kinds

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Solomon, "Dance 'Til You Drop, Must We?" *Dance Teacher Now* 4(5):19, 22-25, September 1982.

of crazy movement until you had that core established. You know, they were coming in from wherever, with their heads wherever, and it wasn't like being quiet and calm. It was being physical and vocal and getting into a rhythm. That rhythmic structure made them come together. They could hear each other's voices. They didn't have to look around and be distracted. They could hear the sound. They could be with the sound, be with the rhythm and that was very important. The vocalization was a critical part of that.

### **Cuts to the Dance Program at UCSC**

I wouldn't let up on trying. However, when I'd have to go off to do performing or whatever in New York, or once I started going to Boston in 1980, every spring, every time I left, something would be cut. I wasn't in the board meeting and something would get cut. It was absolutely just a matter of, "Wait 'til Ruth leaves and we'll cut the FTE. Or we'll cut the hours, we'll say the program will only have three days a week, or we'll only have two levels," and we ultimately only had one level.

It happened systematically because I was guilty of leaving. I really had to branch out. I was interested in going, not in another direction, but moving further into medicine and science. I had to work at that. I couldn't call it in. That meant not being here for spring quarter every year. And every year something was cut from the program. Either one of my faculty would go. I'd be called in June and they'd say, "Oh, one of your faculty just got a job wherever," and then I'd have to scrounge around for a replacement while I was away. Then it was up to the board to approve that replacement and instead they'd put in their own person. So I didn't do a number of things I needed to do politically.

**Beal:** You spoke about how Althea was teaching in PE and the board wouldn't consider somebody who is in physical education—

**Solomon:** Yes, even though she was from a really legitimate modern dance background, they didn't understand that. They needed a non-credit course where kids could go and take dance class. I respected that part of it because theater arts wouldn't offer a part time course. If they wanted to come into our program, they had to take it five days a week, and a lot of students couldn't do it. So they needed a place to go. So I hired Rena Cochlin once Althea moved to Davis.

### **Designing Dance Studios at UCSC**

I designed the Field House dance studio.

**Beal:** Really!

**Solomon:** I did the floor! I did the floor there; besides the two Performing Arts studios, I designed the floor in the field house studio. It's not as good as the performing arts studios, because there was some concrete laid down before I got involved. They called me in so we had to build up from the concrete, but it's still a good floor I also did a studio, you won't believe this, in Applied Sciences?

**Beal:** I do remember. It was upstairs, a small little studio. I taught class there.

**Solomon:** Yes, I went over there and would teach an afternoon class on certain days. With the drums next to the poor steno pool people, the secretaries, until they finally got us out of there. They took the studio, because everything was gauged on square feet, how many people you could put in a square foot. Well, I kept explaining that a dance

person needed a least a five-foot square calculation. But no, because they could put desks in a lot less square feet, they finally felt that that space was not being utilized because it was a dance studio and there weren't as many people in it as many hours a day as they could do with a classroom. So we ultimately lost that studio,

I designed the Kresge Studio. That little tiny studio in Kresge?

**Beal:** Wow. Yeah.

**Solomon:** Yeah.

**Beal:** But they wouldn't give you larger space because it was this measurement of how many square feet per person.

**Solomon:** Yes. Per person.

**Beal:** How interesting.

**Solomon:** We used the Kresge studio for the somatics classes. Andre Bernard taught there, John Graham taught there; other people would teach there who didn't need big movement spaces. You had to understand what you were struggling against politically or even architecturally because the University of California had certain architectural parameters that were very much enforced, and dance was not in their concept or calculations.

**Beal:** Well, it's interesting, because looking at large principles of that early time of the starting of the university, there was an enormous amount of openness for

experimentation, collaboration, and yet, you were still stymied by issues of: well, we only need two square feet per human.

**Solomon:** Yes. When I first came, there were no studios. There was nothing. I taught my classes in Stevenson Dining Hall in between meals with them setting up for the next meal. I was teaching on that stage because that was the largest space that existed on this campus.

**Beal:** So your first teaching was in Stevenson on the stage, and how many years did you teach there before they built Performing Arts?

**Solomon:** It was just two. We moved into Performing Arts in 1972, but Performing Arts was designed without a dance studio. It had no space for dance.

**Beal:** Now, what were they thinking if they hired you?

**Solomon:** Yes! What were they thinking? There was no space for dance. So I went through the architectural plans. I worked with the architects and there were two studios. And they were to be drama studios. I said, "No, one of these needs to be dance." Then they finally acquiesced. I actually got the allocation for a dance studio. I don't know how it went through. I don't even remember, because it was such a fight. It was such a fight. But I got the studio. But it wasn't really a "dance studio"; it was just a studio in theory.

So then one day the building is going up, and they're structuring the studios, and somebody called me—I think it was somebody from Physical Plant, where by then I had made friends with Chuck Khars, and they called and said, "A cement truck is heading

up to pour the cement base in that studio." I said, "What?!!" This was about seven in the morning. Luckily, we lived on Bay Street at that time. I tore up there and I stood in the middle of that room, which was a dirt floor, and I said, "There is no way you're pouring that cement. If you pour that cement, it's over my body, because I'm standing here. You take that truck and shove it." And I stood there and I did not leave that whole day because I was afraid they were going to come back. I went back up there every day and I made it clear that we were going to put a dance floor in there, and it was not going to be on cement. If you remember the Tiananmen Square picture of this lone person standing in front of the tank, you kind of get the picture, albeit on a much lesser scale.

**Beal:** (laughter)

**Solomon:** That's kind of what it felt like.

**Beal:** So even though they wanted a dance program, coming in you really didn't have strong allies to help make it happen.

**Solomon:** I had no allies. I'd say Jim Hall was a great ally, but he just didn't know anything. I had to teach him, and he heard me. He would listen. So I did have his support, from the college, and I think they were instrumental in the story of that first studio. When I came and there was nothing, no place to work, and I stood up in the first faculty meeting of College Five, where all the faculty gathered, and I said, "Well, what do you think *I'm* supposed to do here? There's no studio. I have no space to teach. I have no space to dance, no space to choreograph. What's to happen?" So everybody was appalled because nobody talked like that to power.

**Beal:** (laughs)

**Solomon:** I mean, it was shocking. There were the English folk; there were the California folk. They were all professors, very polite, from the university, and here was this brassy bitch from New York, who just didn't know how to behave on a university campus. But that's what it took.

We walked around all the buildings that were College Five at that moment, and there weren't many, let me tell you, and they were mostly offices. But there was this one little space, it was a nine by twelve room. I said, "Okay, give me this and we're going to put a dance floor in." I went back to the faculty meeting, which had recessed, and we went back in session for the afternoon, because it was a conclave where everybody was meeting and greeting for the very first time, and I said, "Okay, we need to lay this floor. I know how it needs to go but I don't have the wherewithal to do that. Is there anybody here who can help?" And by God, we had George Hitchcock, who had construction experience in his background, although he was a Shakespearean scholar and actor; we had Buchanan Sharp, who was in history; we had Forrest Robinson, who was in literature, and a number of other faculty in the social sciences. They all showed up the next day. George had gotten the lumber. I had told him what we needed. I had gotten the rubber feet, and everything else. We bought everything within twenty-four hours, and everybody showed up. I would say there were twelve of us, and the only thing I did was make coffee for everybody. They worked their butts off and laid the most beautiful simple floor, on stringers, a cushioned sprung floor that lasted, I think, close to thirty years. They finally made a computer room out of it.

**Beal:** How extraordinary, though, as a sense of community, that people would come together.

**Solomon:** It was so remarkable. And it was everything you could have hoped for. It was a little room. We used it as a student choreography room. We put up mirrors. It had a barre, so that if somebody needed to do a ballet barre they could do it. It was a small room where you could go and work by yourself, which was very important because I wanted the students to have a space that was their own, that wasn't encumbered by classes. The Performing Arts studios, I knew, were going to have classes in them all day, and they wouldn't have the real access to a space that they needed to make work.

To me, that was the beginning of everything. It just made me understand what was possible. That it was really possible here, and it was. It was something I couldn't have done in New York. You can't just find a space and there's a lot of money and struggle involved there.

But I embarrassed Jim Hall. I don't know if he ever forgave me but we became great, close friends after that. John became his assistant, as assistant to the provost for many years, until he retired.

**Beal:** And you embarrassed him how?

**Solomon:** By standing up in the meeting and saying, "You brought me here. Now what? What do you want me to do? I'm not going to dance on this table." (laughs)

**Beal:** (laughs) You did that before.



**Solomon:** (laughs) Yeah, I've done that, been there, done that. (laughs) I didn't like it then and I don't enjoy remembering doing it.

### **The Value of Dance Within the University**

**Beal:** Now, I asked you something earlier and we didn't quite get to it, about what do you think the value of having dance within a university is, and the pitfalls? Because now it has exploded all over the country. In June there are ten billion kids coming out with stars in their eyes, and there are four jobs available. So—

**Solomon:** The benefit of having dance? It's hard to even answer because I function in a place in my mind where I can't think anybody would question such a thing.

**Beal:** Dance in the university.

**Solomon:** Yes, dance in the university. First of all, you need an education. A dancer needs an education, and that education has to be top notch. I spent a lot of years with a lot of dumb dancers in New York, on Broadway. If they didn't have their next job, there was no place else to go. I don't think everybody should be a dancer but I do think most people should have an education, and if, at the same time, they can dance and experience what it means to dance, and learn about the discipline of dance, I don't think anything else in the world gives you that. Maybe medicine is up there, because there has to be such discipline in medicine, to an extreme. But in dance, it's so reliant on yourself and your own sense of discipline.

I used to say to my students, when you wake up in the morning you know where you are supposed to be at a given time. A student would say to me, "Oh, I couldn't come to

class yesterday because my boyfriend did such and such and I had this problem . . ." I would say, "Please. Don't tell me about it. There's no question of whether you come to class. You get up and at ten o'clock is your class. It's not something you make a decision about every day. It's a given, and if you don't understand that that's part of it, that that's a given, then you're not going to learn anything."

But most of the students got it because you impressed it upon them that they didn't have to make that decision every day. It wasn't about, "How do I feel today? Um. . . Maybe I'm not up to it. I'm a little too tired. I stayed up too late." It's not a real choice. Get your butt where it's supposed to be at that hour.

That kind of discipline is just such a small aspect of what dance gives you but it lasts through everything you have to face in your life, whether it's any kind of job or responsibility. It's the respect for time. It's the respect for other people, who are there expecting to work with you. They have given their time to you and you have to give that respect back. It's the mutual cooperation that is dance. Dance is not a person feeding another person information. It's just not like spoon feeding. I don't want to demean any other courses, but you don't sit behind a desk receiving stuff. You have to be present in a way that you don't really have to be in some other situations.

**Beal:** It's also a way that your mind, your body, and your heart all have to get connected. There're very few things in life that demand the integration of those three parts of ourselves.

**Solomon:** Exactly. You can come into class and have a million other conflicting thoughts crowding your consciousness, but maybe within the first five to ten minutes

that all gets cleared out, and that clearing out is also something that is to be treasured. I mean, to have that time where you are totally free to do what you're doing at the moment, and if you are not in that moment, you're going to get hurt. You absolutely have to be there 100 percent. I think that's just one of the very minor benefits it brings to your life. It's like any art form. How can you not have art in a university setting? It's not just humanities. We had math majors; we had science majors. We had everybody in all disciplines taking classes. It didn't matter what major they were in.

**Beal:** I agree with you and I love how you articulated it, that in a way that's the center of education, is to bring us to that state of presence and full involvement in whatever it is that we're doing. I think that sometimes it gets wacked out when you're in a conservatory situation and there is no time to learn anything else.

**Solomon:** Yes. And you know, when I got accused of making the program too "professionally oriented"—which I did—whenever anybody wanted to attack me it was, "Ruth, you're trying to make it into a conservatory." It was because I demanded five days a week; I demanded a two-hour class. They'd say, "You're trying to make it into a conservatory. This isn't a conservatory. It's a university." I would try to say that nobody respects the fact that it's a university more than I do. That's why I'm here and not in a conservatory. I could be teaching in a conservatory but I don't want to be, and I didn't design a conservatory program that excluded everything else. I tried to design a program that integrated as much as could possibly be integrated within the confines of a university situation. My dancers had to take music. Every dance major had to take a music course.

**Beal:** Hello? (laughs)

**Solomon:** Yeah. Once more, it's not brain surgery. If you don't understand music and you're not exposed to it, how are you going to make pieces? How are you going to appreciate what you're even looking at.

**Beal:** At some point there was a fulcrum point, where the dance students were really getting the focus of composition and improvisation. They would dance in faculty works and then later they had the possibility of doing the student concert. That student concert is now the only thing happening, versus working with people who are skilled in directing or choreography. At what point did it switch from being: you've got a theater arts degree with a dance focus, and when you did that, then you did go through a gradated program. Do you know what the reasoning was in theater arts, to pull that apart, so you no longer had that kind of an emphasis?

**Solomon:** It was political. At a certain stage in the theater arts board there was a contingent that really resented the fact that dance was doing as well as it was doing. It was getting, within university systems, national recognition for choreography. Our students were going on to graduate programs. They were going on to companies. We were getting too well known. The Summer Dance Institute was too high profile, too high profile for theater. That is when the theater arts board said, "We're not giving you the space anymore. We're putting a theater program in there for the summer. You can't have it." That's eight years after having it and running in the black. I never lost a dime on the Summer Dance Theater Institute. Everybody got paid very well. The artists from New York came out. They got paid very well. The students paid a really reasonable

amount of money to go to a six-week program, and I could run it in the black. I did that, and it got too popular. So the theater arts board took it away. They had the power to do that. They just said, "No. We're not giving you the space anymore. You can't have the theater; you can't have the studios. We're going to put an acting program in for the summer."

**Beal:** So was that when you started going to Boston?

### **Dance Medicine**

**Solomon:** Yes, but I was also moving toward wanting to do more with the prevention of dance injuries. I felt as though even the way I was training dancers that was supposedly based in anatomically sound principles, I wasn't that sure. I had to keep learning more, and the way I needed to do it was not through the somatics—from Alexander, and Feldenkrais and everything else I had already studied, but real medicine.

I really needed to know what went on in the body that caused—what we were doing in class that could cause the damage we were seeing. Why were dancers having hip replacements? Why did they have knee problems? Why did they have back problems? I felt as though I was teaching very solidly because I was doing master classes all over the country at that same time and saw how others taught. I was teaching at almost anyplace that had a dance program. I went everywhere. Anyplace anybody asked me, I went. Just really to see what the programs were like, more than to teach.

And it was pretty strange. They were doing old school stuff, stuff that had been taught the same way for years, even in the university. I knew that was going on in studios everywhere, but to see it in the university was disheartening. So I needed to get more information into the university. That's why I really started traveling, so that I could at least get to the teachers, and I started trying to train teachers. The teachers that I worked with here [at UCSC] all took my class everyday. Which was amazing. That didn't happen in most places. So when they went off to teach, they were teaching what I considered more solid stuff. They didn't kill their students.

**Beal:** Are you talking about students who came through your program?

**Solomon:** Not just the students, the faculty also who went off. People like Gregg Lizenberry, Martha Curtis, and Donna Krasnow. Everybody who taught here for a time worked with me and took that information on with them. Kelly Holt, of course, who was so well grounded to begin with, and Gus Solomons took my classes. There was 6 foot 2 Gus with the longest legs, taking a class from a 5 foot 2 little person, me, and he was really trying to do all the stuff that I put out there, that was, frankly, built on my body. However, I had thought I had built it in such a way that it could accommodate any physiognomy. But I wasn't sure. So I had to go off to find out.

**Beal:** Did you find it did, that it was?

**Solomon:** I think so, although it sounds awfully presumptuous to say, but I think the training was pretty solid. I think it holds up. Even now it holds up. People are getting the video that's nationally distributed and using it.<sup>8</sup> I teach at conferences, like the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science [IADMS]. So I get to a much wider range of teachers, and that was important.

Going to Boston, I had the opportunity of working with Dr. [Lyle] Micheli, who then became my next mentor. We met in 1980. We were both at a conference in Los Angeles. It was the first dance medicine symposium, held in LA by a doctor who was a dancer. His name was Ernest Washington. I brought him here, actually, to lecture. He wrote one of the first articles on injuries and dancers, when all he saw was a plethora of injuries. Oh, my God. Look at this. It's all over the place. And I'm sitting here trying to prevent this. I better get out there and at least think more about what I'm doing.

Dr. Micheli saw my work at that conference. He liked it. I, of course, found that he was interested in dancers. I hadn't ever met a doctor who was interested in dancers. He was very, very committed to making dancers well through prevention, treatment, and surgery if necessary. Most of what he was involved in happened after they got injured. He knew I wanted to prevent the injury. So that, in his foresight, was the way to go: prevention. And that is what sports medicine is all about. He started the Division of

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<sup>8</sup> See *Anatomy as a Master Image in Training Dancers*, An Hour Long Video Created and Produced by Ruth Solomon, directed by Gus Solomon, Jr. <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/solomon/video.html>

Sports Medicine at Harvard Medical Center in 1972, and he invited me to come there as soon as I got my first sabbatical.

**Beal:** So you went in what year?

**Solomon:** 1980 was my first year there.

**Beal:** Oh, so very early in the whole sports medicine, dance medicine.

**Solomon:** Yes. I went in 1980 and I've been going every spring since. Last year was my 34th year. He allowed me access to everything. I was in surgery all day with him. I was in clinic all day with him. The practice has thousands and thousands of patients. They'd come through. We would do as much as nine surgeries in a day, which is what we do now, and we would see forty patients on top of that. So we'd go long into nine o'clock at night. We'd start at six in the morning.

**Beal:** Oh, my God.

**Solomon:** That's what we would do every day. At that point the hospitals were a little more lenient about people being in surgery and helping. So I could circulate and assist. However, I then decided, without him asking me, to go back and get a medical assistant certification. So I went to school at night for three years.

**Beal:** Where'd you go?

**Solomon:** To Cabrillo [College], at night to the medical assistant program. I took thirty-two courses, believe it or not, including insurance and coding and things that I wouldn't necessarily need. But that's what was demanded by the program. I took



courses in transcription, how to transcribe medical dictation— and I didn't type, so I had to take typing because I couldn't type fast enough to pass transcription. It was not easy.

**Beal:** Did you do this after you retired or while you were still teaching?

**Solomon:** No, while I was still teaching. It went on for three years, and then, it was nice because they realized I knew more than most of the students at Cabrillo, so I would teach a class here and there. That was nice. I would teach about anatomy and dance injuries.

**Beal:** Are you able now to take this information that you have, which is a huge body of work, and get to enough teachers? It seems like you should have an ongoing thing in *Dance Magazine*, or—

**Solomon:** What I've done for the past number of years is publish research. So a lot of our articles are published on injuries in dancers and those articles come out of research that's done at the Division of Sports Medicine.

**Beal:** But does that get translated to the teachers who are on the line?

**Solomon:** Now there's the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science, which is a big organization that deals exactly with this. Its membership includes dance teachers, physical therapists, athletic trainers, kinesiologists, people who do research in dance, and all medical professionals, including doctors. It has a thousand members at this point. I've lectured at every conference. It's been in existence since 1990, and I have been on the board of directors since its inception.

We now edit the *Journal of Dance Medicine and Science*. John and I are the co-editors-in-chief of the journal, which is published in New York, and subscriptions are international. So hopefully that material gets out. The more you can write and read about it, the better you get to teach. So we hope people are reading and writing about it. I have to admit I'm not teaching or touring as much because the job of being an editor-in-chief is enormous. It's time consuming. We do it all day, every day, just about, and being on the board of the organization takes almost all the time I have. Oh, I must show you the *Bibliography of Dance Medicine and Science*.<sup>9</sup>

**Beal:** Perfect.

**Solomon:** I must, because the sixth edition just came out. It's all the literature on dance injuries, dance science, and dance medicine from the past sixty-five years. It's all the citations and it's all indexed—subject indexed and author indexed and now has 3694 entries.

**Beal:** Bravo. Bravo!

**Solomon:** So I have to show you that.

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<sup>9</sup> See *Dance Medicine and Science Bibliography: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2014*. Compiled by Ruth Solomon and John Solomon. See [artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/solomon/books.html](http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/solomon/books.html)

### **More on Designing Dance Programs**

**Beal:** So let's start. This is March 3, 2014 with Ruth Solomon, and me, Tandy Beal. And we are at Ruth's home, with John, and we're going to pick up some of the things [from yesterday].

**Solomon:** Prior to my coming here, I had designed three dance programs, i.e., Indiana University, University of Hawaii, NYU's School of the Arts. In other words, I started from scratch at a number of other places.

At IU, I tried to install a modern dance program, which was in PE, while the ballet program was in the music department, because the ballet program was originally started there for serving the opera, so that the ballet dancers could all dance in the opera productions. However, that developed into a very fine ballet program. My idea was to try to bring those two programs together. I was fought tooth and nail. They were going to hire me in both departments, because I was in the modern department in PE, and everything was going through swimmingly. Then the PE people—at the very last moment, as we were going to integrate the two programs, which would enable the modern dancers to come over and take ballet, and the ballet dancers would take modern (there were no dance faculty in PE, they were strictly physical educators)—they vetoed it. So what I had to do was design a modern program for the ballet department, and not try to do anything about bringing ballet into the modern department in PE at that time, as they weren't having any of it.

**Beal:** Why do you think there's such a fight between PE and art?

**Solomon:** I have no idea but in that era that was the big fight. Dance had to get out of PE. If you were in a university and your dance program was in PE, it just was not respected. You had to fight to get out of PE because the PE programs would not really support dance. Originally dance, for some reason, wound up in PE. I don't know exactly how it got put there, but every program that I know, from Ohio University, and elsewhere, fought very, very strenuously to get themselves extricated from PE, and establish real dance programs as separate entities. I don't think there are any that are aligned with theater, the way I wanted to do here, but the theater alliance was important for me in each entity, whether it was at the University of Hawaii, or elsewhere. The University of Hawaii program was affiliated with the East-West Center, and I had to do something different there than I did anywhere else. There I made sure that many different ethnic genres of the art form were taught. When I went to the School of the Arts with Jean Erdman, it was clear from the beginning that dance was going to be an integrated program, and was going to exist with design, acting and music. As you mentioned, Subotnick was there with the big Moog Synthesizer at that time.

**Beal:** And Hovi Burgess.

**Solomon:** Yes, Hovi Burgess. We had circus classes. All of the actors and dancers had to take circus. They had to take Pilates. We had Eve Gentry, who taught Pilates night and day. But that was possible because it was a conservatory program.

### **More Memories of UCSC's Dance Program**

When I came out here, I knew it could be different. It had to be different because it was to be a unique university. So I wasn't replicating anything I had done before. I had to have a new vision, and I had to see what was possible here.

**Beal:** And the vision was for the relationship between theater and dance, at the deepest level. Were there other components to it?

**Solomon:** Yes. Because there was an Aesthetic Studies major, originally when I first came here, I felt that all of the arts might integrate in some way, and dance could feed them, and we could be part of either the visual arts or music at any given time. We had to be part of music and we worked very closely with all of the faculty in music. From the minute I stepped on the campus that was important.

**Beal:** So were they your allies? You mentioned Sherwood Dudley.

**Solomon:** Gordon Mumma, David Cope, of course, and Sherwood. We were very close, and created a number of works together. And as I said, the very first piece I toured from the campus, where we went to all of the UC campuses and the surrounding California campuses, was with Eric Regener, who was on the music faculty at that time. Bill Brooks was on the music faculty. And we did this weird piece *Wood Stone*, out in space, as I told you [yesterday], where we built this whole kiva, and we brought in tons of rock for the base. The performance was building the kiva. But we rehearsed it meticulously. We actually rehearsed it for a whole quarter: how we would move each log, so that every log was choreographed, every rock that was placed was

choreographed. Bill Brooks, when the kiva was finished, lay on one of these huge wooden poles, huge in diameter, maybe two to three feet in diameter, and he recited this endless thing he had written or found about the sloth. Lying at an angle that was precipitous. I don't know how he stayed there, but he remained like a sloth on a log and recited this "poem" through the whole piece. It was strange, I mean, this was weird theater.

**Beal:** Yes, but it's so explosively out of the sixties. You colored outside of the lines in every which way. It's fabulous.

**Solomon:** It was such fun, because I would take the class, which was filled, thirty, forty people, and we needed at least that many people, musicians and dancers, to carry these huge logs that would build this enormous kiva. (laughs)

**Beal:** Nowadays everybody would be threatening lawsuits.

**Solomon:** Oh, my God! You could never do it. In the same way we couldn't have done many of the pieces that we did. We certainly couldn't do *The Journey* now as we did it then.

**Beal:** Because—

**Solomon:** Because the whole audience had to travel through the back woods and the Quarry and climb down rocks etc., etc. along with all the students that we would be responsible for if anything happened to them, God forbid. We never worried about that kind of thing. We were too busily involved in making the work.

I had students who made pieces that I was in mortal fear would get me fired from the university. Way before any of the aerial work was done, Bruce Brownlee, who was your student first, and then came to us and worked with me for years during and after UCSC, was a wonderful example of a student who pushed the creative boundaries. He went on to Ohio State, got his PhD, but he always came back to work with us again. He did a piece where the students swung off the roof of Performing Arts on ropes, in which they actually swung out with their feet propelling them away from the building, like flying. There were things that we saw that were so dangerous, but those were their projects. They had to do choreographic projects, and they'd come up with these incredible ideas. It was so stimulating, I can't begin to tell you, but that was one of the most exciting pieces. All the dancers came off the roof. You didn't know where or when they were going to appear. We were all outside Performing Arts, and the ropes were thrown down. Bruce was a climber, so he knew how to secure all ropes, and the dancers just swung against the concrete walls of Performing Arts. As I think back, I could have really gotten myself in a lot of trouble. A lot of my work really was risky, a little bit risky.

**Beal:** And in which way do you mean risky?

**Solomon:** It was because I needed to take chances on anything. I remember putting all my dancers in these huge oil drums. Norvid Roos built metal handles, or it might have been Tom Corbett, but they built these metal handles so the dancers could be up inside the drums and nobody would see them. They could be scrunched up—and then maybe a leg would come out. But the drums would swing, and we had about twenty drums hanging from ropes on the stage and they swung in all directions. However, it was all

choreographed so that nobody was going to hit each other until it was time for the drums to actually collide. That was part of it. The dancers were out from inside the drums, we had hung ropes inside them, and they then could take the inside rope and swing in space, and then it became a huge banging event, which was great fun. It was a lot of play. (laughs)

**Beal:** Would you work improvisationally with the dancers as you built something?

**Solomon:** Oh, yes. I can tell you that they contributed 90 percent of the movement, because it came from what they could do. In other words, I couldn't put something on them that they couldn't do. So I'd say, "I want you to disappear in the drum. Then I want an arm just to hang out like a dead limb, or something like that." So everybody would hang an arm out in a way they could, and they would create how they did it. Then I'd say, "Is there any way you can now get on top of the drum?" They would figure out a way around this huge thing that had nothing to hold onto. They were strong, because we built strong dancers through the training. The technique was strong enough so that they could handle real strength work. They could climb on top of these swinging drums and stand up, hanging onto the rope, because they were also fearless. They trusted. We trusted each other and it came from them. I would never, especially in a piece like that, get up on the top of the drum and say, "I want you to do this." I would ask, "Can you get up on top of the drum?"

**Beal:** Which is really the deepest part of the educational process, of the art process, is the discovery, rather than, "Do this like me."



**Solomon:** Yes, because I had one kind of body that could do certain things and they had different bodies. There might be thirty students in a piece. They were all different bodies. That's what I tried to teach, how to respect the differences in the body. Nobody was the same in the class. If somebody couldn't handle something I adapted it in a way that maybe they could manage, or at least tried to. The basic warm up, the *Anatomy as a Master Image* material, was something that everybody had to grow into.

**Beal:** How long would it take you to teach it to, say to a group of people who hadn't worked with you?

**Solomon:** Two years.

**Beal:** Wow.

**Solomon:** Before they could be strong enough to do the work in choreography that I would imagine in my head. Also, before they really could take it and make it their own. I would not expect anything sooner, and that's why we had to have a beginning class, an intermediate class, and an advanced class, because you couldn't ask the beginners to do things that you could ask the third-year students to do, or students who had come from a background where you had to then try to undo inefficient movement patterns, which would take another year, and then try to have them willing to accept something that would make them a bit fragile for a while. That was a whole process that was most difficult for a student, I think.

### **Coteaching in the UCSC Dance Program**

**Beal:** You said you wanted to pick up some of the curriculum issues, and one of the things that I think was unique in you holding the line as an educator and artist was that teachers cotaught a class in order to be present with each other's classes.

**Solomon:** It wasn't just to be present. It was more to enable the students to have two points of view. Every other day they had the other teacher. In a typical week a teacher would teach Monday, Wednesday, and Friday the advanced class, and the other teacher would teach Tuesday-Thursday, and then the next Monday, Wednesday, Friday they would switch. So it would always alternate and they got the same amount of time with each teacher, and I'd try to have the teacher, opposite me at least, be somebody who worked in a different style. So the dancers never could develop a guru mentality. There wasn't an opportunity for a dancer to say, "Oh, I only want to work with this person." They were exposed to a variety of approaches, and I felt it was one of the reasons why our dancers developed as fast as they did. They got more classes, more time in the studio, and they got two points of view constantly.

**Beal:** I know when I was teaching with Byron [Wheeler], that by being in his class there were ways where you'd see, oh, yes, I can come in on that point at a slightly different angle. So that they would get a very holistic view of a subject and a concept would come in quite differently. I found that fantastic.

**Solomon:** That, to me, was one of the most important aspects of the curriculum to hold onto, the co-teaching. When I came, there was no problem. That was the way I set up the curriculum. It was five days a week; it was two-hour classes; and we would teach

opposite each other, and because we would teach three levels, we were teaching more hours than anybody else in the board, so nobody complained about it.

However, the problem [became] that the board wanted to diminish the credit you got for teaching a co-taught course. So that you'd have to teach more than we were teaching. We each were already teaching minimum fifteen hours a week of dance classes, whereas every other faculty member on campus was coming in two days a week and teaching one and a half hours or one hour, and that was it. Even our acting studios were like that in the board, while we were killing ourselves, but we didn't mind. That amount of contact time was so important. Then, they decided that the dance classes weren't worth the credit that the other courses were. So they tried to take away the credits and make them one and a half credits each. They tried to do that, and I fought hard to preserve the integrity of our program.

Then I had to fight the next attack: "Well then, they have to teach a full course themselves, five days a week", and I said, "No, we need the co-teaching." It was the whole philosophical approach that was important to me, that all the faculty were to be in each other's classes, know what was going on, and for the students to experience at least two teachers a quarter, whereas the next quarter they might have two different teachers, but they would be exposed evenly. It wasn't a hierarchical system. I taught as much as anybody else. Everybody taught equally. It was just one of the things that the board couldn't handle in the last years.

**Beal:** I'm trying to figure out the philosophy of this.

**Solomon:** I really can't say what was in their minds. It didn't make any sense to me because we were willing to over-teach, as much as double what any other faculty member was doing.

For years there was no theater arts curriculum. The major didn't have any form. As a theater arts drama major you could take an acting class here; you might take a something else there, and finally when they saw the cohesive curriculum I had set up they did exactly the same thing, exactly, except they wouldn't teach five days a week. They'd only teach their classes two days a week. However, they at least instituted levels, so beginning actors weren't in with the advanced actors. They had at least two levels; they had longer periods of class time, and the faculty were given credit for rehearsal time. Our rehearsals were courses, so we would have three-hour rehearsals, 3:00-6:00, say, when we were going into production, every day, and that was considered a course. Finally the drama people caught on and thought, "Oh, that's a good idea, so we'll do that too." They actually replicated our program and then wiped out our program. It didn't make any sense to me but that's the way it went.

**Beal:** Wow. (exhales)

**Solomon:** It wasn't easy.

**Beal:** And it's interesting, because your spirit of having the collaboration of another teacher in there is really, it seems to me, one of the early esprit de corps principles of UC Santa Cruz, which was to collaborate, to work together, to make an exploration that would allow the students to grow differently.

## **Aesthetic Studies**

**Solomon:** That's exactly right, and that's why I built the program and designed it the way I did, because it was something I felt was right for here. I couldn't have done that someplace else. It was a spirit here and it was Dean McHenry's spirit of the Aesthetic Studies major. Truly, there was an Aesthetic Studies major! Imagine such a thing. Our closest friends were the social scientists and the visual artists with whom we worked. Maybe because John was in literature, we were also very close to all the literature people.

**Beal:** When and why did the Aesthetic Studies major go away? Do you know?

**Solomon:** Well, in the early days of the campus, colleges sponsored courses. Most colleges had a smattering of courses, but College Five had a full-fledged major, the Aesthetic Studies major. It was the fourth largest major on campus, after Literature, Biology, and Psychology, and it went away when the college system dissolved. I don't know exactly what year that was [1979].<sup>10</sup>

That is when they physically moved all the faculty, and all the artists had to be in one place; all the scientists had to be in another place, and never the twain met again.

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<sup>10</sup> Solomon is referring to what is known as reorganization, implemented under Chancellor Robert Sinsheimer's tenure at UCSC. This program removed most course offering powers from the UCSC colleges and dissolved the dual-appointment system for faculty. See Randall Jarrell, Interviewer and Editor, *Robert S. Sinsheimer: The University of California, Santa Cruz During a Critical Decade, 1977-1987* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 1986).

**Beal:** And now they're going to have a museum of arts and sciences.<sup>11</sup>

**Solomon:** Right. Rather than support what was or is, make something new. Anyway, the aesthetic studies major was one of the things that the faculty were not given credit for teaching. The boards did not want to give the faculty credit for teaching courses in the college major, whatever college you were in. So that it was very hard for a social scientist like Elliot Aronson to teach in the aesthetic studies major, because he had to teach all of his psychology courses. The psychology board really stopped letting him do aesthetic studies courses. The lit people who would teach in the Aesthetic Studies major, who were very supportive of it, were denied credit for their teaching by their board. So truthfully, their careers were in jeopardy if they taught in any of the college majors, so it had to be dissolved.

### **The Politics of Space**

One of the things I learned was that in the university if you have FTE, that was thought to be golden, but I then found that people could take your FTE. If somebody left, for instance, if one of the dance people took a job elsewhere, theater arts, drama or film could pick up that FTE. It didn't necessarily stay with dance. Then, at a later time, the board could lose the FTE entirely, and sometimes FTEs weren't even replaced.

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<sup>11</sup> Solomon is referring to the plans for UCSC's Institute of the Arts and Sciences. See <http://ias.ucsc.edu/about>

So I learned that it wasn't FTE. It was space. If you had space for your program, that was what people considered power in this particular university. If you had an office, even it was important space. At one point I was moved through about eight offices because people kept wanting the office I had. (laughs) Why? I have no idea, but it was a political kind of game, and it was very difficult because the rules of the game kept changing. I was in one office for years, actually twenty-five years. Then all of a sudden I was asked to move. Then it simply became, "No, we need that office for a secretary. "No, we need that office for our computer person." Whatever it was, I had to move.

**Beal:** Well, you were a dancer. They knew you were flexible. (laughs)

**Solomon:** I guess. I'm not so sure that was the reason.

**Beal:** Or you knew how to move.

**Solomon:** I said, "All right, as long as you move all the books and all the shelves. Fine, I'll go wherever you put me." But it was a logistic move that meant diminishing your amount of space. They took the Applied Sciences studio. I lost that space. They took the studio in College Five. I lost that space, and that dictated the writing on the wall. You don't have to be clairvoyant to understand what's going on. I think during those later years I finally got it: space was where the strength lay. If you had a building, if you had an office, or a studio, that was considered "power".

### **The UCSC Summer Dance Theater Institute**

**Beal:** Do you want to talk about the Summer Dance Theater Institute?

**Solomon:** Yes. I actually did it nine years in a row.

**Beal:** Can you talk about what initiated your impulse to start the Summer Dance Institute and what was your goal for that?

**Solomon:** The students needed a place to dance in the summer. It was as simple as that. People kept asking, "What am I going to do? Not dance for three months? How can that happen?" So it wasn't really for our students alone but people all over the country who needed a place. There were a lot of places on the East Coast, but at the time I started the Summer Dance Theater Institute [at UC Santa Cruz] there was nothing on the West Coast except at Long Beach State. I had taught at Long Beach for a number of summers, and I knew I didn't want to do that kind of program. I wanted something different for UCSC; however, that was the only other program. It had hundreds of students and was a little bit like a mill, but they had some very good faculty there that I got to work with.

We had the facilities. Nothing was happening in the summer here. The campus just basically shut down. I said to myself and others, "My God, there's a whole dorm. Our students can sleep in the dorm, and there's one dining hall open." So I made contracts for dorm space, and for eating plans. So the students could sign up for plans that involved eating, involved housing if they wanted, or they could find accommodations on their own. Nothing was happening, to speak of, on the West Coast, and certainly not up here in Northern California. Everyone needed a place to dance.

**Beal:** So where were the studios that you used at that time? There was the dance studio itself. The College Five stage.



**Solomon:** The Performing Arts Theater was available, but we didn't use that as a teaching studio. We used the theater only for rehearsals. We never taught classes there. We taught classes in the two dance studios, back-to-back classes, all day.

**Beal:** Did you use the Field House as well?

**Solomon:** I think we did briefly, at one point, when I brought in a couple of extra faculty one summer. I started off with five of us and I think at one point I had seven faculty because there was such a demand. We did use the Field House but I can't recall which years.

**Beal:** [looking through old brochures for the Summer Dance Institute] My God, Dee Winterton. I didn't realize he was there.

**Solomon:** Yes, I looked at that. The first year it was Gus Solomons and Kelly Holt. Kelly and I had taught at NYU together for years and he had danced with Jean Erdman briefly. So we knew each other, and Erick Hawkins' studio was in the same building in New York that Jean's studio was, so Kelly and I became close friends, and he started coming out here, and many of the artists who taught in the summer program liked it so well they agreed to return to teach during the regular school year.

**Beal:** Was that where your anatomical research kind of started, in terms of dance, the whole Hawkins technique approach?

**Solomon:** No. I have to say no. I'll say it very emphatically because Erick was so unique in the way he taught and approached class, that most of us who were what we call very physical dancers, needed to jump around. I worked with Kelly for years, whose classes I

loved. But Erick's classes I couldn't handle, because we sat on the floor with crossed legs and listened to him espouse his philosophy and we never moved. By the time we got to move, we couldn't stand up because we had been sitting cross-legged in one position while he lectured us. So that wasn't for me.

**Beal:** Although you were always concerned with the use of the psoas and anatomy, how did that find its way into your dancing and teaching.

**Solomon:** I'd say I got that through Kelly. Kelly's and my work together really was very important in that way. He was a disciple of Erick's and I was able to get it through him. For Kelly it was very important to be able to encompass the quality of movement. It was so different from what I did. I needed to take in that aesthetic physiologically, and it was really through Kelly that I assimilated whatever I did, and of course, his interest in what I was doing. We were philosophical collaborators.

The first year of the Summer Dance Institute Joan Woodbury came to teach. She had her own company in Utah, the Ririe-Woodbury Company, and same for Dee Winterton who also taught those first summers. Gus Solomons, who was a Cunningham person, was also here. So here you have Kelly, who was Hawkins, and Gus who was Cunningham.

**Beal:** And Nikolais, with Joan.

**Solomon:** Nikolais and then me teaching a big mish-mash. I was always the mish-mash.

**Beal:** And would people take from one technique teacher, or would it have the same philosophy of alternating [teachers]?

**Solomon:** The same philosophy. I set it up absolutely the same. They had to study with everybody, and that was attractive to the students. Otherwise they felt they weren't getting their money's worth. The other thing I discovered, which was really interesting to me, and I can talk about this when we talk about students who were here, but one of the people who was here for at least three summers now has his own company in Boston, and his own theater. It's a beautiful ballet company.

**Beal:** What's his name?

**Solomon:** José Mateo. He told me that three of the best parts of his life were the summers he spent here. He said, the growth that he experienced, he was an Hispanic kid at that time, and really didn't know where he was going or what he wanted to do with his life, was life changing. He recently told me, "We didn't have any money. We paid for the tuition, but we slept in the woods." So many of the dancers apparently slept in the woods! I didn't know where they slept. It wasn't my business. I provided a dorm room if they wanted one, but of course the university charged for the room. I thought they rented a place downtown. No, apparently they slept in the woods and when they came to class took a shower in the Performing Arts dressing rooms, and then went to class all cleaned up. They would be in Performing Arts all day and then go back to their sleeping bag in the woods.

**Beal:** Wow, what a history.

**Solomon:** I just was stunned when he told me that, and here he is, very renowned on the East Coast. I'm wondering, how did he do that? However, during that time, that's

apparently what you could do. It was the early seventies and the summer in Santa Cruz was nice and warm and lovely.

**Beal:** Perfect.

**Solomon:** The second year Joan Woodbury came back, Kelly Holt came back and we had Raymond Johnson.

**Beal:** Oh, my God! Raymond.

**Solomon:** And Raymond was this beautiful dancer and human being.

**Beal:** I danced with him. I was in Nik's company with him.

**Solomon:** Yes, he was here. He was the most beautiful person imaginable. To watch him move was so lovely, but he is dead now, died of AIDS. Going through this list of dancers who died is the most difficult part of remembering.

**Beal:** I know, it's still shocking.

**Solomon:** Dee Winterton also has died.

**Beal:** In a car crash, though.

**Solomon:** Yes. That's different. But Raymond Johnson came here and he did a piece by James Waring, a very far-out, tall thin dancer. Raymond did one of his pieces that was very strange in a kind of warrior armor, a very elegant work. I didn't understand it. It was beyond me. But watching Raymond move was always a joy.

**Solomon:** One of the important things about the Summer Institute was that the student dancers were all in pieces choreographed by the faculty. So they got to perform and be directed by the most experienced professionals.

**Beal:** And for the record here, would you talk about the value of dancers performing in mature dancers' or choreographers' work?

**Solomon:** Yes, well it was of dual benefit because a lot of the artists that came from New York could experiment by doing work on our students. I know Gus [Solomons] and later Valda Setterfield took those pieces and set them on their companies in New York. So that was a great boon for the faculty. They wanted to come out here to work because we provided them a laboratory to make work.

**Beal:** And they could also work in privacy, in a way. They didn't have everybody ready to review it immediately.

**Solomon:** Right! We didn't have reviewers. Nobody reviewed us, so there was no pressure. They could see what worked, and what didn't work. The students, of course, learned what it was like to work for a professional. I must say, we didn't have many beginners in the Summer Dance Institute. They got in somehow, here and there, but it was geared toward intermediate to advanced level dancers, because everybody was going to perform.

I have to show you this photo. I'll describe it. We're taking the picture of the students here in the dance studio in Performing Arts, and behind us are egg cartons on the wall. When we first built the studio in Performing Arts, and this is one of the first years I was

here, acoustically you couldn't hear yourself. Your voice bounced all over. It was an echo chamber. I don't remember whether it was Keith [Muscutt] or Tom Corbett, who came up with the idea of putting egg cartons on the wall as an acoustical dampening system. So we nailed thousands of egg cartons all over the wall, in a neat, nice pattern. But that was how we dealt with the sound rebounding for at least a year. I had forgotten that until I saw this photo.

This photo is of a piece that Gladys Bailin choreographed for Byron [Wheeler] and me. It was called Vis-a-Vis.

**Beal:** So your faculty artists came out and worked on each other as well as the students, which enriched the program no doubt.

**Solomon:** Yes. Ivan Rosenblum, whom I didn't mention as a musician, was teaching music and music theory at College Five and I worked with him as a composer. We worked with live piano music. Katherine Karapides was here also, and she came from the Erik Hawkins tradition.

Then the next year I went in a little bit of a different direction, when I invited Valda Setterfield and David Gordon, who were out of the Judson Church to come teach. They were very important artists in New York at that time. They were really seminal figures. Valda came out with David and they did one of David's works in the faculty concert.

A person I had completely forgotten about, who was a lovely, far-out artist, was Katherine Litz. I brought her out. I knew that her spirit was right for Santa Cruz

because she was such a unique artist. She didn't have a major company, but she herself made the most esoteric work.

**Beal:** There was something always whimsical about her work.

**Solomon:** Yes, she had just a marvelous sense of humor. So that summer we had these of us here: Valda Setterfield and Katherine Litz, Byron Wheeler, myself, Kelly Holt. Then the next summer we had Gladys Bailin, who was Nikolais and Santa Alloy from Cunningham. We also had Lynn Dally, who was this incredible tap dancer, and she taught composition.

**Beal:** And Betty Walberg, she was her acolyte, wasn't she?

**Solomon:** Yes, Betty started coming in both the summers and during the regular school year. Meg Harper, from Cunningham was also with us. So look at this mix: Santa Alloy, Gladys Bailin, Lynn Dally, Meg Harper, Kelly Holt, and Byron Wheeler.

**Beal:** So this is a thread that goes through all of your artistic and educational choices, is to have an eclectic threading together of artistic talent.

**Solomon:** Yes, I felt very much in training dancers in this day and age they have to dance for anybody. It's very seldom that one company will get all the work a dancer needs. Unless you're in the Ailey company and can tour twenty-six weeks a year, you have to dance for anybody whose work interests you. Therefore you have to be versatile and you have to know a lot. Each of these artists could impart something. The people who came here weren't just dance people. They were intellectuals. They had real minds.

Gus Solomons graduated from MIT as a mathematician. So it was not just all about dance.

**Beal:** Well, good dancers always have, I think, good minds.

**Solomon:** Well, we hope so.

**Beal:** I don't think you can survive.

**Solomon:** No, but I think it's to impress upon the young dancer how important it is. Ze'eva Cohen came the next year. Ze'eva also was her own artist. I think I have a lovely picture of Ze'eva. Here [going through photos]—here's a lovely photo of Ze'eva. She was head of the department at Princeton.

And just to show you [showing Beal a photo] that a lot of my pieces were into humor. This was with the big tubes. It was a piece with big tubes. They were big rubber truck tire inner tubes. All these dancers rolled around in them, they put themselves inside them and rolled across the stage. It was a lot of fun. That was how I liked to play. Here's Kelly Holt and myself in a piece called *Ashes of Roses*. Betty Walberg was here for this summer. She taught composition and was one of the best composition teachers in the world.

**Beal:** And why do you think that?

**Solomon:** I was never a really good composition teacher. I thought she could bring a knowledge of music. She could have the kids understand every aspect of music. She brought all genres of musicians and music into the composition class. The problems that she would present to students were so special that to solve them they had to really



come up with something creative. I remember taking her class and doing a number of the problems. I actually got on stage one summer to perform one of my things that Betty assigned me using Randy Newman's music.

Betty gave me Randy Newman and a compositional problem to solve. I had a ball. I wasn't embarrassed getting up in the composition class with all my students and putting it out there. It was a challenge but it was such fun.

**Beal:** Well, it seems like the purpose of this was experimentation. To allow your teachers to experiment as well as your students is quite a gift.

**Solomon:** We had a good time. We had to have a good time in everything that we were doing. Then, of course, I hired Betty to be on the faculty each year to teach composition, because she moved to California and worked with us.

Also, she was never critical in a way that was demeaning to any student, any student's work. She has a great story about how she spent an hour with a student. It wasn't here. It was at Long Beach, where she was also teaching, and she told me that she worked with this student endlessly on the piece, trying to fix it, as it was a mess. It was really not good, but Betty gave it her all, for hour after hour. Then the student came in the next day and said, "Oh! I understand now. I fixed the piece. . . .Fog! " She wanted to cover the stage in fog and do the same piece and she thought that that would solve it.

**Beal:** Oh, dear.

**Solomon:** Betty tells this story, and every time I see something that is really bad I say, "Oh, my God. Get the fog." (laughs)

Albert Reid was here.

**Beal:** Yes Albert Reid was in Merce Cunningham's company, and he was with Nikolais for a very short period.

**Solomon:** Yes, and he became head of the Bard College Dance Program, where I started my modern dance training. Albert was there 40 years later. That's just coincidental. He was a New York artist and the most gracious lovely man ever.

**Beal:** Well, it's interesting to see that lineage and also to see the connecting points that you had year to year: Cunningham, Nikolais, Kelly, you.

**Solomon:** Well, those were the important forms at that time.

**Beal:** Yes, though no [Paul] Taylor or Graham.

**Solomon:** Graham was hard for me to bring in. Jean was damaged by Graham, so I was influenced by that. There were residual aspects of Jean's work that were really Grahamesque, which you couldn't get away from. I did Graham for a lot of years. I really studied it because of the need for grounding in my own body. By *grounding* I mean my understanding of weight into the earth. I had an affinity for it, but I also saw that the way it was being taught was physiologically detrimental. I just couldn't face what was happening with the hips and the knees and did not want to subject my students to that training.

Then I did a big research study during my time in Boston, which was one of the first things that got published in a renowned medical journal, on the different styles and the injuries most prevalent in each of those styles. The knee injuries in Graham were just

explosive, compared to Cunningham, where there were back injuries. In Humphrey-Weidman there were minimal injuries, but in Graham we really saw knee injuries. I taught a lot in Japan and Asia, where that was all they wanted to learn for years.

**Beal:** And Graham had many Japanese dancers—

**Solomon:** Yes, but also she had taught there too. Her best dancers came from Japan. There were the two Yurikos, and the younger Yuriko was so physically injured by the form it was difficult to see her in pain. I met her each summer in Japan, and we became very good friends after she left the Graham company. She was called the Little Yuriko and the other was the Big Yuriko. Her spine was just destroyed. It didn't necessarily mean that it happened because of Graham. It could have been a lot due to her own physiological, genetic disposition. We don't know, but certainly I couldn't handle, or risk, having pure Graham taught. I just wasn't going to take the chance.

There was no way of doing Graham without dedicating yourself to that form from your gut in a way that affected you emotionally. So psychologically, it would change you. I would see that in many of the dancers in the studio and that was hard. I didn't want that to happen to me and I was careful. I never wanted that to happen to my students.

**Beal:** As you talk about students, what were the values that you wanted to impart? Obviously clarity and anatomical understanding, clarity of movement, discipline—all of those qualities. But what are some of the other things that drove you?

**Solomon:** To be open. Mostly to be open. To be open to any idea, anything that comes your way, do not reject it before you experience it physically, and before you know it.

Then, when you know it, you can say, that's not for me, and that you're more comfortable doing something else, another way of moving, your own way of moving. But to be open. The only times I ever had problems with students was when they really did not want to change anything. You know, everything had to stay exactly as they arrived in the studio on day one, and nothing could move because otherwise they would be insecure. And so I understood that they had to go through a period where they were left them alone until they were ready to receive anything or to be open to anything.

**Beal:** That's kind of tricky in a ten-week cycle, where students are coming, that you see for a short period, even if they committed for the whole year, two years, four years, I'm sure there were many that came in and out in a ten-week cycle.

**Solomon:** No. I wouldn't say that. I remember thinking the one thing about not teaching here [after retirement] that affected me the most was that I couldn't train dancers for two to four years, in a way so that I could do choreography on them, and in a way that I felt they could then go on and protect themselves.

What I wanted to teach mostly was how to protect yourself as a dancer, because nobody else is going to protect you. When you dance for a choreographer, they're going to ask you to stand on your head and stay there forever and not even blink. You've got to be able to either do that or say, "I can do this for a minute and I need to come down because it hurts." Or, you learn how to build yourself up to be able to do what you're being asked to do. How to prevent being injured yourself, to me, was what I wanted to impart, so that you could take anybody's class and know how to deal with it.

## **Memories of Former Students**

**Beal:** And you've done that over and over again, if you think of the people who've come through your classes. I think it might be interesting to name a few of them right now.

**Solomon:** We mentioned José Mateo, who went on to strictly classical ballet, for years and years. What he choreographs are modern ballets, but they are on pointe, they are ballet.

I remember the first two majors I had were Billy Gornell and Eddie Glickman. Billy Gornell had absolutely no flexibility. The one thing I thought I could do with male dancers was figure out how to open the hip sockets and keep them from gripping all the tendons and ligaments around the pelvis, so that they could get their legs up in the air. It didn't matter whether it was in turnout, but get some freedom of extension, freedom of movement, and a certain amount of flexibility. The male pelvis is a really difficult pelvis to work with, especially if they come to dance late, after their growth has ended. So I worked very, very hard with the men, trying to figure out how to help a male dancer get past that. To do the floor work that I required they needed that flexibility, the ability to work on the floor in a way that would free up the pelvis and not lock it up the way that was happening in the Graham technique. That was what I needed to learn how to teach. So I worked on myself over a long time to discover that.

Billy Gornell went on to dance with Twyla Tharp. He danced in New York with just about everybody. He danced in Gus Solomons' company as well, and then he died. I think he was the first student I lost to AIDS, and I thought, well, that's really wrong. I

shouldn't be losing a student. That was just too hard. I remember him dearly. He was the most wonderful person and dancer. My God, he could do anything.

That's when I designed the senior project, so that every person who graduated had to produce a full concert here. And we mounted it on the Performing Arts stage. A full concert of choreographed group works and solos, duets, or whatever the student produced. It was a full evening of their work. It was beautifully lit and costumed, and that was part of getting a dance emphasis.

**Beal:** How many majors in the dance emphasis were there? Was it about ten per year?

**Solomon:** Yes, about that, about ten per year. At most it was ten per year, at the very most. But in those days—like when Billy and Eddie Glickman started—they were the only seniors I had. They were the first seniors, so I remember them.

**Beal:** And Carl Rowe. I'm just thinking of the men who came through here—Walter White—he then ran the program at Monterey for years.

**Solomon:** Right! He was teaching there. Carl Rowe taught at Idaho. Eric Stern and Karl Schaffer are teaching. Jamie Bishton went on to Twyla's company. He went down, got a master's at Cal Arts after here and then went to New York. He was absolutely the most amazing dancer. He danced one of the hardest roles in Twyla's *In The Upper Room*. Every time I saw him perform I was blown away. It was so thrilling and exciting to see him dance.

**Beal:** What about the women dancers?

**Solomon:** Yes, when Nancy Li was here (she was Nancy Li before she became Li Chiao-Ping) she then formed her own group and went off to Hollins College where she was chair for a while. Then she went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I went there to choreograph on her students not long ago. That was just great fun. She married Doug Rosenberg, who was a filmmaker and composer. She needed that affiliation also. He is an avant-garde artist and always composed music for Li Chiao-Ping.

**Beal:** We don't need to do biographies on all of them but I thought it was really interesting to hear about the threads that went through your hands. And I know Ellen Sevy, who worked with me for years, and the deep understanding of anatomy I think that she received from you, that went into Feldenkrais work. She's a fabulous Feldenkrais teacher. Incredible.

**Solomon:** Yes! I know. I love the fact that people have found their own paths.

### **Women Faculty**

So one of the things about being an early faculty member here was that it really was at the cusp of women coming into the university. Did you find your voice or did you find that it was stymied.

**Solomon:** The very surprising thing which I will speak to, without pointing anywhere specific, was that the hardest people to get support from, and the people I ran up against with the most difficulty, were the women, but I understood it. I could really understand it because they were women that came up through the university and had fought their way, either to head up a department, or hold an administrative position, or

whatever, and believe me there weren't many. There were just two or three who had any influence on campus when I arrived. It was barren as far as women were concerned, but those women acted as roadblocks. They did not want another woman, especially somebody who didn't come up through the university, who didn't have the right credentials, so to speak, to make it here. That was really hard. I was shocked by it. I was shocked by it because I had come from an environment in which women were the force, in modern dance.

The lack of support from women who had come through the traditional mode of getting into the university and into their position of power surprised me, but it was not a time of women helping women. That was a big shock to me, but I got through it. Here at UCSC there were almost no women to speak of, and those that were here were so protective of their position, feeling that they were so special, they weren't willing to allow any infiltration into that little sphere.

### **Political Soup and Support for the Arts at the University**

**Beal:** So do you think that the politics of academia is harder than the politics of art?

**Solomon:** I don't know. Whoever says there is not politics in the university is just naïve. It is a cauldron of political soup. I found it hard to play the political games, but then I didn't know them when I first came. That was a little difficult. Because the campus was so open, I got away with a lot, in a way that probably nobody could do now. I was allowed to do things creatively and in terms of the curriculum that I don't think are possible now on this campus.



**Beal:** What has changed? Is it just the spirit of the time that changes? Or is it more rigid?

**Solomon:** No, I think it had to do with money. Once money got tight, then people got very protective of their space, because either you had the money for your program or you didn't. People were being cut left and right for the last number of years. Finally it's beginning to come back. I think there is a possibility that now things are going to really be restored. I think that's going to be a good thing for the arts. I do.

I think what should happen is that the programs that got cut should be restored, and then you go on to make new things. But at least don't make a big new thing until you really have a foundation; as my friend Inge Weiss, who was head of the dance department at Stanford, the graduate program, where they had no undergraduate program, she would always say [in a heavy German accent] "We have a roof but no foundation." The thing is, you really need to look at the foundation of what you are going to put something on top of.

**Beal:** So if you were to give advice to somebody starting a dance program, what would it be?

**Solomon:** I'd say, "Build a solid curriculum that is going to train people, that is going to have some substance, and if you're in a university, take advantage of all the university has to offer. It's an invaluable environment. Where else do you get your own theater? Where else do you get your own studio? Where else do you get your own dancers to work with?"

But if you can't keep your dancers engaged, if you don't have good people teaching, really good people teaching, your dancers aren't going to take the classes. The reason our classes were filled was because word of mouth just spread—oh, this is a good place to go at 10 o'clock every morning. Even if you weren't a dance major, it was okay to do it because you'd get something out of it. So, word of mouth makes what you have to offer valuable. It means having good people. You can't just hire anybody. That person has to be someone who will fit into the university environment and contribute in a way that meets its needs.

It may not be the way that I did it because, my God, it's forty years later. It has to be something different now. That person has to have a vision and start to implement it with a solid foundation. Start at the beginning. Don't try to do productions until you have something to produce. Okay, so you want to make a dance. But if your dancers look stupid on the stage it's embarrassing and nobody is going to come. If your dancers don't have the skill, then they will look like they don't have the skill. There is no hiding up there in the lights.

**Beal:** Sometimes I think the university, in a way, will be the savior for contemporary dance because it's so impossible to, as I'm doing right now, to rent the theater, to do the

PR, finding the rehearsal space.<sup>12</sup> It's phenomenally expensive now in a way that it didn't used to be.

**Solomon:** Exactly.

**Beal:** The university can be the driving energy to keep dance alive.

**Solomon:** Well, in the seventies and eighties, when dance went into the university, many of the dancers from New York really were willing to leave New York to take university positions because dance in the university, and building dance programs, was so possible, and it gave them, thank God, a salary. I mean, most of us lived from hand to mouth for years, and to get a regular salary was a big deal. Also, to get a place to make your work, and to get a place to teach, with people who really were good teachers, is not possible everywhere. Not every dancer is a good teacher. You have a lot of very brilliant performers who are very lousy teachers. So you have to know who you're hiring, and if their heart and soul is in teaching.

**Beal:** I'd love you to talk about the metaphors of art, or art with science—that you're able to walk in both worlds, and the dance world is one which does walk in both.

**Solomon:** It has to.

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<sup>12</sup> Tandy Beal's production of *HereAfterHere* at Santa Clara University took place in March 2014, during the period this oral history was being conducted. See <http://www.tandybeal.com/projects-hereafterhere2.html>

## **Art as Inspiration**

**Beal:** Does one inform more than the other? As you've focused more on the medicine aspect, does art still inspire you?

**Solomon:** I must admit dance doesn't inspire me as much as it used to, although I have to cover every production of the Boston Ballet when I'm in Boston. So I'm backstage every night, and some of the ballets are beautiful. Nacho Duarte and people like that making work, or Jiri Kylian, doing some piece with the ballet. That excites me in dance sometimes.

I always say when I go to theater, when we go up to Ashland and we spend three days seeing about four to six plays, if we see one that's special, the whole trip is worth it. That's the way I feel about dance. If I can go to an evening of dance and there's five minutes that really works, I'm thrilled. That's all I expect anymore. I said I'd never get jaded about seeing dance and when I did, I'd quit. I don't think I'm jaded. I just need to see some integrity in the work that sometimes exists and sometimes doesn't. What influences me more than dance these days is art, the visual arts.

**Beal:** Which is where you started.

**Solomon:** Yes, and music, and opera, and symphony. We go to the symphony often. We're going down next week to the LA symphony to watch Gustav Dudamel just because he is a performer who is truly amazing. To watch him move is beautiful. It's a beautiful experience to watch him conduct a full orchestra and pull that together. Those things excite me.

So it's everything in the arts. You have to experience. You never know what's going to be good, what's going to touch you. You will be surprised when that special moment happens.

### **More on Dance Medicine**

It's the same in medicine. I had to move on in my work to understand how to teach better. That was the motivation. I felt I wasn't doing as good a job as I could. It was important to me that my dancers not get hurt, if possible, and that I do everything I could to keep that from happening. Also, I needed to know more to be able to do that, *how* I could teach better was the whole motivation. I had to know more about what I was doing in the classroom. I took that responsibility very seriously.

**Beal:** Is that what motivated *Anatomy as a Master Image*?

**Solomon:** For years, everybody who came here said, "Oh, you have to put what you are doing down in some way. You have to document it in some way." And I'd say, "No, I'm just not sure of it. I don't want it in black and white. Then I can't change anything and everything always has to change and be in flux.

**Beal:** So that's a very interesting question: now that you did do the documentation of it, has your point of view changed at all?

**Solomon:** I think it holds up. I go back and I'm not embarrassed by what is documented. I think the material holds up, how to do it holds up. I really think that if people want to train themselves to strengthen their psoas and get their legs up in the air, this approach will help. It will help and hopefully it won't hurt them, if they do it

correctly. However, whatever I taught or teach, if you take it and do it incorrectly, it's just as bad as doing anything else. It's *how* you do movement. It's not the movement itself. It's how you're doing it. You can destroy yourself doing what you think is good for you. If you do Pilates, it can screw you up. Certainly Gyrotonics can screw you up, if you don't know what you're doing and don't know your own body. So my technique is not the be all and end all of anything. It is simply how to get somewhere.

**Beal:** Do you think that those dancers who came through with no anatomical grounding, I'm thinking about earlier times, for example, were they in some ways, freaks of nature to be able to come through and not have an understanding of muscles, bones, and attachments? Do you think that you could go at it qualitatively through principles, that conceptually you can come to the similar thing?

**Solomon:** Well, I think many teachers are able to do that. I think you are one of the really special teachers that do that kind of thing so well. I couldn't do it. I needed more nuts and bolts, hardcore science behind what I was doing to decide what to do, and that's what led me into the medical area. I didn't go into something like dance therapy. It just didn't interest me. Although I worked in the Bronx Hospital and I worked with patients in dance therapy, that wasn't the way that I wanted to go. I needed to go into the body and I was allowed to do that with Dr. Micheli in surgery. Then by going back to school and getting credentialed in order to be a legitimate entity in the medical field, and be of some help to both the doctors and the injured dancers, and to do good research in the area, I have been able to achieve some of my goals.

The research we do is probably the most important component of my work, because that's what gets out into the field. I didn't understand that. John understood it for years. As I tried to get promoted through the university I said, "I'm doing all these dances. Isn't this wonderful?" And he, as a scholar, said "No, you've got to publish. You've got to document this." So we started to write, and by having to write, it also meant having to articulate the ideas.

### **The Opportunity to Choreograph at the University**

**Beal:** We've spoken a lot about the shaping that you have given to the dance program as well as to the university. I'm wondering, what are things that the university shifted in you? Perhaps by leaving New York and coming to California. I mean, there are certain vast subjects there, whether it's being in nature or raising your children here. Are there things that you couldn't have done without the experience of being at the university? Things that changed you?

**Solomon:** Say that again.

**Beal:** By being at UC Santa Cruz, what was the major gift that was given to you from *it*?

**Solomon:** Oh, the opportunity to choreograph. If you look at the website, there are all these pieces I choreographed. I looked at it this morning before you came, and some of the pieces, I thought, oh, I don't even remember what that piece was, but to be able to make work, my God, what a gift that was. Also, to work with the people I worked with. I could never have done that any place else in the world. It could only have happened here at UC Santa Cruz. I think if I had been at Ohio State or any of the other universities

that now have established dance programs it would have been totally different. I couldn't have had the freedom to do the work I did.

I mean, where could I do a piece like *On Klee*, based on a group of Paul Klee's drawings and have them projected all over the stage, as each piece would come alive, out of the painting. Those couldn't have been done anywhere else, because here I had the technical support. I don't mean just that we had the technical facility. The people were so supportive in making those kinds of works happen. Moreover, I asked a *lot* of everyone. Nothing that ever came out of my head was simple. I'd say, can we do this and this and this, and they'd figure out how to do it. Oh, that's was such a gift. I could never have done that anyplace else.

It's one of the reasons why it's hard for me to choreograph in other places, because my work just doesn't transfer that easily. A couple of pieces do. But when I'm asked to choreograph somewhere, I now have to think of a straight dance piece without a lot of shtick.

**Beal:** No fog. (laughs)

**Solomon:** Certainly no fog. (laughs) That would be out of the question.

**Beal:** I think there's the expectation that a choreographer is going to come in and have six days of rehearsal, and you're done and you're out of there.

**Solomon:** Yes.

**Beal:** So I think this weird mentality has shaped our young dancers. If you don't knock it out in seven days that you're slow.



**Solomon:** That's crazy.

**Beal:** I know.

**Solomon:** We would have ten weeks to make a work. It would go up in the ninth week. It didn't go up in the fourth week. It went up in the ninth week, as that was the end of the course. What other luxury could you imagine as a performing artist?

**Beal:** What a gift.

**Solomon:** The university has given me so much as an artist. Without it, I probably couldn't have grown in that regard at all, and I couldn't have grown as a teacher because my students were my experiments, unfortunately, for a couple of years.

**Beal:** But I think they always are, for everybody.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

**Solomon:** What I tried to teach was to be open, because I didn't have all the answers. I remember I only had one year where there was a student rebellion. There was this one year that was really horrible, where I just couldn't do anything right. I got through it, but it was painful.

**Beal:** It seems like it happens everywhere.

**Solomon:** You know, it is when nobody is going to like anything you're doing, no matter what it is. I mean, I'd walk into class and I'd see this stone wall go up and I didn't know why. It was just where the heads were in that period of time. I knew I'd have to just wait it out. That was hard, but I'd just teach class and hope things would

turn around in time. I learned not to push, and just be patient. That was a hard lesson for me.

**Beal:** Yes. I think you also see the cadence of students as they go through. I think, for example, in those early days of teaching at UCSC, the articulate nature of the students was quite phenomenal. I look back and go, well, those *were* the good old days. What was the deal? Except that I think we had less people who were interested in taking the class, so you really had people who were excellent in their approach to what they were doing, whether they were beginners or not.

**Solomon:** Yes, who wanted five days a week.

**Beal:** Exactly.

**Solomon:** Also, the other unique thing about the curriculum, was that you had to do a composition, not one, but two. This was unheard of in a technique class. Moreover, those projects had to be performed in front of the class. Came that day of showing your work, either they were done or you failed the class. That was it. For a long time, that was not quite understood. Somebody would come into a technique class and ask, "What do you mean, I have to make a piece?" It didn't have to be long, three minutes, five minutes, two minutes, it didn't matter, but it had to be something you made, even if you were there for technique, even if you had never made a dance before. It was the responsibility of the faculty teaching that class to work with every student. Before they had to perform they were required to show their project to the faculty member. This gave them an opportunity to perform in a "private showing" and get some feedback on how to improve the piece.

**Beal:** I remember this.

**Solomon:** How painful for a faculty member, to go through thirty students and make separate appointments with each student outside of the classroom, and then sit there with the students to critique the work, but then it was up to the student to take it to fruition.

**Beal:** That was demanding. It was asking students to really dig into their work and earn their five units.

**Solomon:** Exactly! It wasn't a two-unit course. It was a five-unit course, and you had to read a lot as well. Every once in a while I'd give an exam. That was shocking. Imagine being in a dance class and actually having to take an exam on what the third lever in the body was, and how it functioned. Those were not usual things done in a dance class. Those were things I felt I could do in a university because the students were getting credit.

**Beal:** Right. It's different than if it's a private studio.

**Solomon:** Right, if it's a studio, they show up; they come in, and they go out, and they're not responsible for anything and you're not responsible for anything beyond teaching a class.

**Beal:** You know, it's interesting, in the Nikolais tradition—if you wanted to come in and just take technique class, he wouldn't let you. You had to take improvisation three times a week and composition twice a week. That was the minimum, along with five days a

week of technique. And then there were all these other things, pedagogy, and percussion, and production. We had the whole nine yards.

**Solomon:** All Nikolais dancers—the most wonderful thing that they could do when they'd come here to teach, was do percussion themselves. I just loved it because Gladys Bailin could play the drums. It was such a joy that they knew more about percussion than some of our percussionists, and that came from the Nikolais training, which was just a marvelous contribution. Having a teacher come here like Gladys or Raymond Johnson or anybody from that style contributed so much to the program, and they also took away a lot from being here.

I know this was true of Gladys, as she was my dear friend in New York. She taught for us at NYU for almost the whole time I was there, and she and I thought we would never leave New York because our careers were in New York. That was where it all was.

Then I moved out here and took this job, and she said, "If Ruthie can do it, I can do it." I tried like hell to get her to come here on our faculty. The very first non-ladder position that I got, because I didn't get FTE's at that point, I offered to Gladys. She got the offer at Ohio University, which gave her a much better deal than we were offering. She said, "Ruthie, if you could move out of New York, I know I can," she went to Ohio university. You have all those people at that period being willing to go to the university. Cliff Keuter and Elina [Mooney], who went to the University of Arizona, who taught here a lot. Helen Tamiris's husband, Danny Nagrin went to Arizona State. These were

important name contemporary dancers whose whole professional career was based in New York. They made the leap of faith and entered the university system.

### **The Promise of UCSC**

**Beal:** I know this is both a history of you and a history of UCSC. I think there is something about the promise of UCSC in those early days, the issue around openness, community—whether it's community studies or whether it was faculty working together. The promise, has it been attained? Has it been attained and then taken a right turn, left turn, or stayed on track.

**Solomon:** No, I think it went astray when departments came in, when we had to make departments and people got segregated. I think that was the big turn. Also when we couldn't write narrative evaluations and grades were to be handed out. Narratives, to me, were never a chore. I just felt that was the fair way of evaluating the student, in a long narrative evaluation. How in the world was I going to give a dance student an A, B, C, or D? That just seemed crazy to me. But because other places and graduate schools couldn't understand the pass-fail system, couldn't understand the Narrative Evaluation System, nobody was willing to read them out there, they could only understand A, B, C, or D, that was a huge change.

Then the fact that everybody got segregated into their little departments, so Performing Arts became a little enclave and we no longer were in proximity with the scientists or the physics people who were our friends. All of a sudden I wasn't seeing them anymore. Those were people that fed me ideas and nurtured my growth.

I think that died. I think that's gone. I know a lot of people are doing a lot of good work. I go up to the emeriti meetings, but they're mostly attended by scientists. There's maybe myself, I think Audrey Stanley attends. I think we're the only humanities people that are there. I love the lectures because otherwise I wouldn't get to hear these colleagues. It is nice as they all know me because somehow they came to the theater when I was performing.

**Beal:** That's great!

**Solomon:** They all saw me as a dancer, so they think they know me, but I never really knew many of them. They're all doing very good work. However, it's all isolated in their very closed form of research and their secluded working groups. That's a big change. You cannot deny that on any level. It's just the truth. Maybe it had to be, because maybe the outer world could not accept students that didn't have A, B, C, or D. Or, perhaps people who were to apply here couldn't understand the college system. They couldn't get it. It wasn't clear they would be able to study art in an art board, even though they were in Crown College. It just never sunk in. The administration thought it didn't sink in, and most of our chancellors were scientists, and they needed the A, B, C, & Ds.

**Beal:** Dean McHenry was close to the humanities.

**Solomon:** Yes. That's why we could do what we did when he was there. But since then it's been Sinsheimer and people who were [in] chemistry, biology, and not ones keen on the arts.

**Beal:** It's interesting that science is what's driving it all.

**Solomon:** Maybe that's what's important today. But boy, the arts better be part of it; otherwise we're going to be a pretty limited group of people.

### **The Value of Dance in the University: Part Two**

You asked me last time about what is the value of dance in the university. John and I wrote a number of things out. I'll go through them quickly. One is that the students are in academic courses. I wanted a dancer in as many academic courses as possible, so they weren't just taking dance, and we had the opportunity to teach anatomy and kinestheology, which you don't do in a dance studio. The dance faculty could interact with other disciplines, and other disciplines could interact with dance faculty. As a benefit to the university, we could produce people that could go out as artists into the world, as a product of UCSC, and be valuable contributors on many levels, wherever they went. It was more of an outreach kind of thing that we could do when we could teach here. We could teach people to be more complete human beings.

You asked why did the university want a dance program.

I came in with theater arts. I was hired by theater arts and College Five. I came in at the beginning of College Five. A college major developed, the aesthetic studies major, and we were asked to teach in it. So the aesthetic studies students could take dance classes. I think I taught a course with Doug McClellan in the arts for aesthetic studies. I taught a couple of early collaborative courses. Actually, I think the *Wood Stone* piece that I described with Bill Brooks was an aesthetic studies course, and possibly the orchestra

piece that I did with Sherwood [Dudley], *Go for Baroque*, where we used the full student symphony orchestra. *Go for Baroque* was an aesthetic studies course. It wasn't a dance course. It wasn't in the dance program and it wasn't in the music program.

As a funny aside—a couple of the students were so riled up about our asking musicians to move with their instruments, to carry their violin and still play it while they were actually moving through space, and changing chairs, and standing up on their chairs, and other unusual things, that at the end of one performance they planted a couple of students with tomatoes, and as Sherwood and I and the whole orchestra were taking our bows, they threw tomatoes at the stage. Sherwood—I couldn't believe it—caught a tomato and threw it back at the audience. It was sensational and everybody roared. We just thought it was hilarious. We didn't mind at all because we knew that we had caused a big stir. (laughs) I wasn't afraid of causing a big stir. Poor Sherwood was in the music department and he was getting flak from some of his conservative music students. Of course, I wasn't exposed to it as much as he was.

**Beal:** Wow. That's a great tale.

**Solomon:** There were things like that that are fond memories.

### **John Solomon**

The collaboration that I've been able to achieve with John has really fostered my work in the writing and research field. The research and the publications are now more what we're doing because that gets out in the world. The books, *Preventing Dance Injuries*, and



*Anatomy as Master Image*, and the *Dance Medicine & Science Bibliography*, and the big abstract books we edit are what is most important to us right now.

**Beal:** Well, it's extraordinary this collaboration you've had through the years, as well as marriage and children.

**Solomon:** Well, you have the same thing.<sup>13</sup>

**Beal:** It's true, but without the children part.

**Solomon:** That can throw a monkey wrench into it.

**Beal:** I recognize what an extraordinary accomplishment it is to be partners both in work and life. And you've worked in the same place, as well.

**Solomon:** Yes, it's unique.

**John Solomon:** Two academics can probably do this more easily than two people in disparate fields. Academics have a certain amount of flexibility where scheduling their time is concerned.

**Solomon:** Yes, and I'd say the university has also afforded us that possibility, which is something I would say has contributed to us being able to do the work. I've worked hard for every dollar they've paid me, but the fact that I was able to get a salary to do

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<sup>13</sup> Solomon is referring to Tandy Beal's collaboration with her husband, the musician Jon Scoville.

that work, as opposed to being an artist in New York—I don't think I could have managed to do it at the level that I've been doing it. Also to be able to be in Boston, take a sabbatical or a leave of absence every year to do the medical research is such a gift.

Well, Tandy, I really appreciate your being willing to do this and take the time. You did such a beautiful job.

**Beal:** It was fascinating. This is an amazing intimacy to have with somebody.

**About the Interviewer:** As a director, choreographer, performer, teacher and writer, Beal has performed as a solo artist and with her ensemble in major cities and festivals on four continents. She has created works for dance, circus, film, television, theater, opera, animation, corporate events, industrials, and even a half-time show for the San Francisco 49ers. Ms. Beal wrote, directed and choreographed the Pickle Family Circus for ten years and the Moscow Circus in Japan for two years. Her most recent projects include directing an opera for Bobby McFerrin in Moscow, Abu Dhabi, and Basel, and performing in New York for the Nikolais Centennial. Her most recent concert was [HereAfterHere](#): a self-guided tour of eternity—about what people think happens after we die. That production was based on extensive interviews. Tandy Beal has been a lecturer at UCSC for many years. She taught *Documenting Oral Histories* for Porter College in 2010.

**About the Editor:** Irene Reti directs the Regional History Project at the UC Santa Cruz Library, where she has worked as an editor and oral historian since 1989. She holds a BA in environmental studies (with a concentration in women's studies), and a master's in history from UCSC, and is also a small press publisher, writer, and photographer.