

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**OLD GALVESTON OPERA HOUSE**

Interview with: Maureen Patton  
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes  
Date: May 18, 2007  
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes  
Location:

MP: (beginning of tape) Not because I didn't like it but simply because I didn't ever think that there would something that would pull me back here. And of course it didn't pull me back here. It pulled Larry, who was not from here, when the job opened up at Galveston College and he was hired to become the head of the music department. So, when we moved back to Galveston, almost everybody I had gone to school with or grew up with was pretty much gone. So I joined a newcomers club. And I was introduced as a BOI (laughter). And I went home that night and I asked my mother and father (they had been babysitting the kids or whatever). I said, "what is a BOI?" and they just couldn't believe that I didn't know what that was. And it actually wasn't something that originated years and years and years ago. I think it is a little more recent. And so they told me. And I said, "oh well, okay that's what that is." And Larry and I did here what we did in every other place we lived. And that is we were performing. I was teaching voice at the college and I was directing Opera Workshop Productions. And getting involved in the arts community here, which meant I was on the board of the Arts Counsel. And the Arts County had purchased this Grand 1894 Opera House. So I was raising money to help, you know, get some fund together to help restore it. And I rotated off the board. And about that time, the then Executive Director of the Arts Counsel left. And the board hired someone else who was not an artistic person in the sense of, there

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was no artist kind of past for her. But she was a good fundraiser and that was really the main reason that she was hired. And it was somebody I knew and so she determined that what needed to happen was that there would be a Director of the Opera House and a Director of the Arts Center which would be two major projects of The Arts Counsel. And that she was not going to feel comfortable sort of umbrella-ing all of this personally as well as within the scope of The Arts Counsel. So she was going to hire somebody for that job. And one night Larry said to me, "well have you decided yet what you want to be when you grow up?" Because I just it was just sixes and sevens. The kids were in middle school and I was teaching at the college and, you know, but just sort of looking. You know, trying to find out what I wanted to do at some point in the future when the kids were older and so forth. And I said, "No, I just I really don't know." And he said, "Well what is Jan" (because this is a person we knew, she was in our church), said, "What's Jan doing about the opera house job?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Well that's the job you ought to have." I said, "Well, but the kids are still kind of little and I don't know that I want to go back, you know I don't know that I want to work full time. It's been very easy for me to do the teaching and so forth..." And he said, "If she's smart then she'll take you on those terms." And so I said, "Well, I haven't thought about it." And of course, when I took this job on most of the people of my generation did not have like a master of fine arts and all the rest of it. I mean, the people who were doing these jobs were people like me who were coming to them from sort of other, you know, other directions. So I called Jan the next day and I said, "Well what are you doing about that job?" And she said, "Well you know me I'm a good Presbyterian. I'm waiting for

God to drop somebody in my lap.” She said, “Do you have somebody in mind?” And I said, “Well, I thought I’d talk to you about me.”

EV: (laughter)

MP: “But I have some issues about it in terms of full time and so forth.” And she said, “Are you serious?” And I said, “Well, yeah I think so.” So she said, “Well come in and talk to me.” So I did. And I explained to her that I wanted to have a little different time table and she said, “Well I think we can make that work.” So I went to work at 30 hours a week and within 6 months I had 350 comp hours of time because I was working, you know the job has never been a full time job but the job is a 24/7 job. So to get paid for 30 hours and work 60, you know, it doesn’t matter, you’re going to work what you’re going to work. So I went on full time within a reasonable amount of time. And as they say, the rest is history. And it has been the right fit. One of the things that I brought to the table was the fact that I was a BOI. And knowing that had not really occurred to me. But the project had just been, been fraught with peril, as they say. And at that time The Alyssa, the tall ship Alyssa which is a project of the Galveston Historical Foundation and this Opera House is the project of The Arts Counsel, were both thought of as the two biggest white elephants Galveston had. And people used to laugh about it. And they said, “You know if you dug up a channel up 21<sup>st</sup> Street and pulled the Alyssa up the street and birthed it at the Opera House we’d have both white elephants at the same spot.”

EV: (laughter).

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MP: Of course these two projects are now probably the most noticeable projects and maybe the most dynamic projects that there are in the city. So that's kind of the way this got started and then in 1986 we had just finished the restoration as you see it today, done the last piece of major fundraising for it and so forth. So, and within months The Arts Counsel went out of business. And the Opera House, you know, there were a number of issues that sort of brought that to the core. But the bottom line was that it went out of business. And the Opera House became a stand alone non-profit as 1894, Inc. The Arts Center became a stand alone. And it was probably the best thing that could have happened. It was a healthy, it was a healthy thing. And people who were confused about how, why they were giving money to an Arts Counsel, what was it going for, all of the sudden could identify, "I'm going to donate my money to the Opera House or the Arts Center" just as they did to the Historical Foundation and so forth. So, I started in '81 as the Opera House Director. In '86 became the Executive Director of the newly formed 1894, Inc. and I just celebrated my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Which is kind of... wow.

EV: So did, The Art Counsel went out of business as in, went belly up or they went out of business?

MP: Went belly up, went belly up, went bankrupt, in essence.

EV: Okay. Now, lets go back a little bit. Tell us where you went to school.

MP: I graduated from Bob High here in Galveston. And then went to Texas Christian University in Fort Worth to do my undergraduate work. Studied there with John Brigham who was the voice teacher and in choral music with Beth Ensen one he had moved there. Did my masters work at Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, started it

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at TCU and then when Larry took the job in Wichita Falls I ended up doing my masters there in music theory and composition, studying with Kent Hughes who was the theory head of the theory department.

EV: What was his first name?

MP: Kent Hughes.

EV: Kent Hughes? Was he related to Dr. Hughes that we had at \_\_\_\_\_(7.9)?

MP: No, no he wasn't?

EV: Isn't he the one, he went to TCU? Is he the Fine Arts Director or Dean?

MP: Dean, Frank Hughes came to TCU and he is the reason that Bev went to TCU. I think, you know Frank made sure that Bev came up there. So I met Dean Hughes when I started my undergraduate work because he was already there. Bev came along the next year. And then that third year, my junior year is when Larry and Tom and, you know, J.P. and Bill Bender. Sort of that whole little conclave of people from Trinity then went to the music department at TCU to study with Bev. And it was that simple.

EV: And I guess after you and Larry met, the music department.

MP: Larry and I met that way. Bev actually told me that he had somebody coming up the next year that he had picked out for me and it was Larry.

EV: Who told you that?

MP: Bev.

(laughter)

MP: And so he used to take great pleasure in telling everybody that he had it all figured out. That he knew it was going to happen and it was fine. And the first time I

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met Larry I actually was listening to his senior recital tapes. Mike Connolly was playing it for me. And Mike and Larry were roommates that summer. They both were working for Casa Menana doing the summer stop and after we got married, some years later, Larry and I went back and did summer stop one summer together at the Casa. But I heard, I was listening to Larry's tape and Larry walked in the room and he just finished saying something just absolutely beautiful and I said, "Oh Larry, will you marry me and just sing to me all the time?" And I barely met him. So we got a big laugh out of that. And, you know, it's a good story that we've been able to tell our kids.

EV: \_\_\_\_\_ (9.6) Italian weather?

MP: It must have been.

(laughter)

MP: It must have been. You know what you want, you go after it.

EV: So you all got married in Fort Worth?

MP: No, we got married here in Galveston at the church where my parents got married.

EV: Oh really, how nice?

MP: And where my mother was baptized I was baptized, my children were baptized here and my grandchildren, all baptized.

EV: Was your family from here?

MP: Yeah, see this is the oddity. You see that name **Asino (10.1)** and you know that that's Italian. But my maternal great, great grandmother was an Italian who was a protestant missionary in Italy, and was jailed for her efforts.

EV: Oh really, isn't that interesting? I bet she had a great story.

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MP: Part of the Valdencence (10.4), which is the oldest protestant sect there is, so I grew up at my grandmother's and you hear the stories of baking leaves of the bible in bread and passing it around to the neighbors and preaching the gospel that was a protestant gospel instead of, instead of what the Catholics wanted. My father's family, also Italian, were Catholic and my paternal grandmother's family, all protestant. My maternal grandfather, Yugoslav, actually Austrian which became Yugoslavia which is now Croatia, (laughter) but so it's an interesting mix.

EV: Yeah, it is...

MP: But, yeah, so that's so my great grandmother came to this country and set up an Italian speaking protestant congregation at First Presbyterian Church. They gave the space for her to use and she ministered to the Italians and as you know, Galveston is this enormous melting pot, because it was such a major port of immigration. So, you look at the mix here in Galveston and you've got a lot Italians, a lot of Greeks, a lot of Jews, both German, Russian, Polish Jews. Lots of Yugoslavs, and um, and that's because they immigrated here and for a lot of people Galveston, because Galveston was the port city, it was the major city in Texas, which is why we had this opera house, which is why Galveston was called the Wall Street of the Southwest. It was, you know, it was like the first city of Texas, if not literally then figuratively. So, there were all of these immigrants here who needed to be able to worship in their own language and my great grandmother provided that for the Italians who were protestant, and then ultimately called as a full time minister a man from Sicily who brought his family over and became a full time minister of that congregation until they were all eventually assimilated into the First

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Presbyterian Church. And that man's family and my family were made very, very close, even though (you'd have to hear my mother tell it), because they were Sicilian, and we were **Tescana (12.6)** and, you know, you want to talk, you want to talk a system in this country, my gosh, the Italian's are notorious for trying to decide who lives where...

EV: Oh, yeah.

MP: and whether or not they can speak to each other, which is hysterical. And me and my best friend growing up was a member of that family. So our families have this absolutely wonderful rich history of what our roots were all about, and how we all came here. And she, along with a lot of my other friends from high school now live here again. We all have sort of migrated back here for lots of different reasons.

EV: So when you and Larry got married did he have a job here immediately then or did you all have...

MP: He was in the service.

EV: He was in the army?

MP: He was in the service. We thought, he had started his master's degree at TCU because he had almost an entire year before he had report to Officer's camp because he had been in the ROTC at Trinity. And, um, so he said, "well I can either spend a year, you know, maybe teaching a year and then going away or I can start my masters work" which is what he chose to do. And so he was supposed to go to Fairbanks, Alaska. And as strange as things happen, we planned our wedding around when I was going to graduate from college so that he would come back from Alaska, I'd graduate, we would get married, we would go back to Fairbanks, spend a year there before he finished his two

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years of duty. Well when he showed up to his officer's camp in May of, it would have been 1963, his orders has been \_\_\_\_\_ (14.4) wrong, they had him showing up on Memorial Day and the entire base was closed down. And they thought he had been AWOL for 10 days.

EV: Oh my God...

MP: Because somebody hit a 2 instead of a 3 or a 3 instead of a 2. So he called and he said, "I'm not going to Alaska." And he said when the guy called him in he thought, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to Korea." And a lot of people were going to Korea at that time. And not even started kind of going to Vietnam a lot. But he thought, "I'm going to who knows where." And they sent him to Fort Sam in San Antonio, his home town. So he ended up being at Fort Sam while I finished my senior year at TCU and so then we got married here, moved, I moved to San Antonio, we spent his second year there and then, then he got a job at Wichita Falls and, you know, went there.

EV: Did he, what branch, I know you said he was in the Army but what?

MP: As a general (15.3).

EV: As a general. Okay.

MP: He was assigned to the hospital and he did a lot of planning and executing of special events for the patients. You know, took them places and such.

EV: And then he went off to, is that Midwestern?

MP: No, he went to Wichita Falls and I went to school there. He was already teaching. And he finished, we did Summer Stop one summer at Casa, you know, he was doing summers finishing up his degree. And I had started my degree at TCU and then said,

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“this isn’t going to work, I’m going to need to go ahead and go full time.” And then I finished my degree and six weeks later we had our first baby.

EV: Wow.

MP: So I was expecting more than the degree when it came right down to it.

(laughter)

EV: I heard something about your wedding. You all were...

MP: We sang there.

EV: Yeah, everybody were singers...

MP: Well, yeah, you know we had this, it was very interesting because the preacher who married my mother and father and aunts and uncles and whatever who was our pastor **meritus (16.2)** and had retired long since, baptized me and so forth, married Larry and me. And when we went to talk to him he said, “I wonder if you would consider doing something for me?” And I said, “What is that Dr. Johnson?” And he said, “Your aunt and uncle...” (this is my mother’s youngest sister and her husband, both of whom had music degrees) sang for their own wedding. And they caught so much grief from everybody when people found that’s what they were going to do. And they weren’t the only people who sang. But they decided to do this and they sang a piece called The Wedding Prayer by **Doug \_\_\_\_\_ (16.8)**. And everybody got, just talked about it, ridiculed it until they heard it, until they went to the wedding. And it was just beautiful and it was so special. And they of course were both singers and so Dr. Johnson said, “I’d love for you and Larry to sing the way your aunt and uncle did.” Well Larry and I kind of looked at each other and said, “Oh my gosh,” you know, “who sings at their own

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wedding?" you know, "Whose got the, whose got the poise or the whatever to sing at their own wedding?" But then as we thought about it we said, "You know, every friend we have from college is a singer." I had family who were singers. "How in the world do we ask "a person" to sing for our wedding?" And so we said, "Well you know this would be a good answer. We don't. We just sing for ourselves." So we decided to go ahead and do it. It was like only the second time we had ever sung together.

EV: Really?

MP: We had sung once before, in fact, we came down on a school break or something and we sang at the church and did a "Bop" duet that we liked. But we really hadn't been singing together. And of course, after we got married we ended up singing a lot of things, a lot of places together. We did sort of the Jeanette and Eddy sort of stuff. And

EV: Hooked on you?

(laughter)

MP: Oh, we never could get through that one. But, yeah it was that kind of thing, a lot of musical comedy things or operetta and things like that. But yeah, that's what we did.

EV: You have been the only director here, right?

MP: I've been the only opera house director they have ever had, which is kind of scary.

(laughter)

EV: What was the, if you can say, what was the percentage of the revamping of the venue you had to do?

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MP: Well, let me paint you a word picture if I can. Because you have been here and you know,

EV: This is my first time. But I walked down and watched the little girls dancing and stuff.

MP: Oh you did, so you went into the theatre?

EV: Well I wanted to see the theatre. It's a beautiful theatre.

MP: It's a gorgeous theatre.

EV: It's one of those places that looks like every seat is a very, very good seat.

MP: They are. We seat 1008 people and when the theatre was built it seated over 1600. The reason we don't seat 1600 anymore is that in the early days they had bleachers up on the top balcony. So you had no seat, so they could just cram in a lot of people.

And the seats were smaller because people were smaller back in 1894. And, you know we had to make allowances for all of those things. So we seat a whole lot fewer people, which makes it a challenge. But, but to paint you sort of a picture of how it was when it was built how it was when we took it on: In 1894 a gentleman by the name of Henry Greenwall, who was an entrepreneur and had established a whole circuit of theatres along the gulf coast, went to the business community of Galveston, and I say this every time I do a tour for anybody because I think it is one of the most important pieces of information somebody could take away from them (certainly the business community). He went to the business community of Galveston and said, "You have in Galveston an older opera house it's on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of a building. It has severe limitations and Galveston is the premiere city of Texas, you deserve the premier opera house of Texas.

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And I want you to invest in my building a new opera house that will be....: (I'm sure they didn't use the words state-of-the art then) but in essence, "state of the art, the best of the best and do you proud." And in one day he raised the money.

EV: Wow!

MP: In one day he raised \$100,000 and in 1894 \$100,000 was a whole lot of money.

From the businessman of Galveston who believed that what he said was true and that Galveston, "the Wall Street of the southwest," you know, this very vibrant city and the gateway into Texas, was also deserving of the best arts.

EV: This was 1894, six years before the hurricane is that right?

MP: Yeah, yes. So he built, for that \$100,000 he built The Grand Opera House and Hotel. What you are sitting in right now is part of the hotel. And when we finish I'll take you on a walk so that you can actually see how the building is put together. But in the main, what they were looking for was a place where people could come and perform and that the city could come and gather together, band together, you know, do the things they did. So he built this opera house. It took about 7 months. I mean that's the other astounding part of this. When we did the last piece of restoration of this building, which was the interior that you saw, you know the final, sort of the final finishes and so forth. Not the stage, stage work had already been done, but just all of the, from the proscenium out. It took us 7 months just to do that. He built the entire thing in just 7 months.

EV: Well is the interior of the theatre, was that restored or was that an added modified thing, that? I mean if you brought a person back from that era would they walk in and say, "Wow, nothing's changed!"?

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MP: No. But if you brought them back from about 1901 they could say that. You know, so 1894 the interior of the theatre looked a little different than it does now. But obviously the balconies were the same, you know, a lot of it was the same. And it enjoyed this enormous popularity and celebration of everything else of that period. And so the, all of the major artists came through Galveston because they, this is where it was happening. So it was always designed to be a roadhouse. It was never a production company. You know, it's not The Grand Opera.

EV: (inaudible ...22.3)

MP: I sure will. That an opera house is simply a performing arts center. You know, it was just the term in those days. You know there were little opera houses that sprung up all over the west in Colorado, in the gold mining towns. And they were called opera houses. But it did not produce opera. It was not a producing arts organization. It was not "Houston Grand Opera" or "The Ally Theatre" that produces theatre or "The Symphony" that produces a symphony season or "The Houston Ballet" that is a ballet company. This was not a company, this was a stage. It was a theatre. And people came to this theatre to do the things that they did. And so they were touring artists. So that if a train came into Galveston and it came with a, at one time they brought in a circus and a circus performed here, they had a load of camels and they left town and the camels left their fleas here. They had to close the place up and fumigate.

EV: Did they really? (laughter)

MP: Yeah, William Jennings Bryan orated from this stage. Anna Pavlova brought her court of ballet from Russia and performed on this stage. In the Vonville years, George

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M. Cohan came here and performed. May West. The Marx Brothers. Burns and Hallach. You know, John Phillips Susa came here repeatedly. And various a sundry opera companies would come through Galveston as they traveled all over the country. So being a road house is being simply a receptacle for what ever is coming through here and, and it's what we are today. We are still a touring house. You know, we don't produce a play or produce an opera. What we do is I buy a product that's touring out there and Galveston is one of the many stops that they are taking. And that's how it worked.

EV: That was going to be one of my questions. How do people contact you and say, "Hey we'd like to perform in Galveston?" or do you call up and say, "We need you to come to Galveston?" or is it a mixture of both?

MP: Both. So here we are in 1894 and this place looks wonderful, the building looks wonderful and I've got some great photos that I'll show you that are what the building, the building had a majestic **coupla** (24.2) on the top right above where we are, you know the to most of the building this **coupla**. And then it was flat. So the building today looks like a fairly, sort of, I don't want to say ordinary but that's kind of, it's a very simple building. So a lot of times people will come in here and not ever expecting what they are going to see when they walk in the door.

EV: Yeah.

MP: You know you walk in the lobby and then you walk in that theatre and then you are struck with this amazing beauty and fine, fine restoration. So it enjoyed, you know, six years of just really wonderful life. And then that little old hurricane came through here called the 1900 storm. And, you know, you can talk to anybody in Galveston

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whether they are BOI's or what are called IBC's "Islander By Choice," it doesn't matter who you talk to. If anybody has lived here at all, you can tell in talking to them that the 1900 storm defined this city as when people talk about before the storm and after the storm that's the storm they are talking about, there is no question. Galveston actually had more damage done to it by fire in terms of buildings and so forth then it did by the storm. But the storm killed 6000 plus people and it still remains today as the largest natural disaster to hit this hemisphere...

EV: Yeah, isn't it also, isn't it what killed Galveston as being the capital of Texas, or as being the main harbor?

MP: Well it's interesting. I don't think it did it then. But it's probably what lead to a series of events that sort of changed the island. And they, because later is when they dug that channel up to Houston and the Houston Port took off and Houston just grew like topsey and Galveston really hadn't, I'd have to say it was like the forefathers and so forth had more of an interest of keeping Galveston maybe a little smaller or whatever. The interesting thing is that had it not done that, this place would be gone. You know, all of the inventory of historic structures would probably be gone, or at least the majority of them. Just as in Houston you go down Main street and I went to see movies at The Majestic and The Palace and all of those wonderful movie palaces along, you know along Main Street are gone. And they fell because of a perception that they had to make way for improvements and roads and whatever. And Galveston sort of, never did that. It never had a chance to do that. A lot of the homes have fallen because the families that inherited them couldn't afford them and one by one you saw them being destroyed. And

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so it's good that sort of that stopped. That came to a halt. But Galveston, meanwhile, here you had this storm. This building, the whole back wall of the theatre was blown out. The roof was torn off. The **coupla (26.5)** completely lost, and it's never been replaced. And you think, "what's going to happen?" That was September of 1900. By October of 1901 the place was back up in business and doing well.

EV: Wow.

MP: And that's probably the second most important piece of history about this place.

The fact that the money was raised in a day to build it, \$100,000, it took 7 months build, destroyed, for all intents and purposes. I mean there was a whole lot of damage here.

And within a year's time it was back in business.

EV: Who was spearheading the repair of then?

MP: I don't know who actually spearheaded the repair, but this is what I think, and I believe it with every fiber of my being, I think that this community, and in 1900 remember they didn't have TV and they didn't have game boy, and they didn't have... a lot of things, theatres like this were in many respects sort of the heart and soul of the community. This is where people came to socialize, to learn, to enjoy, to be entertained and I think that the opera house was really critical to the health and the healing of the city because people could come here and either forget for a moment about the horrors that they had gone through or to band together and draw strength from each other to do that. I think in many respects it was not unlike after 9/11 when people had, they had to come together. They needed to feel a connection. You had to feel like you needed to just hold on to somebody. I think disasters do that for people. I think you saw the same thing in,

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you know, Katrina and Rita in different ways. And so I think this was, this was a place that needed to repaired quickly. You know, as quickly as possible, get it back online, and it was up and running. It was up and running.

EV: That is an incredible...

MP: Yeah, it's amazing. So when you see, when you see the thesis about it you say, there was a disruption... (laughter) from 1900 you know to 1901 and then starting in October it was back up again.

EV: How do you all, I'm assuming you have a lot of local guys who give you, I'm not trying to say you're funding...your funding comes, I'm sure you have George Mitchell's a BOI isn't he? (laughter)

MP: Yeah, George Mitchell is responsible for so much of the development of the strand it's just unbelievable. George is one of our patrons. But you'd be amazed, 75% or better of our budget is generated revenue. Ticket sales, renting the theatre...

EV: Really? Well that's a great statistic.

MP: Yeah, it's very important.

EV: Do you get any help from the fat cats in Houston and other Texas, non-Galveston folks?

MP: When this theatre was build, when this theatre was bought in 1974, Arts Counsel bought it in 1974, the **Kentner Fund**, here in town and **Houston Downet (28.9)** gave the money to buy it.

EV: Oh.

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MP: And they have continued to be major benefactors for us. **Houston and Downet** just gave us a wonderful grant to help do this construction work that we are about to do. As did **Kentner Fund**. I mean, you do defend on the largest of foundations and individuals but you also have to make your way. The arts, when I got started in this business, we probably had hit about that time when people were no longer accepting the excuse that you were an artist, therefore you didn't have a business sense. You know, because that was sort of the prevailing attitude for a long time. "No I'm doing things for my art. I don't have to know how to balance a checkbook or pay for the electricity or whatever..." and that really screeched to a halt and I have, I know so many artists and wonderful performers who are so savvy and people who are in positions like this and running all kinds of arts organizations who are absolutely you know just...

EV: Well did someone help you or did you study up on business administration or budgeting at all or did you come in by the seat of your pants or what?

MP: My dad owned his own business for years and I, you know, I used to help him write checks, because I loved doing that, I was just fascinated by it...

EV: Writing checks? (laughter)

MP: Yeah, writing checks. Something about writing checks...(laughter).

EV: Okay, anyway, go ahead...

MP: Yeah, my mother wouldn't write a check unless you held at gunpoint. But, you know I always was at least aware of sort of business mind. And, and most of it's the seat of the pants. And what I brought to the table and I really do think that this is a good way for it to work, because a lot of my colleges, we've all come to, like I said, from different,

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sort of different directions. And very few of us at least in my age group, had the MFA or the Art's Administration degree or whatever. But I think that one of the pieces that I bring to this is that I've been on both sides of the footlights. You know, I understand the performers who come in here. I really do understand what they are about. And I value that and I appreciate it. By the same token, I'm not going to take all of the red M&M's out of the jar. You know to put in the dressing room. There are certain things you just state, "well no but that's just silly." So that you, you have to look at is also as a patron and what is logical and, you know when you sit in those seats. If you got seats, we do have some seats that aren't the best and they are behind the polls. As a patron you have to appreciate that. And look at the value of that and make sure you have "cost-ed" that out appropriately. You know, we have a, we are a union house. And for some reason they are just blanch if you say that. I have the fifth generation of one family who is working here who is my stage manager whose great, great, grandfather, no great grandfather opened this house on January 3, 1895. And his name is Jeff Pye.

EV: Wow, what's his name?

MP: Jeff Pye, P-Y-E.

MP: And his family has had a stage hand involved in this theatre in every generation since then.

EV: Wow.

MP: And so it's a wonderful thing.

EV: Maureen, when you, as an artist, as a performing artist, what do you, what insight do you think that gives you into running this, because you go and get a guy who just had

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a BBA and say, you handle the business part or do you, do you sense that the fact that you were a performing artist and you are, you have that education, that that gives you some type of a different edge.

MP: Yeah, I think being an artist really does inform everything else that you do. And I was blessed. The first person that I hired to work with me was a man who's name is Bill Lindstrom. Bill's background was in backstage management. You know backstage, he had been a TV. You know, he'd been the techno director of The Ally Theatre. He had, he had built sets, he had, you know he had been in the producing end of it. He actually was the TV out here at the Outdoor Musicals when those were going on. And his minor was accounting. And the two of us, particularly when we, when we became our own organization, there were only the two of us. And my dad, who had retired, who was our box office manager. Because Daddy, Daddy was not a good retiree. And he had been hired, because I didn't hire him. He was hired by the Executive Director of the Art's Counsel when I got started. Because they needed somebody who could just take care of the tickets. And he was at sixes and sevens and he was just board. And, you know, he was working for minimum wage. He didn't care. I mean he was doing it because he loved it. And my dad was a tap dancer. And he taught tap dancing. I mean he taught dancing when he was a young man. Loved dancing. Loved, I mean, you know, it was just absolutely in his bones. And so, I got singing from my mom and dancing from my dad...

EV: Yeah, you got dancing...

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MP: I got this artistic temperament maybe and sensitivity. And so he, he was working part time. So there was just us. And, so yeah, you have to bring to the table when it's just that few of you. Bill was able to do all the accounting. And he just took on dealing with all the marketing aspects in terms of placing ads and doing all of that. And was my stage manager. Because that is what his background was. So he was doing all of that and I was doing all of the fundraising and the programming, and the administration and all of that. Um, and that's how we, how we got this thing, kind of going, little by little by little. And then so when the break came and we became the stand along organization, we simply moved into a new realm of this. But Bill and I worked with our architect who was the guy who made this all look like it does today, Killis Almond of San Antonio. Killis had been a person who was looked at to take this project on and then they, for a number of reasons, they opted to go to a New York firm and the New York firm and the Art's Counsel came to a parting of the ways in 1981 which is when I started here. I didn't have anything to do with the parting of the ways but its when I started. And they went back and got Killis, who had done some work at our church oddly enough. And so from that point on he has been our architect of record. So when we were planning this whole restoration, the interior and so forth. Killis and Bill and I together worked as a team to figure out what it was that...

EV: I'm sorry you said his first name was?

MP: Killis, K-I-L-L-I-S.

EV: What's his last name?

MP: Almond like the nut.

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EV: Okay.

MP: And because the three of us really worked so well together, you didn't have this. Somebody called me sometime back for a reference on Killis and he asked me three different times or three different ways or five different times or whatever... and he kept saying, "Well when you had a fight, who won?" That was really the question he was asking no matter how he couched it. And I finally stopped and I said, "You're not listening to me." And I said, "When there was any kind of disagreement about what should be done in the theatre, the theatre won. This was not about ego. It was not about an edifice complex, the way a lot of art picked up. This was about making this theatre work so that we didn't just summarily say, let's put that there without figuring out who is going to have to live with it, who is going to have to make it work. Because that had happened to us with the stage. When I started working here, the work that had been done on the theatre first was the stage work. And it was, I mean you couldn't really use the theatre very easily without getting that done. But we ended up with stuff on the stage or designs on the stage that were not really right. That we had to live with. That was pre-Killis, pre-me, pre-Bill. So when we did get together we said, "Okay, every decision we make has to have a reason why it is going to make this theatre work better." Which is what we did. And one of the things Killis did, this hotel space that we're in is a four story building, the top two stories are apartments. We converted those to one bedroom apartments. Which is part of our income. And then the first floor is, sort of an adjunct lobby space with extra rest rooms. The second floor, office and storage such as that.

EV: Do the people who live here, can't they hear what is going on?

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MP: Not really, because, in the old days they would have been able to. Because the old days you had the windows on the street side and then windows on the interior wall of the hotel and four feet beyond that were the interior windows of the theatre and then the ally windows of the theatre. So the only ventilation they had was to open up all the windows.

EV: (laughter)

MP: And so, yeah you could have heard anything at anytime. But, when, you know, when the place had to be changed, it changed to a movie theatre and so forth, all of those windows on the interior windows and so forth were bricked up because those aren't allowed anymore. But go back to after 1900 storm. The place was rebuilt, operating again. Moved from sort of the typical performing arts venue into **Vodville** (36.8). You know, these are the **Vodville** years and that's when Burns and Allen Marx brothers name was, you know, Cohan, you name it. You know they were all coming through here. And, I tell you a Helen Hays story in a little bit. But she said, "I'm sure I played here because I played every place." You know, she'd go on a train, she'd go to every place. So the **Vodville** years then became sort of a little bit of live performance and then movies. You know because movies became "the thing." And the man who had purchased this place had renamed it "The Martini." Mr. Martini owned every movie theatre in Galveston. And at any, at one time they can actually go back and catalog there were 43 movie theatres in Galveston.

EV: My God...

MP: During a span of years. They weren't all here at one time...

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EV: Oh, I see...

MP: But there were dozens of them. There were dozens of them. And at one point, Market Street over there had a whole row. It was like, kind of like Main Street in Houston. And you had all these movie theatres in a row. And Mr. Martini owned them all. So he had renamed this “The Martini” and then he builds this flagship theatre which is just a block away and named it “The Martini.” It was an art deco theatre. And he renamed this one “The State Theatre.” And so then this theatre sort of went the way of a lot of downtown movie theatres. And it became more and more

(Interrupting person) – Maureen we have two important things...are you driving a Ford Taurus sir?

EV: No, it's not mine...

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MAUREEN PATTON.

MP: So, one of the things Mr. Martini, Mr. Martini was a really good marketer. I mean he had this, you know, he had this, you know he had this innate sense of marketing. He closed up the entrance with a beautiful arch and he cut a path, rented a store front on 21<sup>st</sup> Street, which was a major thoroughfare. And he rented a building and then created a long corridor, chopped up, you know, cut open a wall in the lobby and made this long corridor that opened up to 21<sup>st</sup> street, right were the bus stopped. So that was the way that he was getting, you know, kind of getting attention, getting people in here. Smart, you know had the ticket booths and the concession stands. Well the person who rented him the building kept raising the rent and he got mad and he closed it up. And he put the

wall back. Including the beautiful wood and had somebody hand carve the wood so it would match. Which I found very interesting because, you know, at some point people sort of didn't pay attention to that, if you closed it up, he might have just thrown sheet rock up there or something. But he didn't, he actually put the wood back. When we did the restoration we left the hand carved wood alone. We could have smoothed it out, could have, you know, made it look better. And then reopened this other entrance. Well when he did that, they had literally just chopped off that gorgeous stone arch. And it, so here's now what you are going to envision, after all that background. This is what we saw in 1974 when the theatre was built. I mean when we purchased the theatre and the restoration was begun. There was a woman who ran the theatre department at Galveston College and she had, she was running a community theatre. And she and the, um, the choreographer she worked with were searching for a place to sort of, find a home for the little theatre. That's the way a lot of these places are found all over the country. And they knew that this place had closed up. And they got access to it and they came in. One of them ended up top balcony, the other was back on the stage somewhere and they started talking. And they said, listen to this, this is not just a movie theatre, there is something here that is more than a movie theatre. The acoustics of this place are just wonderful. Look at the size of the stage, this is a real theatre. You know, this would be wonderful. They took that idea, because they said, you but we can't buy this, we can't fix this. They took that idea to The Arts' Counsel, to the person who was then the Executive Director, whose name was Emily Whiteside and said, "This would be a great theatre for Galveston. We could do a little theatre here, we could do other things." And

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as they say, the rest is history. The Arts' Counsel then bought it with the help of the **Kimpner** fund, Houston Endowment and started the whole restoration process. 1974, it had been closed only for a few months. It had been a movie theatre, you know from **Vonville**, to movies, derelict movie theatre, X-rated movie theatre, you know by that time.

EV: (laughter)

MP: Street had nothing but bars on it. You know there was like one viable business or two. But mostly had become a place for bars. A lot of hookers on the street. You know, just not a place that you'd feel real, you know that's where you want to spend all of your time. The arch had been shaved off. There was a pastel kind of bathroom tile look.

EV: The hookers....

MP: "A look" of the box office. Because it was all just little mosaic tile stuff. And walking through doors that had aluminum casings around them. Up the stairs they had brown linoleum. Into the lobby they had a dropped ceiling with florescent lighting that made everybody look a little bilious, everybody looked a little green. White, red and green rubber tile floor with an occasional black patch where they had fixed it. Maroon wood work, which was about the 8<sup>th</sup> coat of pain. Green, sort of a this institutional green paint on the walls with water splotches everywhere. This place leaked like a sieve. A carpet that was a wine and green fern design that the Interstate Theatre, because this was an interstate theatre at one time. Interstate had bought a warehouse of this stuff and it put it in every Interstate Theatre in the country. If you went to The Majestic theatre in San Antonio, I went there one time for a consulting job and I poked around, and poked

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around. And if you look hard enough you can always find it and I found a piece of that carpet in the orchestra pit. Because it's everywhere. It was all over the country.

EV: This is the one you had down there right?

MP: No, no, no, no. This was this other carpet. This really attractive, sort of a purple and green look. And orange leather-esque and corduroy covers on the movie theatre seats and aluminum end pieces. You know the aluminum, those little tickey tackey things. And everywhere the smell of mold. I mean it was, it was just not real pretty. You know, ratty curtains, not enough power to really outfit a stage anymore. You know, enough to do, you know enough to do movies and that was about it. They chopped off the boxes, covered up the orchestra pit. You know, the whole nine yards. So that's what you entered into in 1974 when this place was purchased. And that's what we, that's what we started with to become what we are today. \$100,000 seven months to build, opera house and hotel, 13 years \$8,000,000 to restore. And we're about to spend another couple of million. So at some point we'll be saying it's \$15,000,000 and you add on some more time. But when, when the place was bought, started using it right away. But had to always have extra power somehow. You know, trying to just get people in here. And as, you know, as fate would have it, the first performance in here after it was purchased by The Art's Counsel was a holiday concert that the Galveston Corral did with Larry Patton directing and Maureen Patton in the fourth...

EV: Really, oh my. What did you all sing, Come to Jesus?

MP: We did some holiday stuff and at least some of the Messiah because it was all built around a holiday theme. And, so we had been asked to do that.

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EV: I bet that was fun.

MP: How about that? Yeah. And so when I started working here in '81 and my office was a block away at the time. I would come over here at the end of the day and we had a piano and I'd push the piano to the center of the stage and I'd have my music with me and I would just play and sing on stage to an empty house. And that was part of what, you that you ask about what I brought to it. Part of what I brought to it was I appreciated it so it is a wonderful house to sing in. It's, the acoustics are so fine. The hardest part of doing something in here is with amplification, it's not built for that.

EV: Did you, do you all have your own orchestra or do these travel companies bring their own orchestra?

MP: Yep, they bring their own sets, their own drops, their own props.

EV: I thought at some point they, didn't they at one point hire a local guy like the orchestra conductor to come in maybe with a...

MP: Well we just did Bernadette Peters here and we had to contract an orchestra for her. She brought her conductor and base and drums. I hired a music contractor out of Houston. They hired the 28 musicians that were needed for the band.

EV: Okay, that's fine.

MP: But that's not ours. I mean it's like's hiring, it would be like hiring the artist, it's just another, just another person to hire as the artist.

EV: So if Bernadette Peters, I was thinking of Bette Midler. If Bette Midler comes in, she brings her musical director with her then that director goes out and some musical...

MP: The director doesn't...

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EV: somebody...

MP: The director sends me a contract with a writer that says, "here's what I have to have, you have got to provide an orchestra of 28 people, here is the instrumentation, here is the rehearsal schedule..."

EV: Okay, that's what I meant...

MP: I pick up the phone and I call the person I work with in Houston and who is a musician and part of the Musicians Local and say, "I'm sending you this, I need a cost on it, here's the time table. This is what we need to do." That's part of being a touring house or road house instead of a production house. Now there are a couple of exceptions. When Paul Lanka did his show here, Paul Lanka travels with all of his band. He keeps his group together and you don't bring in...

EV: Right, so there are some people they have their own idiosyncrasies about the music, if you can call that idiosyncrasies ... (laughter) Do you have to, what do you if anything to the, where do the requests that maybe some little starlette brings with her/him or something do you just say, that's the way it is and bring your own, or do you have any of that?

MP: Well, I've told people and this is absolutely the gospel, I can count on one hand, 25 years and I can count on one hand the number of artists who have been what I would consider a problem. And it could be various degrees of that. I've never had an artist who was just totally obnoxious. But you know, somebody who was just was and I thought, (sigh)... "God, I really..."

EV: Can you tell us who they are, would you tell us who they are?

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MP: I'm not going to tell you who they are. I'll tell you who one of them is because she's dead. (laughter) Anyone who is dead, I'll tell you who that is. Um, and we presented Sara Vaughn here in concert. Wonderful artist. I mean, nobody can quarrel with how Sara Vaughn sings. You know, and I was in the house listening to the sound check. You know everything was fine. Everything was in place. I was standing at the back of the house of the show. She complained from the time she got out on that stage until the show was over about how bad the sound problem. The sound problems, this wasn't right, this wasn't right, this wasn't right. And I'm standing back there thinking, "What on earth are you talking about? I was here this afternoon, you were perfectly fine." Talked to some of my colleges. That's how you find out things in this business. They said, "it's her SOP." One of my colleges told me that he was standing in the back of his hall and that she was telling the audience about this awful dressing room that she had. His board president ran up to him and said, "Where on earth have you put her?" He said, "She's in the star dressing room." "Well has something happened to it?" "No." And it was her way of getting the audience to sort of feel sorry for her or to sort of get on her side. It is a very quirky kind of thing. But there are artists who do that. Very, you know, and I said, and afterwards after she left I had talked to the agency and there was a group in town that wanted to do a meet and greet with her. And they said, trust me on this you don't want her to do a meet and greet. Because she will insult your patrons. And I said, no we couldn't do it. And then I was really, really glad because I thought this is not a person you can trust to play fair with you and that's what it is about. I don't view people as, and I said at the time, "she'll never play here again." And of course she hasn't.

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And now she's dead, she can't. But I've never bought into the whole prima donnas thing or the diva thing. Because I think a lot of times people who get prima donnas and people who get called divas are really in truth perfectionists. They want it to be right for them. What we provide for them, I've got the best crew in the world. What we provide for them is somebody who knows what they are doing, being ready for them so they don't walk in here and nothing's done. You know, the lighting hasn't been done or the sound isn't hooked up yet or the, you know they asked for a glass of water on the stage and there is no water, or whatever the case may be. You know, the star attractions stay at the Tremont House. You're not going to find a more lovely hotel and within close proximity so they don't have to go out of the way. And so what they want is they want people to be professional. That's all they are asking for. So I don't buy into that whole prima donnas stuff very often. I mean somebody has to prove to me that they really are being obnoxious. I've never had anyone ask for something really bizarre. Willy Nelson wants organic foods, but he also, for the bus. You know it may take some extra time but that's not an unreasonable request I don't think. I mean these people are working really hard. Are they getting paid? Absolutely. Some of them are getting paid very, very, very well. But what they're really, they are on the road. And I have a real empathy for that. I have a real sensitive streak in me that says, "These people are giving us 100% and then some. If we can make their lives a little more pleasant by accommodating them then maybe we're going to stand against them." People love coming here. They love coming back here. Hal Holbrook has become a friend.

EV: I'm sorry who?

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MP: Hal Holbrook. I mean he's been here several times.

EV: Oh Hal Holbrook, yeah. Did he do the Mark Twain thing here?

MP: He's been here several times. You know James Whitmore has done Will Rogers here. Victor Border was here twice one of which was on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday tour.

EV: Victor Border?

MP: Victor Border, 90 years old, he's playing this place. Paula Laska has been here several times. Bernadette Peters has been here multiple times. I mean the list goes on and on and The Smothers Brothers are coming in next year. This will be their third or fourth time to be here.

EV: Are they really? I wish I had known when y'all did *Donkey* \_\_\_\_\_ (16.0)  
last...

MP: One of the best Broadway shows we've ever brought in.

EV: Yeah?

MP: It was just amazing.

EV: Who did the lead in that?

MP: We rarely have anybody you'd recognize as the lead.

EV: Really?

MP: But right now on Broadway you don't get many of those either.

EV: Yeah, yeah.

MP: I mean it's really becoming more of an ensemble effort. However, the person who did it on Broadway recently Brian Stokes Mitchell, who did a solo shot here which is one of the best evenings I've ever spent in this theatre.

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EV: Richard Condley did the first one...And what, did you get, are you going to be doing Chorus Line anytime? I've seen it like 80 times...

MP: Chorus Line is probably going to come back out on tour I'd say in two or three years because it has just come back to Broadway. So what you see is the tour and productions...

EV: Is it back on Broadway?

MP: It just reopened on Broadway this spring.

EV: Really, because I saw it in the [REDACTED] theatre (16.8) first time I saw it.

MP: You did?

EV: Yeah, and then I saw it again, when they did it, twice they came here. They did it one time I think either before or just after they opened the new one, the Newspaper guide...

MP: The Hobby Center?

EV: Either when they first opened or maybe one of the last things they did. And then...

MP: It played here, it played here a couple of times.

EV: God, I need to get on your mailing list...

MP: Oh yeah.

EV: That's a, I can do that, I can see that anytime.

MP: Wonderful.

EV: I have a thousand other things I need to ask you... (laughter)

MP: Go ahead.

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EV: So you've actually performed on this stage haven't you?

MP: Uh, huh...more than once. (laughter)

EV: Did you ever do a fill in for some of the shows that were coming through or ????

MP: Uh, no. No.

EV: Chorus or something else like that?

MP: And that wouldn't be appropriate because their bills travel. They don't come in and audition people for the show.

EV: My [redacted] (inaudible 17.6) go on with their lady and they said...

MP: No they have somebody else waiting to do that.

EV: (laughter) Okay. Do the uhh.

MP: Oh you asked about the strange requests...the strangest requests I got was not from a performer who played here but I was brokering a contract for a Mardi Gras performer for the Convention and Visitor's Bureau and, I'm not going to tell you who it was, and in the contract writer it had a...

EV: I'm sorry in the what?

MP: In the contract writer, you know because you have the contract and then you have all the other stuff. You know that you're an attorney. (laughter). It had very last, and it had 12 pair of men's white jockey shorts size, whatever, and another 12 pair of a another size, like three different sizes and then 12 pairs of white socks or whatever. And I'm looking at this and I'm thinking I'm not believing this and I called the agent and I said, "Did you put this in here to see if people read it all the way through?" I said, "This is the most hysterical thing I ever saw." He said, "Oh, well that wouldn't apply to you anyway

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because it is a run out date." And I said, "Well let me tell you something, if it didn't apply to me you'd have a broken deal. Because," I said, "this is absolutely insane. The money they are paying this person and if they can't travel what do they do not even go to the washateria, they just wear their underwear and then throw it away?" It was hysterical. I couldn't believe it.

EV: But that person's still alive so you can't tell me who it is?

MP: He's still alive.

EV: If I shut it off will you tell me?

MP: (laughter) I will, but if I tell you on the tape I'll have to kill you. You know it's one of those things...

EV: (laughter).

MP: We had somebody ask for Chris\_\_\_\_\_ (16.9) champagne. And the fact is we provided it, you know, it was just a bottle. And that was fine.

EV: How much time does these, do these shows come into town? Do they need rehearsal time to just get used to the...

MP: Most of them don't. If it's a, lets say it's a Broadway show, we've got a show coming in next year, it needs a \_\_\_\_\_ (inaudible 19.6). They are doing this show every night, or most nights of the week on the road. They come in here. The crew comes first. They will do a load in, probably starting at 8:00 in the morning or earlier. And they are putting the set up, getting everything done, loading the costumes in. The wardrobe people are getting those ready and so forth and then the cast comes over much later in the day, put their body mikes on, they go out there and do the sound check. They get a feel

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for the stage. If they say, "okay, this stage is has a 38 foot wide proscenium and we just played last night in a theatre with a stage that had a 50 foot proscenium so here's how we are going to adjust. It's like re-blocking briefly. But they are used to, used to doing that. It's what they do. You know, that's how the whole thing works. And then they load out that night, I mean, a lot of times we'll do two performances or maybe three of a Broadway show. So they are loading in, lets say we are doing two and we're doing two in one day. We're doing a matinee and an evening. They load in, they do the matinee, they take a break for dinner, they do the 8:00 show. They load out and are back on the road to go somewhere else. It's a young man's game.

EV: Oh really.

MP: It's, you know, touring like that is a killer. When they go into Houston, the Houston Broadway series is a week or two weeks long. So when they go to Houston they were just, they are just high cotton, or in any of the major markets like that. That tour will only do...

EV: Do you coordinate your... whatever shows you bring in with the Houston season or Austin?

MP: Yeah, we, we don't do anything that Houston's doing because Houston's our market. 80% of our audience comes from Houston. Galveston is a community of 60,000 people. The rule of thumb is that you can depend on 1% of your population to support the arts and other kinds of cultural things. And that would be 600 people. And Galveston's demographics are really, really skewed to the have and the have-nots. So we can't even count on 1%. If we did not have the Houston market coming down here we

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could not survive. And that's not the people with the second homes down on the west end and the condos and whatever. These are the people from this whole area of north of us. So no we don't do things that are in Houston. We might do it the next year or they might do something next year but we don't coordinate with them. However, I coordinate with Orange Texas, The \_\_\_\_\_ (21.8) Theatre. A lot of times we'll do a lot of the same things. Or the Paramount Theatre in Austin. Um, not so much in San Antonio, because San Antonio, San Antonio tends to coordinate more with Houston. But sometimes with Fort Worth, The Bass Hall in Fort Worth, Tyler, College Station. So there's, in fact, I just hosted a meeting at the beginning of last week with the Southwest Presenters. And we're all in an, you know in an organization together. We talk amongst ourselves. To find out, what's out there, what works, what doesn't work.

EV: Is there price difference in the tickets between you and Houston? I mean, not, you know, I think they've almost priced themselves out of the market. For me to take my wife, for both of us to go see a show it's sometimes \$160 just to walk in the place.

MP: And you might pay more to see it here.

EV: Might pay more to see it here, really?

MP: You know why?

EV: What would make the difference?

MP: Well, The Hobby Center seats 2,600 people. We seat 1,000.

EV: I see...

MP: And the costs are going to be, you know, the costs for producing the show. That might be a bigger show, but they are sitting down for two weeks. We may have, you

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know, it may certainly cost them a little bit more but they got 2,600 seats to sell. We have 1,000. That makes a huge, it makes a huge...

EV: Where is that...

MP: You are also sitting, every place you sit in this theatre you could afford to buy a less expensive seat and still see the show well as opposed to sitting a football field away.

EV: What in this business, what makes that big gap of expense? Why is it so expensive to put on? Is it salary that the stars are asking...?

MP: Well it depends. In the case of a star attraction, a lot of it has to do with their fee, what they perceive their fee can be or what the market will bear. It you're talking, it's not with some exception, you're not talking about saying, oh we want to present Bernadette Peters and that's all there is. Because Bernadette Peters has a conductor arranger, and a piano, bass and drums and her assistant who travels with her and all of the things that go with that. And you know we have to put together the orchestra. So the fee, sort of the structure changes some. If you are talking about next season I have James Earl Jones coming here. He's doing an evening of poetry. My favorite poetry. "Poetry I Love to Read" I think is the way it's titled. And then he does a Q & A. It's just him. Sitting on the stage. So, even if you're paying him a relatively high fee, there's nothing to putting him on. I mean my labor costs are going to be nil. It's him. If you're presenting, if you're presenting Bernadette Peters, you've got an orchestra, you've got two rehearsals, you have a loading that's going to take a lot of time. You have extra sound equipment that you have to rent because it's a big deal. And if it's a Broadway

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show you've got the cost of the costume shows, the sets, the travel for the whole group that has to be amortized over all of that touring that they do. It's expensive.

EV: You said they, so if it's a solo act like Bernadette Peters would rehearse?

MP: Oh yeah, because it's an orchestra that she's never worked with before.

EV: Okay.

MP: You know, this is a pick up orchestra.

EV: That was going to be, when you contract an orchestra for her she needs to hear...

MP: They need to hear her.

EV: Right.

MP: And they need to know what she's doing. And her conductor's there so he rehearses them before she does. So he has one rehearsal with just him and then she comes in and does a full dress rehearsal.

EV: Okay, let me ask you a really silly question...is someone like Bernadette Peters, and maybe I'm picking the wrong one, but are they musical enough to say, "lets go back here to note C and lets drop the measure and do this?" or do they just do it out of the seat of their pants?

MP: No, (inaudible 25.6) she has to do a rehearsal. And they, you know, they do some wood chopping in there. Paul Lanks is a concert musician and he does...

EV: Yeah right.

MP: He does everything. Do some of them phone it in at rehearsals? Maybe, maybe. But they give a lot, we opened last season with Tony Bennett. It was just Tony Bennett, piano, bass and drums. And it was...

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EV: It doesn't take much more for Tony Bennett. (laughter)

MP: No, no. So the fee for him was all in the front end. Because it was just him. We didn't have to worry about, you know the labor costs were next to nothing. All we had were piano, bass and drums. You know, it wasn't like you were loading in some big show. We did Julio Iglesias. He brings, he travels with his own musicians. And that was a bigger show. He did a meet and greet afterwards, you know. A lot of these stars will do that. I'll ask him...

EV: You know I saw him at The Summit and he was so rude I couldn't believe it...

MP: Really, he was charming here. That's the other thing. It's funny, I get these reports from people saying oh this is terrible. And this one has done this and that and the other. Something happens to them when they walk in this building and they look at this theatre and I swear to you it changes how they feel.

EV: It must be because he was, he was just I don't know. He is what we say in Spanish "very \_\_\_\_\_ (26.7)" and there isn't a real translation for that into English. Other than, rude is about as close as you're going to get. But...

MP: I picked him up at the airport here in my SUV.

EV: Really?

MP: And I drove him here. And afterwards we did a meet and greet and he agreed to do one. And I had just my sponsors, my high end donors and then he had these other people who crashed the party. And I thought, I thought, there was this little old lady and I mean she had to be "this" tall. And I walked in there with him and she made a b-line for him and I mean, we had security and everything, because these women go nuts. They

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go absolutely nuts. And, it's the only time I have been sitting in the theatre when somebody is performing and there were these crazy women hollering, "I LOVE YOU JULIO!" I mean it was hysterical.

EV: Throwing their panties...

MP: Oh my gosh! I thought, what... get a life! (laughter)

EV: I saw that (inaudible) 27.5

MP: Yeah, this woman and... I mean she's old. She's pulling on my arm. I mean she's trying to get to him. And I'm trying to sort of protect him from her. And I said, "Ma'am, you mustn't pull. You mustn't just grab. You have to be patient." And finally, she backed up and he immediately walked into the crowd and started hugging on these young, gorgeous women. And she said, "Well they're..." what did she say, "They're grabbing him" or something and I said, "Well no ma'am he's grabbing them. It's different." (laughter). I mean it was just bizarre. It was just bizarre. You know, nice people in the artist. Uh, Rudolph \_\_\_\_\_ (28.1) danced here towards the end of his life. And people said, "How was that?" Because, you know, everybody knew that he had this really, he was very temper mental. And I said, "He was a sweetheart." He did a party after he danced and he sat on that stage and signed autographs and talked to people. And it was amazing. Two weeks later, one week later or whenever it was, he went to London and he decked some guy on the stage. Got mad and (POW!) just popped him one. And people called me and said, "Did you hear that, did you hear that?" And I said, "He was a pussycat. He was just the sweetest person in the world." So, going back to the whole

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diva prima donnas thing, I think a lot of it has to do with how you treat them. A lot of it depends on how professional you are and how you are ready for them. You know Beth...

EV: Oh yeah.

MP: Beth could be really... but Beth wanted it perfect.

EV: Yeah,

MP: I don't see that as temperament. See I see that as paying attention, doing what you are supposed to do from a business standpoint of your business, of your art, you know, that you want it right.

EV: Yeah, I don't know that if in my lifetime I met anyone that was more of a perfectionist than Beth. I mean, I've really bumped into some who were sort of that way but nothing like him. He was incredible. As a result he got good performances out of it.

MP: Of course. And that's all these people want to do. They want to give it their best.

This is who they are. I mean, it's kind of a ball player... you talking about Craig Biggio. Craig Biggio is a ball player. I mean it's who he is. And you can see it, you see it in the way he plays, you can see it in the way he looks. You see it in what he does. It defines it. People who are artists, that's who they are. I mean Victor Borga was performing at the age of 90, still taking \_\_\_\_\_ (29.5) off the piano bench. And I took him to dinner afterwards while his son was sort of seeing to the, sort of wrapping up stuff and whatever.

We were sitting down in the corner and he was saying, "What did you think of the shows today?" And I said, "They were wonderful." He did a matinee and an evening. He said, "You know it's getting kind of hard to do these two shows in one day." And I was just

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laughing the whole time. And I said, "Mr. Borga, forgive me but your 90," I said, "Your kind of schedule would kill a person half your age."

EV: Why are you even doing one act?

MP: Yeah.

EV: Thank God he's still doing it.

MP: Then he died (\_\_\_\_\_ 30.0). His birthday was January 3<sup>rd</sup> and The Grand's Birthday is January 3<sup>rd</sup>, our opening night was January 3<sup>rd</sup>. So I told him, I said, "When you do your 100<sup>th</sup>, when you have your 100<sup>th</sup> birthday you need to play it here, because it's our birthday. And we're older than you but not by all that much." (laughter).

EV: So you bind with some of these artists do you?

MP: Yeah. Larry Gatlin is absolutely a doll. He and I just love each other. It's just, you know, I worked really hard to get he and his brothers here and it was just like having family come home.

EV: There's a country and western singer named Larry Patton isn't there?

MP: No.

EV: It's on the internet. Yeah, the Texas Guide.

MP: Oh my gosh.

EV: And, I think I saw an ad where you put a green, but if you just put in Larry Patton on the google you'll get a country and western singer.

MP: Yeah, oh how funny.

EV: Did you, are there any ghosts in this theatre?

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MP: I have had people swear to me that there are ghosts. I must not be real receptive because I've never really felt the cold chill or whatever. But people have shown me where they fill it.

EV: The phantom of the opera...

MP: The phantom. Yeah, and I wouldn't doubt it. I mean, there is something very interesting being here with all the lights off and you're alone. (laughter). Because when I first started here I was the first one in the building in the morning and was the last one to leave at night. And I'd be turning off lights and I was walking around in the dark, you know. Because we didn't have, it was before the building was even restored so there weren't any real safety lights or anything else. And my office was under the stairs on the orchestra lobby where they had the movie, the movie theatre manager's office was there. This building was so holey that when I sat at my desk and my desk faced this way, so I'm sitting like this, when the North wind blew it blew my hair. That's how holey the building was. I mean, you couldn't get it cool in the summer and you couldn't get it warm in the winter. You know, so and I'd go prowling around in this place with, you know, without any lights on and I never felt like the icy finger touch me or whatever. But I've had people who have done that, you know...

EV: \_\_\_\_\_ turn your voice down...(inaudible 31.7)

MP: No, no.

EV: (laughter). Maybe they like you.

MP: Well, maybe they do. Maybe they just sense I'm kindred spirit and they just leave me alone.

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EV: Well you know you're Latin, you're supposed to be able to take this connection.

But you're a protestant Latin.

MP: I'm a protestant Latin. Yeah, I don't know. It just...

EV: That makes a big difference.

MP: It must.

EV: I mean I say that as a protestant Latin myself.

MP: I must not be receptive. See that's my fear. (laughter) I'm not receptive to the ghosts.

EV: Well I think it happens to the Catholic, because it gives them an excuse to call a saint in.

MP: There you go.

EV: We don't say John Calvin will you please take care of this? (laughter).

MP: Yeah (laughter).

EV: Okay, let me see what I've got... Do you, uh, besides Gatlin do you have any others that you get, that you're pretty tight with or at least on a...

MP: You know it's interesting. For instance when Hal Halbrook was doing King Lear in New York, I sent him note and I went back stage and did something. And he was showing everybody the post card. He said, "See I played here, this is, you know..." It's that kind of thing. David Parson, I mean I look around and I'm looking at the posters in here to kind of remind me... Mark Russell, do you know who Mark Russell is? Political author?

EV: Yeah, yeah.

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MP: He has been here a number of times. He is delightful. Some of these people I could literally pick up the phone and call and actually talk to them. You know, Paul Lanka said, "Once you come to Vegas and, come sometime when I'm there..."

EV: Who was this?

MP: Paul Lanka. And he says, "Let me know when you're coming..." He said, "I'll make the arrangements for you." And that's not lip service. Some of the people I would say that's probably lip service. Others of them you know when they really are sincere because they appreciate what we do. And I think that's the difference. Um, the great Marilyn Horn sang on this stage. You know, an opera singer. I mean I was so excited about having her here. She is another one that is a meet and greet and we had a retired diva here in Galveston who sang Wozzeck and Marilyn Horn had sung Wozzeck. And I was so excited because I had them together and I said, "You have to meet each other because you are the only two people I know in the world who both sang Wozzeck and they just had the loveliest conversation. Part of, you know part of the fun that I get out of this is sometimes bringing people together.

EV: Yeah, but you have to explain to me what Wozzeck is...

MP: Wozzeck is Al Bonbares's opera Wozzeck which is an "A tonal" opera so that the notes are just wherever. You know, I mean it just has to be...

EV: How do you spell it?

MP: It's W-O-Z-Z-E-C-K pronounced Vozkeck. It's just, you know, one of these really unbelievable pieces of music that I'm not sure anybody understands or maybe even likes but, you know the most difficult kind of stuff in the world to sing. Because the

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pitches are all over creation. And here were these two women, you know, who had done it. It was just fun. You know, Bev would have gotten a big charge out of that. He would have loved that.

EV: (laughter). Bev.

MP: Willie has been here several times now. Willie Nelson. I can't say that he is a friend.

EV: He's just basically charming to everybody.

MP: He is very shy. He is a very quiet man. Bill Engvall was here. Do you know who Bill?

EV: No.

MP: He's one of the Blue Collar Comedy...

EV: Okay, okay.

MP: He's wonderful. Bill Engvall was born in Galveston during a storm.

EV: Really?

MP: Lived in Texas City for a while. Crazy...the crazy things you discover.

EV: So what was your, when you were a little girl what was your dream in the arts? It wasn't running an opera house I take it?

MP: Never occurred to me. I mean I really think I wanted to grow up and be Sid Charisse. You know, or Debbie (inaudible) 34.9

EV: Oh I wish you would have...

MP: Me too. (laughter)

EV: Larry would have had a lot of competition.

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MP: Yeah.

EV: You know I saw her one time and I just, she just blew me away. And I couldn't, I didn't get to see those legs, just that face...

MP: Yeah.

EV: She was with her husband Tony Mark.

MP: Yeah. Actually I really wanted to grow up and be Roy Rogers.

EV: Will Rogers?

MP: No Roy Rogers...

EV: Roy Rogers, did you really?

MP: (laughter). You know I never wanted to be Dale Evans because Roy had a lot more fun and he got to ride Trigger. I mean, come on, give me a break. And he got to fight the bad guys. And I really, I must have some sort of identity crisis that goes on because I really wanted to be Gene Kelley and Fred Astaire. It never occurred to me to want to be Ginger Rogers...you know. Because the guys, you know these consummate dancers. Oh my word. And with Roy Rogers, I mean, he was... he was my cowboy.

EV: But you're also, I find it surprising you're a sports fan.

MP: Yeah, see there is. Well and I also wanted to, I actually wanted to be the star of a baseball team. Uh, the, I should have worn my jersey today. My brother played little league ball, who was on the Allstar team, he was the first baseman. And I grew up in a neighborhood where there were almost all boys. So I played football in the street and baseball. I mean that's back when you could do all that sort of thing. And I had this fantasy, I've told people this before and they were just hysterical, that my brother, my

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brother's two years older than I but that when we grew up we were really the same size.

He was very short and I was taller for my age and he was short. And we looked like twins. You know we just looked a lot alike. And I had this fantasy that he would get sick and I would put on his baseball uniform and have my hair all up in the cap and I would show up and I would play the game and I'd make the winning catch and I'd make the winning hit. Because you know they didn't have lassie league. So when our girls were in lassie league it was just wonderful. And I got to play in the mother/daughter game. You know, it was, for me it was just wonderful. And the family went out to El Paso one time and my mother had found this article about a place out in El Paso where you could ride horses and you could spend the night under the stars and have the breakfast in the morning and all that on a ranch. And they cooked the steaks that they are grilling right there. And I just couldn't wait. I mean, it was, for me it was I get to be Roy Rogers, just for a day. I couldn't move for a week but I got to be Roy Rogers for those two days. And it was just wonderful. And when I was practically crying because I hurt so badly, my leg, every muscle in my body was just...

EV: That's was at the, down by \_\_\_\_\_ (37.1) or Clints or something down there, just south of El Paso?

MP: It's just outside of El Paso.

EV Oh.

MP: Old Fort Misery is where they would take you...that's the name of the fort. But you would spend the night out under the stars. They had a singing cowboy...

EV: Yeah, that's, you know that's my home...

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MP: I didn't know that.

EV: Yeah. And those skies, I really miss, I miss those skies, the sunsets, they are fantastic. Uh...

MP: But see I wanted to do all that. I wanted to be the musical comedy singer-dancer or the movie musicals or do the opera or whatever. I loved doing summer soccer

EV: And hit the... clear the bases in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning.

MP: I was honored in the fall by the Chamber of Commerce with the Spirit of Galveston Award. And I was sitting there in the audience. And they had people coming and they were talking and doing this stuff (knocking). And I was sitting there and all of the sudden I hear this voice, do you go to baseball games at all?

EV: Once in a while I go.

MP: Well the man who is the announcer at the stadium itself is Bob Ford. Bob Ford used to live here in Galveston and he did the local access TV and all kinds of stuff. So I have known Bob forever. And he used to interview me for stuff, you know, about the theatre and all that. So I'm sitting there, and whenever I'd go to the ball game I'd waive to him because I'd see him in the booth. I was sitting in my seat and you hear coming from back stage... "It's the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup>," you know, "The bases are loaded and they are sending in a pinch hitter. The Astros are down (whatever) and the hitter, and coming up to bat is Maureen Patton!" I'm just screaming, "It's Bob, It's Bob.." Bob walked down on the stage and one of the things he has is a REAL player's jersey. Not the ones you buy, even the expensive ones, but the real deal with the number 25 on it. Patton on

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the back. It's José Cruz's number. I mean his is a retired number. And it's got all the patches and all the... and they gave me that jersey.

EV: Oh my gosh.

MP: So I wear that to the ball games. Absolutely was wild. And I've gone to a lot of different baseball stadiums in the, you know in the country wherever I've gone, you know there's been baseball games. So I've been to Camden Yards and I've been to Yankee Stadium and the Mets Stadium. Both the stadiums in Chicago. Where the Giants play, where the Padres play, the Rangers, Kansas City, and Miami and been to a couple of minor league parks.

EV: Seen them Damn Yankees yet?

MP: Yeah, I've seen the Yankees.

EV: I mean have you'll done it here?

MP: Oh have we done Damn Yankees? Yes we actually have done Damn Yankees.

EV: (laughter)

MP: And of course right now in Houston they are probably thinking "Damn Yankees" more than usual. (laughter)

EV: Yeah, they took a few pitchers back...

MP: Nolan Ryan has come here.

EV: Yeah.

MP: Nolan Ryan comes here to see the Tuna productions...

EV: Really?

MP: Yeah and he is a delight as is his wife Rudy. Nice, nice people.

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EV: I think I've seen the first Tuna at the Old Timer Theatre in Houston.

MP: Yeah? Well, Greater Tuna was the first and then they did Tuna Christmas. We do Tuna Christmas every year. We do Greater Tuna as often as they sort of bring it out. And then they did the world premiere of Red, White and Tuna here.

EV: I remember that. I remember seeing that in the paper.

MP: And this summer, August 4<sup>th</sup> they are doing the world premiere of the 4<sup>th</sup> one, Tuna Does Vegas. Now just think about that...Tuna Does Vegas. Dee Dee Snavely in a slot machine. I mean there are so many characters that you can just imagine what it'll be.

EV: I'll be honest with you, I have a hard time understanding their Texas accents sometimes.

MP: (laughter)

EV: You know. And I had, I think I may have gone with **Jualina** to that, maybe not. Maybe not, yes I did, I think I did.

MP There are two others that are friends. I went to their opening night in New York when they did Tuna in New York and got to go to the after party and "wait for the reviews." What fun.

EV: Oh, I'm sure!

MP: They are delightful, they are wonderful.

EV: I mean to go to those things and wait for the...

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2 SIDE A

MP: (beginning)... in, you know in my hand.

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EV: This is probably 10...right?

MP: Yeah.

EV: Okay.

MP: And I literally am running down the street, you can ask Bonnie, Mr. Jim, Mr. Turner...like an idiot. And then I said, I introduced myself and next time you come home to Houston. I said, "I hope that if you've got a minute, you'll call me and let me show you our theatre in Galveston."

EV: He never, he didn't know you from Adam at that point?

MP: Oh no, I'm just tracking him down there on the street. And we had a big laugh about it since then. His sister, who is a dancer and a dance teacher brought a bunch of people down here for a performance that we did one time. And then the first time he played here, he said, "You know what's weird," he said, "I think my sister and I actually played this place. You know, one of the Mardi Gras times or something." And he's just a doll, he's just the nicest man.

EV: You know, I was on the board of the S. P....

MP: SPCVA

EV: Whatever.

MP: Wait a minute...HSPVA.

EV: HSPVA. And [REDACTED] (.9) was a wonderful friend of mine. And I wanted to introduce, wanted to interview her for this and, but here's the neat thing about Ruth Denning, she, she asked me to be on the board. You know, the organization board. It

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wasn't like I was a big force behind that. But she waited for me to get my license, to pass the bar to do a little real estate thing for her. So she was my very first client.

MP: Oh my word.

EV: Yeah.

MP: Now see, after you mention it, after Tommy played here the first time. I saw that he was doing a book signing in Houston. And so I went up there and waited in line at this little book store. And I think, I think my younger daughter was with me. And we were waiting and I had written on the little thing on the book mark who it's to and so forth and I had gotten one for a really special friend too. And so uh, I was standing in line when he walked in and Ruth, and he was there in a wheelchair. And he saw her and just went wild, went over and hugged her. And then said to everybody in the room, "This is my dance teacher, this is Ruth Denning." And I thought, you know there is where you take the measure of a person. You know, you see how they are when the spot light is not on them and all of that stuff.

EV: Yeah.

MP: So I'm standing in line and I put my books down in front of him and he's just, doing the whole time and he says, "To Maureen...MAUREEN!" And he jumps up and gives me a hug and then he announces to the room, "This woman runs this absolutely wonderful theatre..." I mean he just, what a, what a genuine, and that's what I said those are the kind of people that you say, you could say, "Yes, that they're friends." They become friends. And they appreciate that those relationships because it makes life a lot

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better when you're going to do your show and in a number of theatres in the country, yet you establish some connections.

EV: Yeah, did you ever meet Susan Stub who was Ruth Denny's?

MP: No.

EV: No? Do you remember a young lady who apparently did a play here to celebrate the storm? A little play... Delora Carnogy...do you remember her?

MP: No.

EV: Maybe she did it here. Maybe, was the other, it wasn't Theatre Under the Stars... what was the other one you used to have out here on the beach?

MP: The outdoor musicals? We've also got The Strand Theatre which is little bitty. It's a little 200 seat venue.

EV: I thought she was going to do it here, but...she did, she wrote, she was my next door neighbor.

MP: And you know, she might have and I might have forgotten by now. I mean, truly.

EV: Yeah, she was my next door neighbor. She went up to New York to break in the big time. You know.

MP: Uh, huh.

EV: She's still waiting... She's one of those thousands banging on the door.

MP: Sure.

EV: But for a break here and there any one of them could be an Academy Award, Tony Award.

MP: Oh absolutely. There's no one best of everything.

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EV: No.

MP: There really isn't. Because there are thousands of people who have the same amount of talent. There is a time and place. Yeah.

EV: When I was in the army we would do maneuvers out in the middle of the Mohave Desert and the guy, we got, we snuck, not snuck, we were allowed to go to Vegas one time while we were going through all of this. And the taxi cab drivers told us, said, "Look you guys, I'll take you where you want to go. It's very expensive here for you," us GI's. "But, uh, there's a whole lot of places that are not expensive. And these are people just waiting for a break and they are as good as anybody else." Well we saw a bunch of those. You know, and jazz was just coming in, this new jazz was, just, you know like the **count basic guys** (4.9) and all of that just coming., **Stan Kenten** and all those guys. Um were just coming in to a whole new era of popularity. Anyway, they, we saw a lot of those. And we just couldn't help it. You know, you got to go to the big players. So we go to the Woodpecker and as it turned out we never had to buy drinks because back then GI's were, you know, all the vets around would be picking up your tab. And some guy let us in for free at the gate. So, uh, you know. That's was my first year \_\_\_\_\_ (5.5).

EV: Maureen, I don't have a whole lot more to ask you about. Is there nothing that I have not asked you about that we have not covered that you want to add in here?

MP: If what you're doing is really wanting to tell the story of this place, and obviously I feel, I feel like I've been an important part of it because I've been here forever. But projects like this one, and there are lots of these around the country, and I've done

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consulting work on others. To go into a community and talk to them about what it means to save a theatre and what the value is and all the rest of it. And I would have to say that these theatres were always in the heart of the city. And what happens when you bring them back is that they become a really big piece of the revitalization of that community. And this one has certainly done that. This has been an anchor for downtown. It not only brings people at night to an environment. But when I started here, there was bar after bar after bar, topless bar, after topless bar. And little by little they all went away because they weren't comfortable with the activity that was here. It was, it was a slow but an extra push to, that's the way it happens. That's what happens all over the country. And we are a major source of economic impact on this city. We put a lot of "heads and beds," as they say in the hotel industry, because of all of the people who come here from out of town to see the shows and all the people who come here to perform who stay overnight. And I think that's the legacy that this place will leave, whether it's in a time capsule or anywhere else. It can't be done single handedly. If you had all the money in the world and you needed a play toy I guess you could do it all by yourself. But the fact is there are key people who have gone through this every step of the way with me. You know, who supported me. Who used me as the point person, you know. Who said, "Oh but, we, but you did this." But that's not true. The primary person who comes to mind is **Noney Thompson**, who is a, **Noney Kempner Thompson** (7.9), who was my first board president, who struggled through so much of this with me. Who is going to be 94 this summer and is still a heart, you know, of this organization. And we have an award every year that's called the Community Enrichment Award, it's the Leonore Kempner

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Thompson Community Enrichment Award and that's her, that is she. And the board members, the volunteers, you know, the staff, the crew, all of these people who have gotten involved here, I think also have been part of what informs the credibility of the place, the quality of the place, who connect with the artists. You know, as we take care of them. It is a passion, it's not a job. And that's what you want. And it's a 24/7 commitment. It's like, I have 3 children. I have two daughters and an opera house. And the opera house has probably taken more of my time and given me more agony than my two girls put together. But it is, I think it would not be remiss to say it's a calling. And there are a lot of people out there like me who feel this way about their theatres. And feel that enormous emotional commitment to it and that many times is what separates the historic theatre movement from let's build a new theatre, let's do whatever. Sometimes it's this history, it's having, it's knowing that Williams Jennings Bryan appeared on that stage orating and that Hal Holbrook came along years later and did Mark Twain. Or that the camels were here with their fleas. Or that Helen Hays came in the last years of her life as part of a presentation that the National Wildflower Society had here when they did a conference here in Galveston. And she and Dorothy Kerston and James Dick and Horton Foot all appeared on that stage as a special event for that group.

EV: God, Dorothy Kerston...

MP: Yeah, and she walked into the theatre and I had done Madam Butterfly with Dorothy Kerston in New York when Larry and I were in the Master's Sigmas together, New York, San Antonio, when we were in the Master's Center. She and Helen Hays walked into this building together and I greeted them in the lobby and walked into the

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theatre. She stood behind the brass rail at the back of the theatre. She was dressed all in pink, I tell this story all the time, dressed all in pink. Pink hat, pink shoes, pink suit. She looked like cotton candy. You know, she's tiny. And she said, clasped her hands together and said, "Oh Dorothy isn't this an adorable little theatre?" And then she walked up on the stage and the stage was preset for her with chair, a rug. She was going to do The Letters from Victoria Regina, which that was her portion. The only people in the place were the stage manager and myself and Dorothy Kearson. She went up there and sat in the chair and she starts talking. You know, Bill and I were in tears. It was an unbelievable moment. And, of course, then she told me she'd probably played here. She said, "I'm sure I played here. I played them all." Said, "I went from town to town on a train.... That's what I did." Uh, you know moments like that you can't replicate.

EV: Yeah, I think...

MP: I've been extraordinarily blessed I guess is the bottom line. This is, have I worked hard? Oh yeah. Yeah. You know, it's, you go into it knowing that's what you're going to do. But I've been so blessed with being given the chance to do this.

EV: Uh, I think in theatre, ironic, maybe it's not ironic because it's all entertainment, but a theatre and a ball park establishes a longevity of the team, it becomes an institution, a part of life. And you can sit down with some 90 year old who was there and maybe saw some world series or they had heard Caruso sitting in a certain palace and it's a shame we tear down those little theatres.

MP: Oh absolutely.

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EV: Because that, that, I don't know, I find it I'm so glad that El Paso kept its Plaza Theatre.

MP: Oh I've been there.

EV: Yeah, isn't that beautiful?

MP: And **The Alamdra (12.5)** I was really hoping that they would do something with The Alamdra because the Alamdra was gorgeous, was wonderful, had such promise. The Plaza I thought any moment was going to go away because they just they were...

EV: It kept sinking and popping back up again.

MP: Yeah.

EV: But when I once saw The Majestic in San Antonio I was just blown away. I mean that is just a...

MP: See you've got a 3,600 seat theatre. It's a movie palace that was built by John Eberson or designed by John Eberson, the atmospheric theatre. You've got this one that is more on the scale of a European opera house. And everything in between. You've got Radio City Music Hall that seats 6,000 and you've got the little Anson opera house in Anson Texas that seats 300. You know, and yet they all have a place and a piece of that history. When I talk to people, you know, who have memories of... "Oh I remember I saw, I had my first date with my husband here." Or, "I was in the opera house when Tex Ridder rode his horse up the isle and on to the stage with all the kids screaming in the theatre." And I've got friends who are here now who were here when he did that. And when I go to these other communities and I talk to them about the value of saving their theatre and it looks like it needs tons of work and all the rest of it. And then the question

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I get asked is, "How long before it's self supporting?" And I have learned not to laugh out loud. (laughter). And then I say, "You know when you make this commitment you're in it for life." These theatres are not built in a way that they were ever be self supporting. You will always be fund raising. You will always be maintaining because maintenance is a critical component of this and you're talking about a very old building. And that's the way it is. But it's something that will not only tug at your heart strings but it will be lasting and it will provide value to your community no matter what you do.

EV: You know I was thinking about this when I saw those little girls.

MP: Those little girls are dancing on the same stage that Ana Pavola danced. And Tommy Chung and Rudolph Noray.

EV: And they are going to come back and they're going say, you know when I was a little girl I danced on that stage.

MP: They do now. They do now.

EV: And I just, you open the venue for a variety of things don't you?

MP: We had both of our daughter's wedding reception on that stage.

EV: Really?

MP: We've done weddings, we've done birthday parties. We did carnation for Mardi Gras. We've done meetings, we've done film festivals. We've done, you know we've had memorial services.

EV: Whatever pays the rent.

MP: Well, or whatever somebody feels like... You know, one of, two memorial services, one particular, one was a very good friend and someone who had been an

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accompanist for Larry and me for years. I grew up knowing him. He grew up knowing my family and he knew my mother and dad before I was born. Wonderful organist and pianist. And they asked about doing a memorial service here. He was on my very first board. He played for me in this theatre when I performed. And of course it was appropriate that we do that here. And another board member who died and they did a memorial service and I sang for his service. We did it here.

EV: What about your crew? Do you have of them that have been with you for a long, long time?

MP: Uh, the four, my four full time stage hands with me right now. Only one has been with me a long time. I've lost, through death, I've lost two different staff members. One who was my sound man, who I had worked with at Galveston College before he started working for me here. And of course my stage manager had been with me for 20 years. A lot of my staff stays with me a very long time. And I think that that's, again, I think that that's testament to how people feel about the work that they do here and what it means to them and how they get involved because, they all work really, really hard. I mean, there is no such thing as a "regular work week." We always sort of always laugh when somebody says, "Oh, so do you just sort of take off for the summer." You know, where do people get these ideas? I don't know.

EV: What happens when Madam Maureen leaves for vacation? Who takes the..?

MP: Well...

EV: I mean does it have a life of it's own, does your staff, it can survive?

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MP: Yeah and I'm careful when I take the time off, obviously. But also I'm only a phone call away. I always have a computer with me. Probably the more critical question that is looming in the future, I'm not ready yet but at some point I'm going to retire.

EV: That was probably going to be my last question...are you going to wiggle your toes in the sand and stuff?

MP: You know I told Larry, I said, "I don't, I don't not want to be here, yet." And I think that I'll know when it's time and I'll think, "I just don't want to go do that anymore." It's hard for me to imagine that such a day will even come. I am blessed because our kids and our grandkids are all in Houston. So it's not like we are traveling great distances to see them. We see them a lot, which is such a great thing. And I enjoy what I'm doing. I think I still have the ability and talent to do it. My board got very nervous because I ended up in the hospital. I was in the hospital on 9/11. First time I had ever gone to an emergency room. First time I had ended up in the hospital for anything other than something, like a baby. You know, I still have my tonsils and appendix, you know. So, but it was a non-specific viral kind of thing that happened or bacteria. And, scared my board half to death. Because it was only about nine months after we'd lost Bill. So it really freaked them out.

EV: Who is Bill?

MP: My...

EV: Oh you're assistant..

MP: My assistant, yeah. And so they immediately said, well should you have somebody that you're training at some time in the distant future if you do retire or should

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you do this, that, or the other. And I said, "No, because if I train somebody to do this they'll take a job somewhere else. And we won't have them anyway." And I said, "I can assure you that if I should cough up my toast tomorrow, you'll have a line out the door from all over this place, all over this country, we don't live in a vacuum." And I've been President of The League of Historic American Theatres, there are a lot of people who would love this job. And they are all just like me in one way or the other. They are not "me." But they are cut from a similar cloth. I said, "You can't really plan until I tell you and I say to you, I'll give you a year. And at the end of a year I'm gone, then you can plan. But you can't plan." And the people who've worked for me are all departments of one. So it's not like I could say, "Oh, my marketing director could take over." That's not what she wants to do. It's not who she is. She is a marketing director. She's an artist. She's a graphic artist. She's absolutely wonderful. I don't think you could pay her enough money to do this job. My development director is wonderful at fundraising, my box office manager is an IT person. Those are all skill sets. That's not necessarily who you want to be in that position. So, you know, there's an amazing little bit of movement in this field. Because people do tend to find a niche and they stay there. I told Max, retiring after 20 something years up at SPA in Houston. David Godly had been there a lot time before he went out to California. Look how long Ben Stevenson was there with Houston Ballet. And it's the same in this part of the business. So, yeah it will happen. I'm 64 years old.

EV: Oh you are, you're still a baby.

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MP: Yeah. Are you older than Larry?

EV: Uh huh.

MP: Because Larry's 66.

EV: I know he's still a baby too.

MP: No he's 67.

EV: I'm going to hit the 7-0 in March.

MP: Are you really? Next March?

EV: Yeah, I guess...

MP: See our generation doesn't seem old to me.

EV: I think we're probably the head of the, what do they call it, the baby  
benchmark...the baby boomers...

MP: They say 60 is the new 40.

EV: Well yeah, we're the new 30s.

MP: Yeah and if you think about it how your grandmothers were. And I think back  
and I think my grandmother's...

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