

Excerpts from Dorothy Demby's Audio-Taped Interview of John Pratt in His Home

La Résidence Leclerc,
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D. DEMBY: Well, Mr. Pratt, we all know that you are the husband of Katherine Dunham. But tonight I wanted to have the opportunity to talk to you about your career as a designer, and your work and experiences with the Katherine Dunham Company. I thought we might begin by you telling me something about your background.

J. PRATT: Well, I am Canadian by birth. Both my parents were naturalized Canadians. They were American. And I was born in Western Canada, up above Montana is where it actually is. My grandfather had gone there as a homesteader, and bought additional land. He then moved on farther west, and gave this particular farm to my father, who had just married my mother.

So I was born there. It was quite wild, an open country, even at that time. There were buffalo and antelopes around. The buffalo left hollows and I used to fall asleep in them, which bothered my mother because she couldn't find me, the grass being very high.

When I was six years old, my family moved to Winnipeg, where my father was editor and publisher of *The Grain Grower's Guide*, a very important Canadian farm paper. And it was there that I went to school. I had always had a tutor from the time I was very young. My grandfather was an educator and he saw to it that I had tutors during the summer, when I would visit my mother's family in Indiana. I always enjoyed going to school and was always rewarded by having some advantage over the other children. I remember the first day I went to public school. The teacher had asked, "Can any of you read or write?" and I held up my hand. She wrote out a sentence on the board, and said: "What does that say?" And I answered, "It says, I see a funny lady". Why she chose that I don't know. (laughs) And then she said, "But do you know how to spell?" And I said, "Well, somewhat." She asked, "How do you spell the word 'bridge'?" Bridge is a rather hard word for a small child to spell, but I spelled it

correctly. So she said, “Well, you may go home.” So, I was rewarded on my first day in school by being able to leave early.

D. DEMBY: Do you have brothers and sisters?

J. PRATT: I have a brother who is six years younger than I. He was born in Indiana. My mother decided she found it easier, this was during the 1914-1918 war. And it became a matter of citizenship. He became automatically an American, which has been useful to him ever since, because I became a naturalized American, while I was in the American army. It never occurred to me that I was not an American. But I wasn't. I was Canadian.

D. DEMBY: Technically. Your brother, did he have tutors also?

J. PRATT: No, he went to American schools.

D. DEMBY: Did you continue in public schools?

J. PRATT: Well, yes. I went to the Eugene Field school in Chicago, where I used to take my little brother, who by that time was four years old. He went to kindergarten there. When it came time for me to go to high school we moved to a suburb of Chicago. It had the advantage of being smaller, better than the large city schools. And my brother finished his grammar school there and then went to the same high school as I did.

D. DEMBY: What is his name?

J. PRATT: His name is Davis.

D. DEMBY: Davis Pratt, yes. So there were two brothers and no sisters?

J. PRATT: No, we were just two brothers. But we do have a half sister, very late in life my father married again. She is forty years younger than I am. There's quite a generation gap there.

D. DEMBY: But during your school days you had your brother as a companion.

J. PRATT: Well no, not really. We hardly knew each other, because he was going to grammar school while I was going to high school, and then he was going to high school while I was going to college. And we were never in any school at the same time.

D. DEMBY: Oh yes, the six year gap.

J. PRATT: Except when I used to take him to kindergarten, and then bring him back home.

D. DEMBY: Did you go to a high school where there were mixed nationalities?

J. PRATT: Well, they were all rather middle-class Americans. It was a very simple school. I would think very typical of any small town in Illinois. And there were no exotics there that I can think of at all. We were all just neighborhood children.

D. DEMBY: Were there any black children at this school, that you can remember?

J. PRATT: No, there weren't. I just remember a couple of Chinese young men, when I was in first grade, who were learning English along with us. But in my high school days it was very simple, country people from around, or from either of the two small towns which have now become very big cities, practically. But that was in the days when Chicago suburbs were very separated. Like you went through open country before you got to Chicago.

D. DEMBY: What was the mode of travel at that time? Train, I suppose?

J. PRATT: Yes, we went to Chicago by train, on the North-Western Railway. I suppose my theatrical experience began when I was in high school. And to my eternal embarrassment, I sang the tenor lead in an operetta. And I must say I did a very poor job of it.

D. DEMBY: Do you remember what operetta it was?

J. PRATT: It was *Rosamund*, by Franz Schubert.

D. DEMBY: Had you studied, were you studying music while you were in high school?

J. PRATT: Well, my mother was a very fine musician. She was a graduate of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and played the piano and the pipe organ very well. She usually led the church choir wherever we happened to be and was often directing and playing accompaniment for women's choral groups and that sort of thing. So, I had a considerable musical background.

D. DEMBY: Well, you started your theatrical career then with your voice, in singing.

J. PRATT: Well yes, I sang a great deal. And all the time I was in college, I sang in the choir. But I would do that five days a week, and then on Sunday I would sing in the church choir. So I was used to music, and certainly vocal music.

D. DEMBY: Was it your plan at the time to become a singer?

J. PRATT: No, I never had the faintest dream of being either in the theater or being a singer of any sort.

D. DEMBY: What did you think you wanted to be at that point in your life?

J. PRATT: At that point in my life I was very interested in being a horticulturalist. I liked flowers. I think that's why I was a botany major when I finally went to college. And I found that it was very different from liking flowers. We were cutting up pickled asparagus, and so on and so on.

But when I went to the University of Chicago, I happened to have gone the same year that Robert Hutchins came there, and together with Mortimer Adler started the new plan. Robert Hutchins recently died but Mortimer Adler, I believe, is still around. They were both working as editors of the latest Encyclopedia Britannica.

D. DEMBY: You were at the University when there was a great number of the 'greats' in many fields and areas.

J. PRATT: Yes, there was an amazing number of celebrated philosophers, and mathematicians. We had a very distinguished faculty. And during Thornton Wilder's time, I think he was partly responsible, for instance, for Gertrude Stein coming to the University and giving a series of lectures, which I must say I enjoyed thoroughly. She was, incidentally, a great supporter of mine. I had by this time taken two art courses, and had actually had the show for which Thornton Wilder....(inaudible)...and after that I was accepted as an artist to be represented by Alice Brutier, who was a very chic gallery owner in Chicago. I found that I developed very early as an artist. I actually earned a living painting pictures and doing religious metal work, which seems very strange to me now. There was the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Milwaukee. And the sisters there liked my work very much. They used to commission me to do various icons, which I would hammer out of lead and set with various semi-precious stones, you know. I found myself making a perfectly acceptable living as an artist. I never took myself terribly seriously as a painter. And when I finally became a theatrical designer, I realized that that was what I really liked to do. And I think it's because it is a temporary thing.

D. DEMBY: Always changing.

J. PRATT: Yes, it's a thing of the moment and when it's over it's completely finished, and you go on to something else. And I think I've always been in the theater, rather than having pride to immortalize myself as an artist. I never took myself very seriously. Not that I wasn't perfectly truthful, I certainly did the best I could.

D. DEMBY: How did you move into theatrical design? How did it happen?

J. PRATT: Well, I very early designed for a number of what were then called, modern dancers. And then at the Federal Theater, I found myself called on to design every possible sort of show. Among the many things I did for the Federal Theater, was a ballet for Katherine Dunham. I was assigned to her especially for a ballet called *L'Ag'ya*. And it was a program being shared by three dance companies in Chicago, of which Miss Dunham was one. So that was

actually the beginning of our association and we have hardly spent much time apart since. Even when there wasn't something to design, my technical description in the program was always Production Supervisor. On occasion, I would be the stage manager if he was missing. I would fill in for that. So our association has been a very total one for many years.

D. DEMBY: *L'Ag'ya* was the first production. It was when you were assigned to it, that you met Miss Dunham. You didn't know her beforehand?

J. PRATT: Well, I had met her very briefly before that. I had met her socially at Paul Scofield's house and I heard a great deal about her travels in the West Indies. We had mutual friends. Then shortly after that, a friend of mine who had been very influential in my career, and was an important art critic in Chicago, Inez Cunningham, invited Miss Dunham to meet Igor Stravinsky. I remember that was the second time I met her, when she came to this party. But I saw very little of her there. She spent most of her time in the salon with Stravinsky. I had talked with Stravinsky several times before when he came to Chicago. He was a very interesting man and of course a person with enormous talent. I had been in the music room in his apartment when Tyrone Power was playing the piano and singing *Liza* for some reason. I remember that vividly. He sang it very well.

I remember Miss Dunham was in the adjoining room with the Stravinsky group, so I saw very little of her. But the next time we met was when she had officially been assigned to do *L'Ag'ya*, and I had been given the job of doing costumes for it. And so I went to a first rehearsal. She was still casting the ballet and we discussed it. And from that time on I spent a great deal of time with her, to a degree that very soon after that, when she did her own concert, she called on me to do her costumes. I remember she used to do a Debussy number called *The Wine Door*. And I remember making a wine colored dress for this particular dance. We also did some very interesting ballet to the singing of a woman called *La Niña de Los Peines*, who was a great figure in the Spanish Civil War. And it was called *Spanish Earth*. It was at a time when everybody was very much concerned with the Spanish Civil War. And it was Miss

Dunham's contribution. I remember making the costumes for that too. She also did a ballet called *Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby*, which I'm sure she wouldn't have done now.

D. DEMBY: *Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby*, was that a ballet?

J. PRATT: That was a ballet, yes. Carib Sheba, who was a very talented black artist with whom I had, incidentally, a joint exhibition at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, had actually designed the costumes and settings, and I executed those. But the other numbers, the solo numbers, I designed and saw that they were made. I did do some designing for other people. It seemed to me I was awfully busy.

D. DEMBY: What's involved in designing?

J. PRATT: Well, I'm sure various people have different ways of doing it. I'm very used to being in on the inception of something, working with the music and the general idea of the choreography, and I always have designed in the case of Miss Dunham. She had appeared in *Star Spangled Rhythms*, which was a Paramount picture, the first of the big entertainment pictures. Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and an enormous variety of stars. And Miss Dunham appeared with Rochester, the first time I think Rochester had ever been seen away from Jack Benny.

D. DEMBY: Oh my Goodness.

J. PRATT: I did design her costumes for *Stormy Weather*, which was made at Twenty Century Fox. In *Casbah*, in which she had a speaking role, most of the dance costumes were not costumes that I had made.

D. DEMBY: Which costumes did you enjoy designing the most?

J. PRATT: Well, I think I enjoyed designing and making all of them really.

D. DEMBY: Which was the most challenging to do?

J. PRATT: The most celebrated ones for Miss Dunham, were the ones she was displeased with. (laughs) She did a number called *Batucada* which became a sort of trademark of hers and she described this number to me over the telephone and I designed a dress, made it and sent it to her. She had many complaints about it, but she wore it for many years. It became her most celebrated number. (laughs)

D. DEMBY: Can you describe the costume you created for *L'Ag'ya*?

J. PRATT: Well, a very short dress, and then she appears in a very grand dress, which was when she was dancing the Creole mazurka, which was the high point of the ballet.

D. DEMBY: Did the dancers ever help to make their own costumes?

J. PRATT: Yes, some of them did. Some of them were very helpful and supportive. By union regulation they are not supposed to do this. Certainly not in America. Most of our shows however were made out of the country, because Miss Dunham's greatest success was always in Europe, you know. So, many of our clothes were foreign made.

D. DEMBY: Were there any special problems to get certain materials for your costumes?

J. PRATT: Well, I used to buy things when I liked them. I'd buy them and carry them around until I had some occasion to use them. I was always preoccupied with the baggage and I handled it myself, repacking it, and approving the packing and seeing that the baggage was properly marked. We travelled with over a hundred pieces of baggage, about ten tons in weight, because we were actually a repertory company. In other words, we would do a show and then we would do a complete change of show. My time in the theater was usually spent early in the morning with the stage crew, working on the technical aspects of the production. Once I found myself in Algeria doing the stage managing, as our stage manager had a severe mastoid attack in Marseille. And it was at a period when the Algerians were being very nationalistic, and they wouldn't pay any attention to anyone speaking French. So I had to learn enough

Arabic in a hurry to stage manage, you know, names of colors, and numbers and various décors.

D. DEMBY: How many languages can you speak? I mean, can you communicate in?

J. PRATT: Well, I have forcibly had to speak French and Spanish a great deal, because we made one tour of South America which took two years. And we have also played in Mexico City. So Spanish has been a very useful language to me. And French, I am very used to speaking and working in French speaking countries. I did take lessons as a child with a tutor. And I took a great deal of French in college. We also speak French with our daughter, Marie-Christine. Then we also spent long periods of time in France, mostly in Paris and especially in the casino towns. In summer, Paris is deserted and to keep the company employed we had to go play someplace else. So we played Monte Carlo, Cannes and Nice, and various other Casino resorts. And I also speak German to a degree. I spoke it as a child, and spent several years in Germany in the army.

D. DEMBY: There is some thought of a revival of a repertory company.

J. PRATT: Well, I would like to see that but I frankly don't feel it would be possible. This is strictly my own opinion because many people are in dispute with me. I find that something very beautiful ten years ago, is not the same thing anymore. Actually, in the idea of a repertory company, the important thing with Miss Dunham, was always Miss Dunham herself. Her company made the frame work for her. She claimed that it was not true but I always felt that she had a special gift, which very few people in the theater have, and which I admire very much, which is that of "direct communication". Miss Dunham certainly had that, it was the gift of a personal relationship with the people in the audience. I think many people in the theater, who work very hard all their lives, never achieve anything, because they don't happen to have that special relationship. In the first place, I thought she was wonderful looking. I always admired her.

D. DEMBY: Everyone else did too. (laughs)

J. PRATT: I always admired her for her talent and choreographic gift. And I've always worked for her because I admired her. A practically lifetime association with a person. She had to have a framework, she always did, she always arranged to have to work with musicians and dancers and technicians, whom she often developed. People who apparently did not have any special potential, she would force them into a mold of performing ability, which was always very impressive to me and I feel that her taste in what she choreographed, and what she chose to do, was always with this in mind to a degree. She would actually choreograph things, with certain people in mind which she would then develop, until they became the people that she wished them to be. It was a sort of Pygmalion situation.

During her long career with the theater, Miss Dunham always paid her own way. Our State Department, for instance, never made the slightest effort to support her in any way. And she was also an Ambassador, as far as America was concerned. I don't mean that various Embassy people were not very helpful and thoughtful and good friends, but the State Department never acknowledged Miss Dunham's contribution, especially in countries where our relationships were not of the best.

I remember our first trip to South America when we were not on the very best of terms as a nation with many countries which we then played. And Miss Dunham never presented herself as being anything but an American, made an enormous contribution to the State Department, whether she was paid for it or not. But it does seem rather unfair that in her long career she did not have more support.

D. DEMBY: Many people have commented on that feeling, that there has been a lack there, yes. Getting back to your contributions to the company, how would you describe the problems that a dancer has in the kind of costumes they have to wear?

J. PRATT: There is a very important element in costuming that is one I enjoy. And that is the dynamics of a costume. You can make the most beautiful clothes in the world, and if they don't move properly for that particular choreography, they are of little use.

D. DEMBY: I remember Miss Dunham pointing out that there were times, when she went to Hollywood, and was exposed to someone other than you in the preparation of costuming. And she found it so unsatisfactory, she felt that you had a special insight into what it took to make a dancer feel comfortable.

J. PRATT: Yes, we did seem to have a sort of empathy in this particular thing. When Miss Dunham appeared in *Cabin in the Sky* she was very unhappy about her costumes. And her manager sent for me to come from Chicago. By that time, as often happened, the budget had all been spent up and I was faced with heaps of abandoned costumes, with the prospect of having to do something with them.

D. DEMBY: What were the kinds of things that you did to make the costumes more amenable?

J. PRATT: Well, one thing which was very successful was a set of Egyptian costumes made out of bandanas, because bandanas are still comparatively inexpensive. And I designed for Miss Dunham a dress which the producer - I was very flattered - said was the loveliest costume he had ever seen on stage. A pseudo Egyptian costume which Miss Dunham wore, made out of tie-dye East Indian scarves! And the woman who was executing the costumes was one of the geniuses of the theater, Madame Scott, and she did a great job of following the designs which I made.

D. DEMBY: There must have been an art to make a costume fit so well, and yet have the freedom of movement needed, regardless of the style of the costume.

J. PRATT: Yes, there is. And I must say that Miss Dunham and I have not always been in agreement on this. She felt very often that her clothes were very heavy, and they were. They did take up a lot of strength to support them, and they were often very large and bulky costumes. But Miss Dunham's clothes were always highly dynamic in so much as they moved to great advantage.

D. DEMBY: Did you use any one kind of material more often than other in your costumes?

J. PRATT: Oh, I wouldn't say especially. I had no special feeling for theatrical material. I rather liked using materials designed outside theatrical supply stores. I think most of Miss Dunham's costumes were made of cotton which could be bought, and of nylon, which I was one of the first people to process, because I went to the original manufactures of nylon fabrics. I made many of the basic costumes of the company, such as large white petticoats, which were a rather standard, basic element of West Indian costumes, with this particular material.

D. DEMBY: That stiff stuff you mean?

J. PRATT: Well, it was something that could be laundered in one day and they didn't require ironing, which was an enormous help. I have always been known in the theater as a rather stingy designer and extremely frugal about the materials I used. That does not mean that Miss Dunham did not have some rather elaborate costumes.

D. DEMBY: Did you have favorite colors for her?

J. PRATT: Well, I found a rather basic pattern of my own in design which would keep a constant color change, even though the audience might not be aware of it. I mean, I would create a number in very warm colors, and then one in very cool colors, and then occasionally a number completely dressed in white for a change. For the first picture she made for Warner Brothers, which I believe I told you about, *Carnival of Rhythm*, I began sending clothes from New York where they were being manufactured for this particular movie. The producer finally told me what his real worry was. He called me and said if we are spending all this money for a film in color, and this was being done in Technicolor, why are we having so many white clothes? And I said, they are not really white, they are all highly tinted in pale blue because white doesn't photograph very well. I often design rather as one orchestrates. In other words it has a rather somber tempo, in the shade of colors, dark colors then perhaps, occasionally white.

In terms of colors, as a designer, I am not very fond of orange. It is a color which I use very rarely because I find it is too strong, it bleeds

every other color. Orange is a very dangerous color to use in the theater.

D. DEMBY: What about the lighting?

J. PRATT: At the time there was a theory of the type of light to use on dark skinned people or people with color in their skin and there still is the tradition of using yellow and orange light. Miss Dunham's company instead was usually lighted with special lavenders and pale greens, and hybrid pinks and very little use of ambers and yellow. We also used shafts of green and blues together. There also was an enormous contribution of Miss Dunham in the whole system of lighting.

And our curtains were green, although in some companies it is considered an unlucky color. I finally had a new set of curtains made in Paris. They were dyed in two shades of green. The one closer to the audience was a yellow green, and then the ones at a farther distance were a sort of ordinary green, and the ones farthest back were a bluish green. I thought it would add some dimension to the stage. Anyway I always thought Miss Dunham was very well presented. There are many theater taboos which you have to be familiar with as you go from country to country. There are superstitions. Like whistling in dressing rooms, or having peanuts in a dressing room, or having English ivy, which would make some theatrical people blanch with horror, I can't tell you why. And in England, it is extremely bad luck to use carnations in any décor in the theater, or to send them to any theatrical performer. And then we would play in countries like Italy where the theaters would be decorated with great bunches of carnations, and so forth and so on.

D. DEMBY: Just the opposite.

J. PRATT: There are so many theatrical superstitions that you have to pay some attention to. However I always completely ignored the one about green being an unlucky color. I think Miss Dunham felt sometimes neglected and perhaps she was, because I was interested in the overall picture.

D. DEMBY: In costuming in general are there any dramatic changes between the designing and the planning of costumes at that time, and today?

J. PRATT: I don't know. The drawing of a costume doesn't really mean very much to me, because it does not have the dynamics of the costume. It is impossible to make an enormous series of drawings to show the actor the movements of a costume or what it is going to do in this particular number for which it has been designed.

D. DEMBY: What about the sets, were they usually elaborate?

J. PRATT: No, they were usually three dimensional scenery, which was not very practical. Still, I considered myself quite ingenious in making three dimensional scenery which was easy to pack into small containers, so it could travel by air. But, I liked very much to have scenery that pulled into place in view of the audience. We didn't carry any flats which is the usual theater device for making sets and we just never used any flats. Everything was soft.

But there were several arrangements of curtains which actually do give three dimensional effects, which I always found very satisfactory.

We had a front curtain made entirely in bamboo, which was actually imitation bamboo, because the original one didn't fit quite right, and it was always getting tangled up. And we very often used fishnets in the décor, most of which I had made in Veracruz, Mexico.

D. DEMBY: In color?

J. PRATT: No, they were mostly in the natural color. But they were made very large in scale in order to be theatrical. We did have one disaster with a performance in Paris. For some reason all these various bamboo things and the nets became completely entangled and couldn't be moved either up or down. We tried desperately, but we never managed to get these things separated. It's one of those accidents that I occasionally have, not nightmares about, but very unpleasant dreams of scenery arriving late and not working properly and that sort of thing. I am sorry, most of my memories are of

disaster performances. Such as when we had to improvise the entire set and most of the numbers were done in rehearsal clothes, the girls wore black leotards and the men wore black tights and white tee-shirts. Miss Dunham's rehearsal clothes were far more elegant and elaborate.

We played a number of theaters in Colombia, none of which were in very good condition, I must say. When we played in Barranquilla, which is a seaport town, there was no lighting system at all. The entire performance was done with a motion picture projector without a film in it.

D. DEMBY: Were there many of the productions where you found yourself using, I don't know, insignia or symbols from *vodoun*?

J. PRATT: Well, Miss Dunham, one of her great talents as a choreographer is as an editor. She did a ballet called *Shango*, which amounted to a *vodoun* ceremony. It involved the killing of a white rooster. (the rooster was a prop) I believe Miss Dunham spoke to you about it.

D. DEMBY: Yes, she did.

J. PRATT: Well, I'm speaking about her ability in editing. *Shango* was always a great success. And the real reason is, I think, that she managed to reproduce the high point of a *vodoun* ceremony and editing it down until it took between eight to ten minutes, depending upon who happened to be drumming for the number. And actually the sort of ceremony that was being presented on the stage was one that might very well have led to more than a day. It could have led to two days. But she was always extremely talented in picking the essentials out of something and putting them together in such a way that the audience had a feeling of satisfaction.

D. DEMBY: What about *Americana*? The third act of the show?

J. PRATT: Of course Miss Dunham was the first person I know of who took full advantage of that curious period, when the jazz age first appeared, and choreographed a number which she called *Flaming Youth*. It was set in the late thirties, a period which was

fairly over at that time. But later in television, there was hardly a show that did not have a 1920's number in it. It became very fashionable for a while.

In *Flaming Youth* Miss Dunham took these things which were hardly ten years old and presented them in their absurdity.

And I must say she worked closely on that with Noble Sissle, who was a good friend. It became a highly successful number. So were Miss Dunham's interpretations of *Barrelhouse* and *Floyd's Guitar Blues* which were actually jams of characterization.

D. DEMBY: Are you saying that perhaps her projection of it was more than the choreography itself?

J. PRATT: Yes, I think so, it was a rather sad period in many ways. It was the period of Depression and Prohibition, a general catastrophe in people's lives. So, I feel that the Jazz Age does reflect a great deal of sadness and tragedy. That is one aspect which you also find in the number called *Southland*, which she did on the lynching. *Southland* was a social message, but it was not as many people feared it was going to be, a very direct statement. It was not lurid in any way, quite the contrary. A ballet that shows a great deal of the sadness of the times, and the brutalizing effect both on white people who were prejudiced and on black people who were suffering from that prejudice. In other words it was not a matter of all black people being noble and all white people being terrible. It was just showing that the general situation was brutalizing for everyone.

D. DEMBY: You had a broad experience with the Dunham Company and I was wondering, what would you say has been the most fulfilling experience?

J. PRATT: Well, the most fulfilling experience has been the experience itself. As I explained to you earlier, that's the way I personally feel about theater. I love the theater because it is a living thing. And it's also why I question certain aspects of a repertory theater, because that element is no longer there. It's like seeing the Ballets Russes, I cannot believe that their reconstructions are the same as they were when they were first danced and first designed. I

think it is very important that they do whatever they can to preserve the monuments of that particular time, and I am very happy if everything is done to preserve Miss Dunham's creations. But the very important contribution has been Miss Dunham herself.

D. DEMBY: If you had the opportunity to live your life over again, how would you want it to be? Would you want it to be any different than it was?

J. PRATT: No, I think not. I feel quite satisfied with my life. I don't mean to sound smug. But I had several experiences. I went in the army when I was thirty years old. I think that's much too old to be a soldier. And I spent three years in the army. But I am not like a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from the exposure to the military life. And actually I was very lucky in the army. I had comparatively very interesting jobs and a great deal of freedom. I must say that it did make a great difference in my life.

D. DEMBY: Do you feel that you had missed anything?

J. PRATT: I don't really think I did. I certainly would have been devoted to Miss Dunham in any case, because I'm a rather independent person by nature, and I always considered what I did myself my own personal business.

D. DEMBY: I have one final question. I am really interested in the number of people who are interested in perpetuating, preserving, developing, or expanding, the contributions Miss Dunham has made.

J. PRATT: Yes, well I think Miss Dunham has made an enormous contribution to the black theater. As a matter of fact, in some ways she created it. There were many people who did a great deal. But to present a large group of people, it was really only Miss Dunham. She never considered that anything was impossible. She always seemed to have gone ahead and done things in the face of what seemed enormous odds.

D. DEMBY: Well, what would be your suggestion or your wish to those who want to see that Miss Dunham is given proper recognition for the future, so that others can benefit from her?

J. PRATT: I think it is very important to continue the work that is being done on archives. And I am very grateful to Channel Thirteen for having put on this particular one hour spectacular, which includes a ballet of Miss Dunham, *Rites de Passage*. But I think she has had considerable recognition and I hope that will continue. I have always been personally devoted to her so it's made it a double pleasure, but a double job too, because you don't have any time to go home and rest. I mean, you're always sort of working. But we have more or less inspired each other for our entire careers.

D. DEMBY: Well, thank you very much.

J. PRATT: Thank you