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Oral history interview with Bella  
Lewitzky, 1965 Apr. 21

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bella Lewitzky on April 21, 1965. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Betty Lochrie Hoag McGlynn for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript.

## Interview

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I make the—this is Betty Lochrie Hoag on April 21, 1965, interviewing the dancer Bella Lewitzky—and this is spelled B-E-L-L-A L-E-W-I-T-Z-K-Y—in her home in Los Angeles. Ms. Lewitzky was on the Project as a dancer in Los Angeles. She is today married to an architect, Newell Reynolds, which is spelled N-E-W-E-L-L R-E-Y-N-O-L-D-S. And I'm very excited about taping you, Miss Lewitzky, because it's going to be interesting to learn about the Dance Project here.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Thank you.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Before we begin, I would like to ask you a little about your own life, where you were born and when, if you care to tell us, and where you were educated.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I was born in Los Angeles. I am one of the few native daughters to this area, in the Los Angeles County area. Although my actual birthplace was called Llano Del Rio, and it was an experimental colony out in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Interesting.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Very unrealistic and very poetic, [they laugh] but it didn't last very long.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was it something that your parents were interested in then?

BELLA LEWITZKY: My father particularly, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was it a religious thing or—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was a utopian adventure.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Utopian?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, where this group of unrealistic people decided that they could escape all the ills of a more complex civilization by moving away from it. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Isn't that—

BELLA LEWITZKY: And so, they founded a—it was like a collective colony, but they came with insufficient knowledge, as often happens.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: In the spirit of the 19th century American frontier.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was absolutely typical of that day, as a matter of fact. There were—I found out later many such colonies spread out through the United States, and none of them—there is one that still lasted, I believe, but not too many.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oneida probably. Is that the one you're referring to?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Is that in Louisiana?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oneida—I believe it's in New Jersey. It's where they make silver, Oneida silverware. But that was originally [cross talk] [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, I don't know. But that wasn't the one that I was referring to. But possibly it was around that same period. I was born in 1916. And I've lost track of your first question already. [Betty Hoag McGlynn laughs.] I wandered.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did you go to school in this little—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —settlement?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. There was a small school, but I was too young to attend it. By the time I went to school, we had moved back to Los Angeles. My schooling was spent between Los Angeles and San Bernardino, which is an outlying area.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did your family live in both San Bernardino and Los Angeles?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. We had shifted from one area to the other. My father was still a utopian idealist even with the—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yeah, a lovely man—these are his. A Sunday painter, and rather a good one.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, it's a beautiful pastel.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, isn't it?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: A self-portrait?

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's a self-portrait. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And he decided that the second-best little piece of utopia would be a chicken farm. And it was equally unrealistic, but it's a classic, I've discovered. [They laugh.] The chicken farm—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You mean to attempt a chicken farm is a—

[Cross talk.] [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —classic [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: And that's when they moved—that's the classic bit of romanticism. We moved to San Bernardino with the chicken ranch, you see. And most of my young school days were spent there.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. And then where did you go to high school?

BELLA LEWITZKY: San Bernardino. And through junior college in San Bernardino, and I never went any farther than that.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did you have dancing instruction in the junior college or—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did you [inaudible]?

BELLA LEWITZKY: It's fair—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: When did you begin your dancing? That's a better question.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think that I began my dancing as soon as I began in conscious effort to move. I never had any question but what I would dance, and I thought this was the way all

people function, that one simply knew at the first knowing point what one was going to be and set out being it. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You were a very fortunate person.

[00:05:00]

BELLA LEWITZKY: I realized much, much later how far from ordinary this was. It was a singleness of purpose which made many things simple for me. So, I did a great deal of untrained dancing on my own. And in the area of San Bernardino there was no real competent training. But I took what there was, and I thought all of it was perfectly marvelous no matter what. So, I had some odd early training.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: These were little local—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —dancing schools [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, and they're very much the kind of school which still exists in the hinterland areas. A little of this, a little of that, none of it very good.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: But I think when you're in love with it, it doesn't really matter a great deal.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Bella Lewitzky laughs.] I would imagine that if your father was artistic, he probably was a great inspiration to you as far as the costumes and the—visualizing the dance you were doing as a child.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Not in that way. More as a voice one could communicate with. And I also took this for granted and much later found out how rare that was.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes [laughs].

BELLA LEWITZKY: There was a community of interest. We were like many families of European origin. We had music in our home. Each of us played an instrument, even if we might not have had other things in the way of luxuries that other children had. We—I studied piano, and my sister studied violin. My father painted, and my mother approved. [They laugh.] So, it was a—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: A nice family.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And there was literature in our home always. It was this element, the totality of appreciation of culture at this level, which we didn't even put a label upon. It was just something we grew up with.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: My father used to read, not wisely perhaps, with a great deal of heart, Edgar Allan Poe to us instead of [they laugh] *Beauty and the Beast*.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Wonderful.

BELLA LEWITZKY: So, the books lying about our house available to us were current, good books, because he was a man of inquiring mind. So, it was this rather than direct aid. And I think if one had to choose, this is the more valuable.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It's the cocoon that shapes the birthing—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Right.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —thing, which is better—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And if it happens very young to you, you never forget.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And it did happen very young. This was the environment of our home.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, you must have been very young when the Project started, in fact, probably about 17 or 18.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, this really should not be put upon a tape. I fibbed about my age. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: May I add that many other people didn't admit it. [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, I was—I can't really remember. I think I was a year or two too young. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, had you already been with an organized dance group at that time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. At the—by this time, I had moved to Los Angeles. And although the chicken farm had long since gone the way all such things with impractical people like my father—he was not a farmer. [They laugh.] We had come to Los Angeles, and it was in the middle of the Depression. I think this was partly what happened to the chicken farm too, was the Depression.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was that about 1932 or '3 or '4?

BELLA LEWITZKY: '34 we moved—because I graduated high school in '33, this I can recall. And I spent one year to two years in junior college. I don't recall, but around this period of time we moved to Los Angeles. And I was still avidly interested in dance and had at this point seen ballet and found that this was not what I had conjured up as a child.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, really?

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was terribly disappointing to find it stiff and tight and over costumed—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —and scenically like a pageant rather than like communicating dance. I didn't have a label for the kind of dancing that I knew must be somewhere.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You've seen nothing like Trudi Schoop, for instance—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —who was about at that time, I believe.

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. No. I had not seen her. I had seen only ballet. And it was ballet—at this point, the Ballets Russes is at its height—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —the baby ballerinas in the lavish productions, and so on.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I was terribly disappointed. I was—

[Cross talk.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Isn't that interesting, [inaudible] your perspective [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: I felt as though life had been sold short. I wanted to cry because this wasn't what I had envisioned.

[00:10:05]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I think when one moves, some kind of portrait of what you think is perfection is put ahead of you by yourself.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And this was obviously not it. Of course, I didn't move in that fashion either. [They laugh.] So, I studied ballet from Robert Bell at that point, who was a member of that company, for—and I think I studied a very short period of time. I didn't like it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I'm sorry, was his own company you [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. He was a performing member of the Ballets Russes—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —and at the time, had a studio in Los Angeles. And somebody said to go study with him. And so I went to study with him. And this is not in any way a reflection upon him, he was probably a fine teacher. I didn't like the form.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And complained about it to somebody else in the studio, and they said, Oh, well, what you really are talking about is Lester Horton. And I said, Oh? And they said, Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: "Am I?" [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Please go see—and they gave me the address. And I went to watch what I knew was what—exactly what I had been talking about. And of course, it was modern dance.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was this the brother of Edward Everett Horton—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —by any chance?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, not at all.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I thought perhaps that family was gifted in different lines.

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. This was a singular creative artist. My entire career was really spent under his tutelage and with him.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Hm, isn't that interesting.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Because he was a local product he has been neglected. It's too bad, because I think his worth is—really has gone unrecognized.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Is he still here?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, he died. I don't even recall how many years ago. Possibly seven years ago.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was he on the Project, do you remember?

BELLA LEWITZKY: For a short period of time, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Maybe you could tell me a little more about him then, because part of what we're trying to do is find out about people who were—who have died, because—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, because—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —in many cases there's no family left even, to ask.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —you can't contact them again. Of course. And in his case, I doubt that you would ever find this connection—this particular connection.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: Lester came from Indiana. And his first approach to theater was through what must have been a very potent Irish woman who filled him with theater knowledge. He was a person in theater, not in dance. He moved to Chicago. And at that point, apparently there was a lively experimental group in theater in Chicago, and he sort of invented, I gather, on his own—his approach to movement was very much his own, headed in toward pageants, did a great deal of work on the American Indian on a pageant level, had any number of American Indian friends.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Now, excuse me, was that interpreting the American Indians in his own way, or was he actually working with American Indian dances?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Both. Both. He did both. But he was basically a creative artist, and therefore not a duplicator or recorder of dance.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I wondered if he made records of him, and sold—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: My mother paints the Indians and I've been quite interested in the fact that very little work, I believe, has been done with the Indian dance.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's true. No, he had not made any record of it, I'm sure. But when I arrived at his studio, it was quite common for any number of American Indians of various tribes to be at the studio. I to this day I think, had a really remarkable museum concho belt, which was a gift from one of them. They really respected this man and knew that he understood something very deeply about their culture, not superficially.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: They taught him their songs, and their dances. He did them very well. But he enlarged upon them.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And these were all the Southwest Indians [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Southwest Indians. Although he himself, I think, had some Cherokee way back. Most of those—you know, the Illinois people would be closer to the Plains Indian.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And he knew the Plains dances and did them. He did the eagle dance, which the Southwest Indian does out here. Of course, it's not a Southwest dance at all.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: No, they brought that from Oklahoma, from the Indians [cross talk] [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: But they do them interchangeably here.

[00:15:03]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: The eagle and hoop dance he did very well. Very authentically.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: But the dances which he constructed into ballets really were—and the general idea, the texture, the feeling, the philosophy of the Southwest Indian—and in some cases, he even did Alaskan Indians—he was very deeply engrossed to this culture.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That's really interesting. Were these ballets performed in Chicago—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —and Los Angeles?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. This is now Los Angeles. They were performed here, yes, certainly. The last one he did—and they were continuing thread—was *Totem Incantation*, and this was

a totemistic culture, which is not the Pacific Southwest but was Alaskan.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Alaskan.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Why, you haven't saved any of the old programs [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, I have.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Have you? How wonderful, we can film them—

BELLA LEWITZKY: I have. And you'll find the plume, all kinds of things running. This thread of his, he found a community of interest in the Indian as most people do—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], of course he would here.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —who finally go toward this with real simpatico. He did a great deal of Mexican-American work as well. *Tierra y libertad* was one of his finer works. And—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I'm sorry, I—is that a Spanish word?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, it is. *Tierra*, earth.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Tierra?

BELLA LEWITZKY: "Earth and freedom." It was the cry of the Mexican revolutionary Zapata.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: All right. Were—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Comparable to our "Land and bread." [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I'll check on that later in my Spanish book.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yeah.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Were the folklorica [ph] players in e—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —or the dancers in existence at that time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. Oh, no, no, no. This is way before their time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He also explored Japanese American. This community is very particular, you know, in its minority groupings.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible], yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And Negro cultures, he knew them all intimately, and he knew the people in the communities intimately. So this was—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Isn't that—

BELLA LEWITZKY: —a rather lovely heritage that was opened to me—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah, you were very fortunate.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —which I was able to pursue. Oh, indeed. Indeed I was.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did he share this background with you, almost like a teacher, while you were [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. Oh yes, certainly. We—our group at that period of time, which was at that time I think called the Horton Dance Group.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].



BELLA LEWITZKY: And it was not part of the Federal Theatre Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I earned my livelihood on the Federal Theatre Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. And then attended this [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: My work of love [they laugh] was with the Horton Dance Group. And it was a cooperative dance group. You will find this typical in this day—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —because we were all—we shared a community of poverty. You are probably my peer, are you not?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes. And I remember the club, and the nursery school.

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Then you—yes, you remember this time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: [Inaudible] of course, it was typical.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You had to.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I wonder at the time we wouldn't have valued it then when I see the youngster today without a direction. And I think, well, we didn't have an easy time, and we were also post-war people. But I think we had a thing in common. This made a difference. Also, we had only up to go.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: [Laughs.] We had to hit bottom. [They laugh.] It made a difference—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And because they said it couldn't be done, I think people worked harder at it, don't you?

BELLA LEWITZKY: There was enormous enthusiasm. I don't remember a moment of despair in this period. I'm probably—it has become highly romanticized. [They laugh.] In retrospect, there's always that danger. But I remember interest and enthusiasm around the Project, around this group. And in talking with dancers who came from the East Coast, they remember the same kinds of things, that's why I think this is common. One got together and did what one wanted to do and worked elsewhere to earn your living. We studied our craft inside out.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Approximately how many were there in the group most of the time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: It fluctuated. There was a body of, say, 12 dancers that was a rather permanent body, boys and girls—men and women. And at given times, there were auxiliary groups and—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —other groups that fed into it and at all times a school. We all taught in the school.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, really?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. Eventually, many years later, Lester, my husband and I founded a dance theater out here. And it was a continuing kind of thread. And this was actually a theater itself.

[00:20:13]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Now, was your husband a dancer as well as an architect?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: We met through dance. He came in under the misapprehension that dance would be a glorified form of athletics, which it, of course, is not. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: But I'm sure it helps.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. Well, you must have the skill of an athlete—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —but it isn't at all the same kind of function.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: And this is shocking if you are not aware of it beforehand. Lester was on Theatre Project a short period of time, as we had three dance activities out here.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: On the Project?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. I would say three or four. The main Dance Project was headed by Myra Kinch who is now—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Excuse me, do you know how to spell her name?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. M-Y-R-A K-I-N-C-H.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I didn't mean to interrupt you—

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's perfectly all right.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —she is still here?

BELLA LEWITZKY: She is not. She is in the East now, in New York. But she's still actively engaged as a professional and is teaching at Ted Shawn's Jacob's Pillow. Now, these, I'm sorry, I keep throwing these names about because you probably are not too familiar with them.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I'm not. But I'm so happy to have r them because you see, we have a researcher in that area. He possibly would know—

BELLA LEWITZKY: They would find her there.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —about her and they can talk to her and have her [inaudible].

BELLA LEWITZKY: She actually—she was actually the head of the Dance Project itself; organized it. There were classes conducted daily repertoire assembled. We performed all over the Southern California area, including San Francisco.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And San Francisco did not have a dance group, did it?

BELLA LEWITZKY: It is my impression that it did not, but I certainly would not state that as fact. I am very loose about facts generally, and I don't know. I doubt it. I think I would have had a remembrance of it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. And you probably had dancers then coming from all the Southern California [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Not from San Francisco. They were from this area, and really this was an odd situation, she had to really train them, although it included some people that—I remember one young woman on it who had been in [Anna] Pavlova's company.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Goodness, a young woman?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, youngish.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: She probably was not young as a dancer.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Because Pavlova quit dancing about that time, didn't she?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. And I think she was probably very young—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —when she was in Pavlova's company. I'm sure that this woman had had a career and was in semi-retirement—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —and was able to earn a living. But it's stretched across such a reach of abilities, such as this.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. From the academic to the [inaudible]—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, to untrained—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: —and to untrained—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Untrained, right.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —dancers all together.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You started to tell me how she had it broken up into three or four groups.

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, not she.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well—

BELLA LEWITZKY: This was the main Project that employed dancers. It was the Dance Project. But dancers were employed elsewhere on other projects, other aspects of Federal Theatre.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, they were?

BELLA LEWITZKY: For instance, there was an opera—a federal opera project down here that employed dancers just as the opera ballet does. And Lester, for a short time, headed this, the opera dancers. And he too trained raw material to perform on the federal opera. In addition to this, there was, within Federal Theatre, musical comedy and review. Two very gifted young men wrote original musicals, and they were staged by Myra Kinch. So, here was a case of Theatre and Dance Project coordinating—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —for musical theater—musical comedy, really. And these were quite talented young men.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That isn't where that Offenbach one started, was it? There was—  
[Recorder stops, restarts.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, *Ready!*—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —*Fire!* was the name of one of them?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't recall whether this one you made reference to has anything to do with it, because I don't really recognize it. *Ready! Aim! Fire!* was one of the musical comedies which they wrote. And they wrote two others. In addition to that, they wrote a revue called *Two A Day*. Could that be the title? I think. And they gathered together all of the very well-known vaudevillians who lived in this area and had already retired. And it was a fascinating experience, because these were people who were—like the Two Black Crows—very, very well-known people—the woman who made "Stay In Your Own Backyard" famous. And they came back again and all their paraphernalia. It was all—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What a wonderful thing.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was a marvelous thing. And those of us who had never seen live vaudeville of this nature not only saw them and heard them, but worked with them. They were terribly gracious people.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Were they?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Very warm. A different breed altogether. And so we were employed as dancers in a revue. Now Myra staged that as well. So—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: It must have been a fascinating thing.

BELLA LEWITZKY: [Inaudible.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And these were given for the public?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And they were charged admission and [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —defray expenses.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was—there were small admission charges. The theaters were very well attended. And theaters were opened in this city that had never been opened before. You must really speak to some of the theater people.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: There was also an experimental wing here under Virginia Farmer, that did straight experimental work; Living Newspaper. Marvelous, original, experimental theater. Very exciting.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Do you know whether she is here still?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I'm pretty sure she is. Virginia Farmer is her name. They—I can recall to this day that, I think we were in a musical at the time—I'm not sure what the production was. Every Federal Theatre show on this evening introduced its evening performance with a wire which was sent across the United States—I have forgotten how many theaters, all did the same thing at the same time. One play was *It Can't Happen Here*—was being premiered, in the United States of America, not in the theater—in many theaters across the nation. And it was a moment of great excitement as this wire was read before every house—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, my goodness.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —before the show went on. And I can remember the feeling of great—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Unity?

BELLA LEWITZKY: —emotion really, to think that people who have never seen theater were all seeing the same play, of course, and a marvelous play on the same evening.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, wasn't that an amazing thing?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Very exciting. Theaters that had been shut down, old houses, all—we couldn't find enough houses to open. And it was all well attended, really well attended. But

there are moments—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What a perfectly wonderful thing for the country, isn't it?

BELLA LEWITZKY: —moments such as that that really should be recorded, people possibly either do not know or have forgotten. And of course, you don't retain all these bits of memorabilia. You couldn't keep them cluttered in your head. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Miss Lewitzky, don't you imagine that most of our little theater groups probably have their germinal growth in the people who saw these for the first time, and were inspired to do something? [Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't think one can estimate what its influence is really, because these are intangibles. I do think that the renaissance of theater—I don't think anyone can question that Federal Theatre created a renaissance. I think this is accepted fact.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: I do know that most of the people involved in Federal Theatre have continued in one way or another; they never really stopped.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: I do think the thing you will never be able to really equate is how much more deeply an influence was felt by those who saw.

[00:30:03]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: This is another aspect of participation. It is also the creative act of receiving—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —as well as performing. And how would you weigh this? You cannot question an audience. It's [they laugh] very difficult. But I'm sure it must have left its seed.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Certainly must have. Well, let's get back here a minute to the dance. You have spoken of the federal opera project and the musical comedy project and vaudeville, and then some of the groups working in the theater.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And the Dance Project itself.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And the dance itself. And that was the one that Mrs. Kinch—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Myra Kinch.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Myra Kinch, was head of.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And you were on just the one under her [inaudible]—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, for some reason or other, I seem to have been on all of them [Betty Hoag McGlynn laughs], but I can't tell you precisely how [laughs].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, about how many people were on it? Would you have any idea? Would you remember?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I wouldn't offhand. It was a large crowd, I recall.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Fifty, maybe or—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no, not that large.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —100?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no, no. I would say more in the 20 area.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's a guess.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think we can refer to a program. I did find one.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Good. [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: I was so surprised. From the Dance Project itself.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And you were working with Lester Horton dance studio, both taking lessons and teaching at this time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: And performing in concerts. Myra was very wonderful about understanding that—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: The time element [laughs].

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, that I had a first obligation, in spite of finances.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And that was to the concert company. And I was principal dancer of the Horton Dance Company at this time. And this she understood, although I'm sure many times it worked a hardship on her. She would excuse me. And if we had a concert coming, I would be permitted to step out of a performance in order to do the concert.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Wonderful.

BELLA LEWITZKY: So—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Were you required to put in so many hours?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Or a specified time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And a specified time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. We—I—if not, actually, we came close to punching a clock. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You see, some of the painters and sculptors could work at home, that's the reason I wondered.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no. This was—we had headquarters at a building, an actual building, that was the Federal Theatre Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Where were they?

BELLA LEWITZKY: We had two homes. One of them—I don't believe either of them exist any longer. One of them was in the West Hollywood area. And it was specially constructed. And it was a studio where we had classes and where repertoire was built. And the other was on Western, which is at the other edge of Hollywood, the eastern edge of Hollywood.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: And it was also a very large studio. And most of this, of course, was training. A dancer's life is made up of training and rehearsing.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: But we put in hours. We were accountable for hours.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And the Project gave dances, or concerts?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Dance concerts.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. The Dance Project gave dance concerts.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And how in the world do they decide about whether it would be the academic type of dancing or—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, this was pre-decided when the director was chosen.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. [They laugh.] It followed the line of whoever was directing?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. The—Myra Kinch is a modern dancer.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I'm not too sure of her background. I know that she had studied in Europe, I believe. But I'm not sure with either [inaudible] Kreutzberg, something of that quality, I think. When she came—I had seen her before she became Project head, and she worked within her own style. Most modern dancers did. They invented their own approach to technique.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh really?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. And it was very seldom codified. One tended to invent a technique which was most comfortable upon one's own body. It made for great excitement and great limitation, the two aspects of it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: So that she—her work was different from other moderns, but you will find this true of almost all modern. Their work differs.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well would this have been very difficult for some of the students who had had nothing but the Russian ballet type of the training?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We had classes which she taught in her approach to technique, but she did also include ballet classes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I—oh, I remember this woman's name, Eleanor Fague [ph] was the young—wait, she isn't young, you're right. I don't know why I think of her as young. She was so slight—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: She's a Pavlova—

BELLA LEWITZKY: She was a Pavlova pupil. And she taught ballet classes to the company. So that we had classes in more than one technique, although Myra composed and required her dancers to move in the modern vein.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. Well, I think that Los Angeles must have been very, very fortunate to have this wealth of—

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was a busy time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —dancers, [inaudible] fascinating for them.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. It was slow in building. I think there were really not enough skilled dancers on the Project. So, they had to be built in many cases. Although, there were some professionals on it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did they have composers working all the time with her?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Her husband—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —was a pianist composer. And so, they really formed a working team. His name is not Kinch. [They laugh.] Manuel Galea, I think his name was, I may—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Spanish, or Mexican?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't know what his background was.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Galea?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Galea sounds Italian. I don't know.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Italian?

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's a guess.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was all of this music original music that was written—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: For her main ballets, he composed the music. In some cases, she would work to written music, and these—well, come to think of it, I guess they were rather balanced out. Some was music which was already composed. She did Albéniz', as a matter of fact, Iberian suite. And of course, this was done to the musical composition. And in other cases, Manuel would compose.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And did she do the choreography, or is that always [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, she did.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: They don't have a equal [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: In dance this is the same thing.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: It is? I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: In dance, very often you will find a singular thing such as, not only are they choreographer, teacher, but they are also the principal soloist. [They laugh.] And then this was the case here.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: But I think you would find—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Have you ever done either?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Have you really?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I had my own company, and I was also the teacher of my own school—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —and also the principal dancer. It's a monopoly. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, I would think that would be the only way you'd really get a unified production, to have one mind knowing what the all-over concept was going to be.

BELLA LEWITZKY: This is partially one of the reasons this occurs. It does—it happens less, perhaps, in ballet by far than it does in modern, but modern is a—an uncoded form, and



therefore it is communicated via its originator. And that's why this strange identification with technique, creator, performer.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: This is sort of an off the subject question: one of my artists is a friend of Agnes de Mille. Am I saying that right?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: De Mille? Yes. And I wondered if you remember if she was on the Project, this lady didn't know—

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't believe so.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —and I hated to call and ask her—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —because I'm sure she's quite an old lady now. And I thought I'd ask somebody else who was on the—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Out here?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: She is here. Agn—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no, I mean, were you asking whether Agnes were—was on the Project here in Los Angeles?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Or at any point.

BELLA LEWITZKY: She was not here, that I know definitely. As a matter of fact, I think she was—wait a minute, where was she then? I have a feeling that possibly around the time of the Project, Agnes was in London. I'm not sure of that. But I—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: She was quite well known at that time, so she probably wouldn't have been on the Project.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's possible.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Like Trudi Schoop, I think this was kind of their heyday, wasn't it? But the—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, no, this was the—Agnes' beginnings.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, it was?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. She was not an established—I think not an established dancer at that point. Although she worked—I think at this period of time she was working in solo concert, had not yet worked for a group, or with a group.

[00:40:12]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I haven't looked her up and I had the feeling that she was—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: But I am—I am—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —quite an older person but [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Agnes? Not too much, no.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I don't know—[inaudible] just had this impression—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, she's not. No, she's not. But I don't believe that she worked on the Project in the East either. I have a vague feeling that she may—this could easily be settled with one glance at a book. But [they laugh] I don't know why I'm debating this, but I think she was probably in England at that period of time. I don't think she was connected to the

Federal Theatre Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Are there any other dancers—or any dancers who are on the Project who have gone on and are well known today that you know of here in Los Angeles?

BELLA LEWITZKY: From the Los Angeles area?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Or in general, what effect do you think the Project had on the development of dance here in this area?

BELLA LEWITZKY: In this area, I think it had more effect upon the development of an audience and livelihood for dance than it did upon the dance itself. And that is only a guess, I've never really tried to assay this; this is without real thought. I'm speaking, really, without any full thought on the subject. Because it was not a large enough Project, and because it was loaned out to other theater activities, I don't know. I don't know what its effect would have been locally, other than to employ people. I tend to view it, of course, from my own personal viewpoint.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Of course you do.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And that might definitely give you a warped opinion, [they laugh] because I was moving in another direction, you see.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: In New York, probably, the scene was very different, I'm not sure. I think both Helen Tamiris and Doris Humphrey—two very well-known choreographers and very important in the field of dance—were working on Federal Theatre Project. In Chicago, I believe—who is the young woman—young Negro dancer, did a great deal of work. And probably this gave her a great deal of impetus too. She had been in anthropology.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Dorothy something, isn't it?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Dunham.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, Katherine Dunham?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Katherine Dunham—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —had, I believe just graduated from an anthropological viewpoint, really, and was able—I have a feeling through the Project in Chicago, to test some of her ideas in dance. So, this would have been—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Didn't Belafonte do the same thing? [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't know. I don't know his background.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I read someplace that he had been in anthropology at UCLA, I believe.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's possibly so.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible] extensive work in that [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: His wife is a dancer. She was a—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And she's an Indian girl, isn't she?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, she—[they laugh]—his present wife is—was a member of the Dunham Company, although she is not a Negro, and a dancer. [Recorder stops, restarts.] —possibly would have been—well, now I can remember the demise of the Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, can you?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: World War II or—

BELLA LEWITZKY: So apparently I stayed until it ended. This was by congressional act—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, it was?

BELLA LEWITZKY: —that the Federal Theatre was disbanded. And I do recall—although I had reason to attempt to research this on a cultural panel discussion for UCLA, and I wanted to use Federal Theatre Project as an example of a point I was making—and I can recall very vividly when I was on the Project, first one Project and then the other was dropped. That's how I happened to be on so many, I believe.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think possibly, Dance Project was disbanded, and then opera project disbanded, and so on until what was left was a joining of theatre arts all together under a Theatre Project out here.

[00:45:02]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, for goodness sakes, and the artists were retained for the parts where they was dancing—

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think so, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: And this was probably not very long, this period.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I can recall the anxiety with which we followed the news in Congress. And I also recall somebody stating a congressman got up on the floor and danced back and forth in a very poor taste imitation of a ballet dancer and screamed out loud, "This is what your money is going for."

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, dear.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And it was this kind of thing that rang the death knell for the Federal Theatre Project.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, then, neither of these were used by the government for entertaining. For instance, the USO was not an outgrowth—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, no, no.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —[inaudible] entertaining the troops. There were no—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No, no. They weren't even related.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: They weren't?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I thought—you see, the artists, some of them went into the Army Signal Corps directly from the Project, they were put into that to—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —record the war experience—

BELLA LEWITZKY: USO—no. The Federal Theatre Project was killed long before the USO ever came into existence. There was a time span. I can recall that we all assembled at this building, waiting for the congressional vote to come down, that would either support or kill—oh, there were some marvelous speeches made on the floor by some perfectly marvelous people, on reasons why Federal Theatre Project should be retained. And there were some very dreadful speeches made on reasons why it should be destroyed. And it was a political football, I'm sure. I'm sure that the theater itself got lost as a sacrificial goat to a lot of

political maneuverings.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Isn't that a shame?

BELLA LEWITZKY: It is a shame. But I can recall that we just stood in this building. Nobody rehearsed, nobody did anything. Nobody made a pretense at work, and waited, for the boat to come down. And I can recall the announcement being posted, "Federal Theatre has been disbanded." And oh, with what sorrow.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did that work a lot of hardship on the people who were on it?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I don't think so.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Or how were thee—

BELLA LEWITZKY: My impression—although I was quite young at the time and too young to be aware, probably, of this aspect of it—I can recall only things such as this, it put forward a lot of careers. I remember a lot of theater people who got a start in Federal Theatre and went on in theater to successful commercial careers.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Were a lot of them absorbed in movies here?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Some were, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: As a result of—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: There were many who did actually, who had contracts signed because of work they did in Federal Theatre. They were scouted all the time by people who were employing actors, and writers, and dancers. But I think the general feeling was of a live thing being destroyed. It wasn't even—I don't think any of us thought of it as a financial thing. We thought of it as a cultural [laughs] thing. Those of us who were in the living from it, even, didn't think of it in this single-track fashion at all. We were very—I think all of us were concerned at different levels, with the fact that somebody had killed theater, live theater out here, and there was nothing to substitute for it. This was our general feeling, I think. There was great—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Must've been very tragic.

BELLA LEWITZKY: The kind of sorrow was not a personal sorrow.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It was not a "There goes my livelihood sorrow" at all, but it was really for the theater itself.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I wonder if they'll bring it back again. I think there's such a need for it.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Enormous. One of the needs that is the most unrecognized is the training ground for young people. Where else will they grow, experiment, continue, pass on a heritage? Well, in addition to which ours is the only nation of such affluence—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I know. I was just thinking that, that doesn't have—

BELLA LEWITZKY: That doesn't have a supported theater. A supported theater is only one theatre, but it's at least a beginning point.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You know the summer edition of *Art in America*, which only comes out four times a year, it's being given to the Archives of American Art.

[00:50:07]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, [inaudible] good.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And I think that it reaches a great many people. And I don't know how much is included in that, besides the painting, I would imagine it's covering all of the art, and I think it's going to be very exciting to see—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —if there is an influence on people realizing—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. I think—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —more from it.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —speaking again from the experience of the cultural conference, my main point was that I believe there must be a subsidy.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Governmental?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Theater.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Federal ones?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I didn't even specify which, but the performing arts do need to be subsidized. It's something that an individual cannot support.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Because of the expense involved?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, when you get into production—very, very difficult. Dance in particular, because dancers cannot afford to perform, who have to eat.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: But they must go where the salary goes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Of course.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And there was an immediate expression of fear over the word subsidy, meaning control, and to whom and so on. And it was interesting for me because I had lived through subsidized theater, and I knew both its attributes and its deficits.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, you did not feel that there'd been any control—political control of the dance anytime you were on it, did you?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Not at all. Oh, not at all. The control was—the control, which one would gain from any individual. It expressed Myra Kinch's viewpoint, and none of us expected anything differently than that, how could it express anyone else's? She was the creative factor involved.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Although the thing I suppose that people would ask is how many Myra Kinchs there are around? Whether they'd always be as fortunate—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, I—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —under government subsidy to have someone like that?

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think that you would—in the dance, in the East, find that you would have had people like Doris Humphrey, a great innovator, great creator. I believe Helen Tamiris, also a—most inventive person in modern dance. And in Chicago, Dunham. I don't think it was exceptional at all, I think it was the rule. This is in dance, possibly in theater other things happened. I don't know.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I haven't found any evidence of it with the painters. I haven't had a single person feel—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, I—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —that this happened all over those controversies.

BELLA LEWITZKY: [Inaudible] my feeling is that when you are involved in art production it is so time-consuming that you simply don't have the energy to waste in these other imagined fantasies. I don't know what people are worried about.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Into another field. [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Most of the time—most of the time we were concerned in getting a production on.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I'm sure this was the [they laugh] concern with every other artist. That's a big job.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Of course it is.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It's a very big job. Of course, there would be controversy. If there weren't, you would be dealing with people without a thought in their minds, they're not worth dealing with, naturally. And I'm sure that I must have felt that Lester would have been a much more worthwhile person, being, at that point, definitely in his camp. And I'm sure that Myra was most understanding and knowing that this would have been my feeling. I hope that I was mature enough not to let that be a matter of conflict, but these are the things one deals with when one deals with people.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: They had no accusations of communism within—here—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, of course they did.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —in Los Angeles, did they?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Of course they did.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I've read nothing about it, and I know that—

[Cross talk.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —eventually that there was a—

BELLA LEWITZKY: I think this was one of the main things that was used against the theater, was that it was so-called left or Communist oriented.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Early McCarthyism [laughs].

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, I think so.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible], yeah.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And I think it was used to help bury Federal Theatre.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I would like very much to hear what you have done since then, because I know it involves many fascinating things, you've alluded to some of them. What happened after that was over?

BELLA LEWITZKY: After it was over, I—there was really no break. I was still a continuing performer of the Horton Dance Group. We performed through to the war years, as this company, and then there was a hiatus.

[00:55:00]

Lester went east, I believe. And I had, at this point, gotten married and didn't want to move east. And so our relationship was severed. I had also worked as a studio dancer, which was the main source of employment out here.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: At one particular studio?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Or freelance?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Or do you call it that in the—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Dancers—with the exception of one company, a dancer was never so fortunate as to be contracted.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, I see. [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: One auditioned for dance directors.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You were only brought in as—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Of all dancers.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —for one picture at the time?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I didn't know that.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, yes. This is, to this day, still true. A dancer's existence is a constant source of proof. You audition each time for a job.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, my goodness.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. It's not an easy career.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: It must not be.

BELLA LEWITZKY: [Laughs.] In many ways. Then after the war, Lester came back. And we rejoined—my husband, myself, Lester, and one other young artist named Bill Bowne. And for —

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I'm sorry, Bill?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Bowne, B-O-W-N-E.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Thank you.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Formed Dance Theater, which was a school, a small theater and a small continuing company. And it was really a do-it-yourself project. [Laughs.] From the buildings, straight through—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, really?

BELLA LEWITZKY: —to the costumes and lights. [They laugh.] We performed every weekend. Did I can't tell you how many ballets, they were constantly developing repertoire. Lester was a very prolific creator. Built, slowly and quite successfully a large audience here, locally.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Where were you situated? Where was this building—

BELLA LEWITZKY: In—on Melrose.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Melrose?

BELLA LEWITZKY: In Hollywood.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And then at a given point, my interests began to shift, and I left Dance Theater for my own school and my own company, until the birth of my daughter, when I decided that I could cope with only one career at a time. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did your husband stay with you with your own school or had he gone—

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. By this time, he had already discovered the dance was not a higher form of athletics. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That's wonderful.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And thought they were a peculiar breed he was willing to put up with, but not become part of. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And had headed toward architecture. And so, now, by this time, he is—at the time when our daughter is born he is already an architect.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Tolerant husband of a dancer.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh [laughs].

BELLA LEWITZKY: They're a very special breed.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Very sympathetic, probably.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Since he has been through the problems [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Very much so. But I find that husbands of dancers are a particular grouping. They are willing to put up with a great deal, [they laugh] and have sympathetic understanding of the field. It's not an easy field to enter; it's a peculiar one.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: For one thing, I've heard that dancers have to practice many hours a day continually. This must be tough on you—

BELLA LEWITZKY: One must train.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —living with another person of any kind.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's true. This is a difficult thing. And most people will—you say I am going to take a lesson, and they look at you askance and say, Haven't you learned what you should know by now? [They laugh.] Aren't you proficient?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: And then, unless one is an instrumentalist, you do not understand that this is a daily experience.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: You must keep your body as an instrument and that requires daily work, not long hours because the body can only take a certain amount, but you can never stop training. As long as you wish to be a performer, you must take daily classes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: Or work—if you are fortunate to be one of those nicely disciplined people, you do this on your own. And if you are not nicely disciplined, as I am not, then you take a class. [They laugh.] But this is something that is an absolute necessity. You must keep the body tuned, stretched, and strengthened, and that is not a God-given thing, by any matter of means, that's labor. [Laughs.]

[01:00:08]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: The only advantage I can see would be that you're always subtle, and the things that you do have to do otherwise must come much more easily than the rest



of us who aren't in condition.

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's true. I think a dancer's physical vitality extends far longer than the average human being. And most of us—you will find that dancers very seldom, unless they have disabilities, ever really stop this training procedure. They are not used to the slack muscle tone that sets in when you stop. And even when they have finished with their active careers, they will still work because of the feeling of efficiency in the body. They're accustomed to this feeling of efficiency.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You also mentioned having been on seminar, and, I believe, teaching at UCLA.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did I misunderstand you?

BELLA LEWITZKY: No. No, I have never taught at UCLA. I have taught masterclasses through many colleges, I enjoy it very much.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What is masterclass?

BELLA LEWITZKY: This is when you—

[Cross talk.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I don't understand the terminology.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —no, it is a very—I wish there were another term. It is when a so-called master [laughs] is brought in to teach a single class.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. Like a visiting professor in academics?

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's right.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's right. And very often, those of us who have worked any length of time professionally are invited as instructors into dance departments for the extra scope, or the difference in viewpoint that it might bring to the students. I do head the dance department for USC summer school, the Idyllwild Arts Foundation Contemporary Dance Department.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Is that something where you go up and stay all summer? Do you—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, it's not all summer, it is a workshop period during the summer.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: A beautiful spot. Your daughter must enjoy—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Lovely.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —going [inaudible] vacation.

BELLA LEWITZKY: She enjoys it enormously, and this is one of the main reasons why I go. I must confess [Betty Hoag McGlynn laughs], I have now come to the point where I consider career and family hand-in-hand. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That's a wonderful combination, because—

BELLA LEWITZKY: It is.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —they have classes for children of all kinds, don't they?

BELLA LEWITZKY: That's right. That's right. And it is a singular kind of camp in that it is family oriented. And it's a term, as a youngster, I think I would have avoided [laughs], and that I treasure dearly now [they laugh].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: One of the artists whom I've not talked to lives in New York and

was on the Project here, I believe, and he's up there teaching every summer and I think [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Harry Sternberg, I adore him.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You know him? [They laugh.]

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I just met him briefly at a show, but I was hoping to tape him this summer. Is he the only resident artist there in the summer, do you know?

BELLA LEWITZKY: He is the main resident artist.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: And a lovely, dear person.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, so many people have spoken of him—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —he must really be—that must be an exciting place too.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes, I look forward to it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: About how many people do they have up there?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, it is of such a spread-out scope, that I don't know how one would describe it. You start with children and end with lay [ph] adult. In addition to which there are three concentrated workshops—or is it two, I'm not sure, for junior high and high school, that are all special and unto themselves and have any number of students. There are two-week workshops that continue throughout the entire summer in different fields with different emphasis. Contemporary dance is one, playwright workshop, ceramic workshop, crafts workshop, music education workshop. It took me about three years to find out what it was that really went on at Idyllwild; it's so extensive.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I have no idea what it was.

BELLA LEWITZKY: It's a very complex setup. Harry happens to continue throughout the entire summer. His workshop is open to continuing registrants, mine is not. Mine is a fixed given period of time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: There are others—I think the ceramic workshop continues, and engraving, lithography—what is it, enamel on copper, this kind of craftwork, I think continues through the summer as well.

[01:05:08]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: In addition to which there are the two-week workshops—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_lewitz65\_8775\_m.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on April the 21st, interviewing Bella Lewitzky, tape number two. And we're just about the end of our interview, because I've stayed—overstayed my time already. And I certainly have enjoyed being in the lovely home that your husband designed, it's just beautiful. I'd like to get that in the tape, too.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Well, thank you.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [The most of the view (ph)] name of the street is certainly well-taken. A lovely style.

BELLA LEWITZKY: We're terribly spoiled in being so close to a major center of activity, and so close to nature. It's getting exceedingly difficult to find this combination. But you know [inaudible]—

[Cross talk.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes, you told me about the deer [ph] coming up and [inaudible]—

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. And since you are a kindred soul, you lived in the same circumstance.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I think people who don't know Los Angeles are always amazed that we can be in the middle of three million people and still have wildlife in spots.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. Oh, I value it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: We're located [inaudible]. [They laugh.] Can you think of anything else about the Project that you want to say before we stop? I think we've indicated that you feel it was a wonderful thing.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Yes. I should perhaps state both the positive and the negative side of it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: The positive side far outweighs it—s you can tell, by the way, I have weighted this interview, [they laugh] far outweighed for me. Stimulating, exciting, experimental, productive, it had all these things. The negative side was kind of an amusing thing. One was—constantly did have the feeling that one was a number, or a small mechanism and a large machine which, at any time could shuffle you about, being a government—I suppose any governmental worker would recognize some aspect of this. You are part of a very large operation, in other words, Federal Theatre—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Even though those are small local productions?

BELLA LEWITZKY: Nevertheless one was aware that there were bulletins coming down from Washington and other theaters of this kind existed. It was both part of the excitement and part of the uncertainty.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BELLA LEWITZKY: When Hallie Flanagan would come—she was the head of Federal Theatre Project nationally, I believe—to visit and see the various branches. We were fully aware that we were connected to a very large going organization at that point. There was—I can remember, the difficult periods were the periods when you—I think we used to laughingly say being on Federal Theater, one had a built-in reaction: If you saw a line, you instantly got into it, and asked why later. [They laugh.] Everything was done by queuing up. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

BELLA LEWITZKY: For your check, or your—if your check was overdue and didn't come, for anything. Signing papers, for wavering anything, any decision. This was the governmental aspect of it, you just automatically stood in line, hysterically, at a great length. [They laugh.] So these are some of the debit things that occurred. I think you can tell that I'm groping to find what other negative things—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —there might be. I think we have a way of recalling those things that are pleasurable and forgetting those that are negative anyhow. I remembered—really, I must confess, on the whole, I remember it as a stimulating birthing time, even when one would be critical. One would have differences of opinion, nevertheless, it was activity.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, I think you're very fortunate to have the experience.

BELLA LEWITZKY: I consider it so. I treasure those years. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, I certainly have enjoyed our interview and I thank you so much.

BELLA LEWITZKY: Oh, it's my pleasure. I have—I feel so grateful to anyone who will record some of the things which Federal Theatre has done. That it should be wiped from the scene as soon as all the people connected to it have vanished would be a crime.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

BELLA LEWITZKY: So, it was my pleasure.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, thank you. And in relation to that, I also want to tell you how much we appreciate being able to microfilm your scrapbook with clippings about it, because I know there aren't very many around.

[00:05:08]

BELLA LEWITZKY: No problem—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And it all adds a great deal.

BELLA LEWITZKY: —I'm surprised that I have them, really. [Laughs.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Thank you.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

After I finished taping Miss Lewitzky, she was giving me names of other people who've been on the Federal Theatre in Los Angeles who are still here, whom I can look up later. And then she was reminded of another part of the Federal Project which we had not taped, and I wanted to add this, that they did a series of operettas and in the microfilmed material, there will be found a news clipping about *The Merry Widow*, which was one of them. She said there were quite a few that were done at that time, and I wanted to be sure and get it in the record.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_lewitz65\_8776\_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]