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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Benjamin
Patterson, 2009 May 22

Funding for this interview provided by the Brown Foundation. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Benjamin Patterson on 2009 May 22. The interview took place at Patterson's home in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Kathy Goncharov for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by the Brown Foundation, Inc.

Benjamin Patterson has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

KATHY GONCHAROV: So we are interviewing Ben Patterson in New York in the home of a friend of his. And Ben, can you tell me about where you were born and your early family life and your early interest in art and music?

BENJAMIN PATTERSON: Okay, so I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, on the 29th of May, 1934. And mother graduated from University of Pittsburgh in chemistry and father from Carnegie Institute of Technology—it was called then—now Carnegie Mellon in electrical engineering. And as you can imagine, this is [the] end of the 1920s. And so they were among the first blacks “coloreds,” as we were then known, to graduate from these two places. Okay, I won’t go into all of that. Everybody knows what the color barriers were then, so the opportunities for black women chemists were not very big then.

MS. GONCHAROV: I wouldn’t think.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, and also for black electrical engineers. But in some ways I think their persistence and willingness to go through all of this knowing that there was likely a wall at the end, which sooner or later might be broken, is part of my upbringing that when I decided I wanted to become a classical symphony musician, even though it was clear there were no blacks anywhere in the country, I said, “Okay, well, I am going to just keep going and going and sooner or later something will happen.”

So that was a side step, but then the earliest sort of arts affiliations, a sister of my father—an aunt—was an illustrator. A fashion illustrator and living in Wilkes-Barre where my father’s family came from. And she was top of the line and actually did most of the ads for Wanamaker and so forth in Philadelphia and was very good there. And then at some point, I remembered that at least four of my aunts and cousins had all been church organists in various churches, so music was a part of the family tradition. And actually, my father had studied violin. His father had been a violinist also. And he would say—my father with his father, my grandfather—and during his late high school years, 14 to, I guess 18, he played in the pit orchestra for silent films in Wilkes-Barre, which is a funny sort of thing. And then later during his college days, in the summer to make money, worked in the hotels in the Poconos, which were the big resort areas. And so half of the job was waiting tables and the other half was playing bass in the dance bands. And as it turned out later when I became interested in the bass, he had still kept his old bass. And so that became my first personal instrument. In the late ’40s, he gave that to me. So there was tradition of the arts in the family from the beginning.

MS. GONCHAROV: How far back does that go? You say your grandfather, right?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes. Well, there was a—

MS. GONCHAROV: People before that?

MR. PATTERSON: From my mother’s side, I remember I inherited once a wooden fife that a great-great-uncle had played in the Colored Corps in the Civil War. You know, the family has interesting history. Actually, I was the seventh generation that could trace back and goes back to 1770s, 1780s.

MS. GONCHAROV: And how did they come here?

MR. PATTERSON: Funny stories. Okay, we know from my mother’s side that Tobias Ente [ph]—the name has been revived with the youngest son who is getting married now—came from the Bahamas as a freed slave to Philadelphia just at the end of the revolution and settled there. And actually, it was just before the end because he fought in George’s army. And then at the end of the war, George had this big country, but no money to pay the soldiers. And so said, “Go west on the other side of the Alleghenies and stake out your property and that is your pay.” And so Tobias hiked over the Allegheny Mountains into Western Pennsylvania, North of Pittsburgh, and staked out. He walked two days in that direction, two days in that direction, two days, staked out something, which is now more or less Allegheny County, [laughs] as the property over the generations got

divided up and sold and so forth. But the interesting other aspect is that in the family legend, it is described that [he] settled in Philadelphia and married a German nun. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: And I always puzzled over that. And then at one point, a friend—Polish friend did research in New York and she said that there was actually a Protestant order located on the Rhine River not very far from Wiesbaden that had come to the States during the war because King George had hired mercenaries, Hessian mercenaries from the state of Hesse, to fight on his side of the war. So they came with the soldiers to act as hospital nurses and sanitary things. So the assumption is that she was one of these and stayed on and married Tobias Ente [ph]. And so this return to Wiesbaden—[laughs]—a few hundred years later is a curious thing.

MS. GONCHAROV: That is a very different experience from most blacks in this country, which is quite interesting.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. What's next?

MS. GONCHAROV: Your parents and your early schooling and your playing of the bass.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, the early schooling was normal public school situation. The first years [we] lived in the city, Pittsburgh. Oh, this is where she caught it. We say East Liberty. [Laughs.] That is where Kay caught me in the East Side of the city. And then later in the—I guess I was six or seven at that point, [we] bought some land outside of the city in what was then called Turtle Creek and then [it] became Penn Township and now is Penn Hills, incorporated into the city. And at that point, it was just wild countryside, a couple of big farms here and there. [We] built a house there and then I went to public school—Township Public School, and eventually high school there. And in the grade school period, I was more interested in visual arts and was doing drawings and paintings and so forth. And there was a moment when I was nominated for a student weekend thing or session at Carnegie Tech. They had a thing where you could come in on the weekends and learn to draw and paint, but [it] didn't quite work out that way, and the janitor's son, because he was the other color, got it. And then, I guess, starting in junior high—well, I had already been studying piano first with my mother and violin with my father and then [I] went to a professional piano teacher, Marie Carter Hayes, for the record. And the last years in high school, I was studying with Harry Franklin, who was the pianist for the Pittsburgh Symphony then, and [I] progressed fairly well. But then, violin turned into double bass in junior high because they had no bass player. I had a bass. And so that became my instrument after that. It went quite, quite well. And I studied them with a former member of the Pittsburgh Symphony, Herman Clements, in Washington Heights, so that meant commuting in from the suburbs into the center of the city every Sunday morning. And what was interesting, I found out much later, I was his second student on Sunday morning. He was a very dedicated teacher. And I never really found out who the first student was Sunday morning until one point, I saw him walking out. He was late finishing and I was early. And it was Ray Brown, you know, fantastic jazz bass player. And wherever he was, if he had that time free, he would find a way to fly in or take a train into Pittsburgh to have a lesson again. He was an established recording artist and everything at that point.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you were still in high school?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, I was still in high school. So that was—I felt ooh, wow. But when we got far enough along the line that somehow or other, there was a children's Saturday morning talent show—some captain somebody or other—I have forgotten his name. And the music teacher, I guess, the first year I was in high school or second year nominated or whatever. And so I went in my band uniform because I played the tuba in the marching band, to this thing and played the *Elephants from Saint-Saens' Carnival With the Elephants*. So I think it was probably the first solo—double bass solo on television—[laughs]—of all times—A silly thing, but okay. It is my record. [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Were you continuing to paint and draw then, too?

MR. PATTERSON: No, that sort of dropped out because I got busy doing other things like the all-around student and was captain of the track team and the cross country team. You wouldn't know it from my knees now, but at one point, I held the 880-yard record for the state and went to, you know, most of the big competitions. And also, [I was] on the debating team and this and that, and the other thing. But that dropped out and I just began to focus and narrow in on music. Then that continued when I went to college university over at East Side. Okay, it will be a career in music. But even then the background or the interest in the back of the head was in composition. But, of course, nobody, black or white, earned a living as a composer. And so I saw playing in an orchestra as a bass player or something as a practicing performer a way to the day job. And you work as a composer, whatever, at night. So then I continued in that direction.

MS. GONCHAROV: Schools were segregated at that time, right?

MR. PATTERSON: No, in Pittsburgh, not.

MS. GONCHAROV: Really?

MR. PATTERSON: Pittsburgh was—well, this was north of the so-called Mason-Dixon Line, which was drawn at some point or other in Pittsburgh. Well, Pennsylvania was the southern border. West Virginia [and] Virginia on down [to the south] were segregated. So technically, it was not segregated. The schools were not segregated. But other aspects of the city—socially, there was clear segregation. And there were, you know, restaurants where you knew you wouldn't be admitted and you could choose a table and sit and sit and sit and sit and sit. "And I'm sorry, sir, we are closing now." [Laughs.] Never even saw the menu. So it was a polite kind of situation. But the one year—well, when my mother graduated, the only place she could work in chemistry, she taught in a teacher's college, segregated, of course, in Texas. In a place called Center Point, Texas, which was near Pittsburg, Texas. [Laughs.] This was just a little red-dirt town, one road through the thing. But it was sort of a boarding school situation. And then [she] married, children came along, and then to build a house. She went back there for a year to earn some money. And so my sister and I went with her for this summer. Father stayed. Well, that season, father stayed in Pittsburgh and worked further and gathered money for that. And so that was my year of real segregation and [I] learned to read "whites only" at the water fountain or "white and coloreds" at water fountains and toilets and restaurants and the whole thing. That was an interesting experience. Good that it only lasted for that length of time and that it wasn't a circumstance that I was born into. So I did even at that age, know the difference. So it didn't have that crushing effect, I would say. But it did make an impression because it taught—well this Pittsburg, Texas was still a boardwalk town. I mean, the sidewalks were board and the street was this red dirt thing. And when a white man comes down the sidewalk boardwalk, it is your duty to get off and walk in the street, you know, until he has passed—learning experience.

MS. GONCHAROV: You must have been happy to get back to Pittsburgh.

MR. PATTERSON: Well, you know, there were other things to do. So it was—and at that age, it is not depressing. It is like wow that is strange. But I learned to pick cotton—[laughs]—saw molasses being made—[laughs]—all those funny things, alligators in the swamp. Yes. Good old South.

MS. GONCHAROV: The good old South, yes. So back in Pittsburgh, you are studying music. So after high school, what did you do?

MR. PATTERSON: Off to the University of Michigan. And I was accomplished enough and my grades were like at the top. There were three of us who had the same grade average at the top of the class. And so I could have gone to Julliard here or New England Conservatory or Curtis. I considered all of them. But then I thought I really wanted a, "more rounded background." And conservatory then was like eight hours a day, just your instrument. And so I decided Michigan also had a very excellent music department school then. And then I could take courses in liberal arts. It is where I ended up going. And I never regretted it after that. Curiously, again, the professor for bass, which was my major instrument, had been with the Pittsburgh Symphony also at one point under Fritz Reiner. So it keeps coming around the circle. And there was a degree in string instruments, which meant I wanted to have it a little broader than just double bass in the case that a symphony position wouldn't be available or acceptable or I wouldn't be acceptable to them. I could at least teach someplace. So that meant studying all of the four major instruments: bass, cello, viola, and violin. And oh, yes, a funny thing: So the degree included a graduation recital of which three-quarters should be on your major instrument and one-quarter on your second instrument. So my second instrument was the violin and first, bass. So two or three things on the bass first and then the last piece before intermission was on the violin and played Corelli's *Sonata*. I remember the piano after all of this. And, of course, all the friends and colleagues came to the thing and finished it. [Laughs.] They all broke out laughing because they said they all recognized that it was the last time I would ever pick up a violin in my life. [Laughs.] Not quite, but almost. But it was a lot of work getting from there to there, fingers moving.

And then the last year at Michigan, I spent about three-quarters of it traveling around the Northeast Midwest auditioning for various orchestra positions that were open. I think I took 26 auditions during that time. And it was always the same story, you know. "Mr. Patterson, you play wonderfully, beautifully. We would love you to come, but you know what our problem is. Thank you very much. Next, next, next, next." And one of the last auditions before the school year ended was here in New York in this Park Avenue apartment with Leopold Stokowski, who was in Houston as the conductor. And normally an audition lasts 15 minutes, 10 to 15 minutes. But any conductor knows within the first two to three minutes what is going on and the rest of the time is to be polite. But he kept me playing for two hours. And another thing [inaudible] and another piece and sight reading. And in the end, he said, "You know, I really, really want you to come to Houston with me, but you know what my problem is." And I said, "Of course." And he said, "But I am going to fight it." He said, "You will hear from me." And so for the next two months, telegrams, "I have one more board member on my side, one more board member, one more board member." And then, "Tomorrow night is the big board meeting, wish us luck." Next telegram, "Sorry, couldn't make it." But then the funny part of this story is summer comes. I went to

Tanglewood to the orchestra studies thing where I had been for the last 3 years. And in the middle of the summer, I get a telegram from Stokowski there. He said "Mr. Patterson, please won't you reconsider your decision and come to Houston and play with us?" He had forgotten completely what the problem was. He only had ears for, "That is the bass player, I remember he played so well." And he had forgotten what the problem was. And I had to say, "Sorry, you remember I was the—" I guess I was "the negro" then because we have gone from colored to negro to black to Afro-American, you know, whatever. And so I always said, "Well, [I have] great respect for him as a musician before, but then that was sort of like the seal that he really was honest and he had tried his best." He was so color blind in that sense that he had literally forgotten what the problem was. So it is then again the twist of history, my first and only retrospective will be in Houston.

MS. GONCHAROV: Of course.

MR. PATTERSON: [Laughs.] Isn't that bizarre? That was 1956 to '57. So this is 40x years later, 50 years later. [Laughs.] But that is also a measure as with Mr. Obama of what has happened in this time. The country has done its ups and downs. But it has really progressed, you know.

MS. GONCHAROV: So how do you like Houston now? Better, I'm sure.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, yes. Well, I have only been to Houston once. Shortly after, this whole thing began and I met Valerie, and then I had a show in Los Angeles with Michael Solway. And so on the way back, I thought "Okay, I should stop in Houston and see this place." So I stopped for two days and it is a beautiful space, you know. And Houston is quite, quite a town. It is quite a town.

MS. GONCHAROV: So when did you finally did get a position with the symphony?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. Then later that summer, a conductor by the name of Thomas Meyer, who was in Halifax, Canada, came to Tanglewood to look for musicians. And I auditioned for him. And so I was appointed there as first double bass, my first job with them. And spent that season in Halifax. And this was during draft time and the Korean War, I should say. And I managed to get the deferment to the end of the season when my notice came up. And then [I went] into the Army and ended up in the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra, which was stationed in Stuttgart, but toured all of Europe. And this was an interesting organization because during draft, everybody went. It didn't matter whether you came from Julliard or had never even learned how to read or write basically, and Harvard graduates, whatever else. And so at some point, the Army discovered they had all of these really top-notch young musicians sitting around typing in a secretarial pools or whatever because they weren't very good with guns. I don't know who had the idea first, but they brought them all together. It was about—I guess it had been in existence for seven or eight years before I arrived. Brought them all together and made what was probably the best orchestra in Europe at that time, because Europe had been bombed out and the old men had only four fingers instead of five. And the young people had not had the time to practice, study, and so forth. So it was the big orchestra. And as people finished their service, many were recruited by the top orchestras in Europe and stayed there for a couple of years or even a couple friends stayed until they retired. And so I ended up with the Seventh Army Symphony. In my first tour of Europe, I should say, we played every large and small town in Germany. And well, all the NATO countries: so France, Italy, Denmark—didn't get to England, but we were in Greece and—no, not in Spain either, but Austria. Although that was neutral, but we still had sort of guest appearances there, which was fantastic. So [I was] doing exactly what I wanted to do and touring Europe for the first time courtesy of Uncle Sam. [Laughs.] They had gotten used to the fact that musicians are not easy to discipline—[laughs]—except on stage. The only time we were in uniform was on stage and the rest of the time [it] was civilian clothing. We traveled around in three big buses. And there would be a set program that would be rehearsed in Stuttgart. And then we would perform this program for four to six weeks during the tour and then come back to Stuttgart and do another program, rehearse another program at another thing. And as it turned out, you know, if the program the conductor chose didn't include a tuba, the tuba player had nothing to do for six weeks except, you know, collect his paycheck and roam around Europe on his own. So I had friends in the trombone section that knew that they were always trying to bribe the conductor to do an all-Mozart program with no trombones. [Laughs.] "What about a case of whiskey?" [Laughs.] But the basses were always on stage. But that didn't matter.

MS. GONCHAROV: So did you stay for a while afterwards?

MR. PATTERSON: No. Immediately afterwards, I went back to Canada. But in the meantime, the same conductor who had been in Halifax had moved to Ottawa. And so he asked if I would come to Ottawa again as first bass. And that was where the whole brew started again because in the evenings after rehearsals and so forth, I started working at a small primitive electronic music studio that quasi-musician scientist, Hugh Le Caine, had built in the corner of the National Research Laboratories, where he was director for what amounts to the Bureau of Statistics. In other words, that a pound is a pound and an inch is an inch and so forth. And so we got along very well. And I would go there about 11:00 at night and work until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and try to make little things—little music first, electronic experiments and so forth, and then the orchestra during the

daytime. And about three or four times during the week in the afternoon to the Gattineau Hills, which was 20 minutes drive for skiing. So music, sports, creative. And then I finished the season in May and I had gotten, I would say, about—not as far as I could go, but I had gotten enough knowledge of what was possible or what could be done there. And I thought during the summer break, I would go to Europe and see what the big boys were doing—to Cologne, where the major electronic music studio was down at the West German radio. And I planned to visit Cologne and Milan, where there was another electronic music studio and Paris, where there is a *musique concrète*, a studio. And so the conductor, Thomas Meyer, at Ottawa—I was then hired not only as first bass, but also as assistant conductor to the orchestra. So we had a close relationship. He knew what I was doing with the electronic music. And when he heard that I wanted to go to Europe for the summer—to Cologne, in particular—he said, “Well, you know, the German ambassador is a good friend of the orchestra’s and he’s also the brother-in-law of Karlheinz Stockhausen. So if you like, I can arrange a meeting for you and he can make a letter of introduction,” which is what happened. We had a nice lunch. And he wrote a very nice letter for me. Summer came—June, and I ended up in Cologne for the beginning of the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival. It was 1960, where a big new work of Stockhausen was being premiered. And I had arrived in Cologne via Stuttgart, where I went to visit a sculptor that I had met there during my time in Stuttgart by the name of Otto Hajek, who was quite an established sculptor. And so he said, well, he was going to this and [he asked] if I would like to come along with him. Yes, good. And then after the premiere, he had an invitation to the big dinner and said, “Come with me,” and so forth. And so it was fancy. I think it was the Dome Hotel, maybe, in Cologne or the Excelsior, one of the two big ones. At some point, I said, “Well, I guess this is as good a time as any to introduce myself to Stockhausen.” And so I pulled out my letter and go up to the head of the table, present it to him and say, “I’m Ben Patterson, I would like to introduce myself with this letter.” And so he is reading it. At first, he sees the letterhead, you know, the German embassy to Canada and sees his brother-in-law’s signature underneath it. He is very impressed and reads the nice note that he had written. And then he looks back at the date and sees that this is April 30th, when the letter had been written. And this is June 10th or 12th. I don’t know if you knew much about the personality, but in German [he asked,] “Where have you been all of this time?” [Laughs.] And he was serious. It was not a joke. I was, you know, to have been on the next fastest plane to Germany immediately after the—even before the ink dried. And so I thought to myself—quietly, of course, “I am not sure that this is the situation that I would like to work under.”

And then just by accident, the next day, [while] still in Cologne walking down a street, [I] saw a flier for this concert—Counter-Festival Concert—in a studio from Mary Bauermeister, whoever that was, featuring John Cage and David Tudor. I say, “Oh, well, maybe this is going to be more interesting.” And I knew only Cage’s work from the early piano sonatas, which have been recorded. But [the] more recent stuff, I didn’t [know]. And so I went to this studio loft and so forth. And I was astounded because it was recent Cage work and George Brecht, early Fluxus things, Terry Riley I’ve forgotten who else, Christian Wolff, and so forth. And I said, “Wow.” The way these things are, so after the concert, program—this was sort of informal—I went up and introduced myself to John and said how much I had enjoyed it, what a revelation it all was. He said, “Well, what are you doing?” And I explained, [I was] a bass player and trying to make new music and electronic music and so forth. And he said, “Would you like to perform with us tomorrow night?” [Laughs.] This is after a 10-minute conversation. He had never heard me play or anything else. But he had that kind of sensibility about him. So the next night, I participated in the European premiere of *Cartridge Music* and a couple other pieces. It was overnight conversion from serial electronic music that had been the interest then to aleatoric and chance and so forth. And then what had been intended to be a week in Cologne and a week in Milan and a few days in Paris turned out to be 2 years in Cologne. So then I scratched around and found a little apartment—well, a one-room thing and discovered a whole host of other young composers, musicians, as well as over the period of time, artists and the whole revolution that was going on—eruption, you could say—was going on in that whole area of Germany and so forth. And it was easily the most exciting point of my creative career. I mean it was like learning by doing. I didn’t study with anybody. Just kept my ears open and nose open and worked hard. And it developed from there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Who did you perform with in those years?

MR. PATTERSON: In those days, let’s see, the people—well, the big boys were Stockhausen, Kagel, Nono, Maderna, Pierre Boulez were all the major names working at this studio. Then there was the younger group, Cornelius Cardew, who died unfortunately very early. But he was basically, “Stockhausen’s assistant.” But most of the later work of Stockhausen during this period was really Cornelius Cardew because Stockhausen wrote a couple graphic things. And he realized the parts for orchestras for *Carre* and so forth and that was his work. David Behrman, Kurt Schwertsik, Juan Hidalgo was there who later became Zaj—a whole group of younger people. And in this Mary Bauermeister studio there continued to be a series of concerts. But they were mostly related to either Cage, Tudor, Earle Brown, and so forth—the established people or Bussoti. Silvana Bussoti was one program and one or two others of people that were connected to the West German thing. There was one of those classic situations that although this counter-festival had been organized, in a sense, against Stockhausen and so forth, within about three weeks after the festival, Mary Bauermeister and Stockhausen were into an affair, which lasted for many, many years. But Mary’s boyfriend, at the time, Haro Lauhus, of course, went

bonkers because I always felt that he was more or less the gray eminence and the intellectual background to that. And it almost got physical. Fortunately, Nam June Paik got in between and kept them apart.

MS. GONCHAROV: So Nam June was there, too?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, he was there at this point, also.

MS. GONCHAROV: And George Brecht was still there? Or had he gone back to Stuttgart?

MR. PATTERSON: No, George Brecht wasn't there. No, he was still here in the U.S. He went much later. Yes, but I had met Nam June there. And Nam June did one or two programs at Mary's. And one was his homage of John Cage. And this is famous because he, at some point, jumps up from the piano with these giant scissors and cuts the tie that John was wearing. And just by chance, I was sitting directly behind John when this happened. And at that point, I had been there, I guess, about almost a year or so, and known Nam June had seen one or two of his performances before. But like everybody else, John and I—nobody really knew if he was all there or if, you know, he was—he sometimes went into the insane mood. [Laughs.] So he comes to John with these big scissors. And John is trying to be his normal, cool self, no reaction. But sitting directly behind him, I could see these little beads of sweat coming on the back of the neck. [They laugh.] In retrospect, I remember that I thought it was very funny. But at the moment, you know, nobody knew what was coming next. But, of course, it was super brilliant and clever. And many people didn't recognize it at the time. It took me a while to remember. But there was this carnival tradition on the Thursday, I think, before a big day called Weiberfassenacht, old women's night. And the women take over the town. They invade the mayor's office and they go around the town with scissors and cut men's ties off, whatever that may mean. [They laugh.] And so this was—Nam June picked up on this, you know, whatever—this disguised edible thing, you know, including, father, get behind me, or something like that. [Laughs.] So that was interesting. Well, the end result of this split, Haro and Mary, is that Haro opened a gallery one block away from Mary's studio gallery. And her place was pristine white, Bauhaus, no specks of dirt. Haro went to the other extreme and found this old storefront, which probably hadn't been used since before the War even and had survived the bombings. And the dust on the floor was about like that deep. The walls—probably people had camped out in the there as refugees, so the walls were all sooty black from fires. And the windows hadn't been washed in 10 centuries or something or other. And he opened his gallery there: as is, as was, nothing cleaned up. And [he] presented the other end of the spectrum. So among the first exhibition of Wolf Vostell and Daniel Spoerri, his first exhibition in Germany, and Christos's first exhibition after coming from the East. And who else? Mimmo Rotella. So it was a big push against that. And for all of these exhibitions, Haro invited me to make a performance for the opening of the thing. So that was like a big honor and it meant—because they were all compacted in a space of about six months, so it meant producing a lot of new work. And that was very good. I really kept my nose to the grindstone.

MS. GONCHAROV: What kind of pieces were they?

MR. PATTERSON: I started in my first attempts to move into aleatoric music. The first one was a piece for three pianos. And then there was a duo for voice and a string instrument, meaning double bass in this case. And then at some point during this period, my paper piece was developed and that was included. And then the—

MS. GONCHAROV: Describe that further.

MR. PATTERSON: Okay, and the variations for double bass, also, those were the main pieces. The paper piece was a reaction to—now, I was living there and still listening to whatever was being performed. And there was a premiere of a new work by Stockhausen. And the title I am blocking right now. I don't remember. But it was for I remember two pianos and a whole battery of percussion instruments. And David Tudor was one of the performers—pianists, and he told me later that they had something like 200 hours of rehearsal to prepare this piece because it has very intricate timing and so forth. And it lasted maybe 35 to 40 minutes. I can't remember exactly. And at the end of the time—and I was open to hear it. But I just felt, I would say, underwhelmed. And when I learned how much time he had spent in preparing it, I was just completely disappointed that so much work, for me, at least, for so little effect. There had to be something else. And so I began to think and think and think. Also, by this time, I began to develop this fluxion idea of making music and performance available to, "non-professionals" or non-highly trained professionals. And so—okay, well, I will stop there and make a little parens around here. Because at some point, I had realized that being a performer in an orchestra, that the audience really only gets about at best 50 percent of what you experience as a performer performing a Beethoven symphony because not only are you hearing it, but you are doing all of the physical work to produce the notes, as well as trying to follow the conductor, as well as listening to whatever else is going around the other instruments and trying to fit into that. So it is a very complex mental operation, which for me was the total experience. And as a person sitting in the audience, you hear—depending upon the hall—fairly well and you see what these people are doing. But, you know, the whole kinetic thing is missing and also a lot of the mental work. So early on, I tried to find from time to time pieces, which would involve the audience, so that they would have as much of this combined experience as possible. So that led to trying to make works that could be

more or less performed by anybody that brought the right spirit to the situation. And so this was in the wintertime in this funny little room in the top of the house [inaudible]. And also, I was there on what I call the Poorbright, not a Fulbright. [Laughs.] Whatever money I could scratch together from selling the automobile that I had in the States and had by that time, had two basses and sold one, brought the other one to Europe and so forth. So scratching by. And heating was expensive. There was a little coal stove in the room. And so I fed these with coal briquettes, pressed coal. So I had rationed myself to I think it was four briquettes a day. And so I decided to save those for the evening. And in the morning, I could stay in bed and read and write. Later, I discovered a famous painting by a German painter, Carl Spitzweg, you know, Bavarian, sort of half-comical, 19th Century. And there was one painting called, *Der arme Poet*, the poor poet. {Laughs.} And he is in his bed, you know, with the big feathered things and a hat on and half gloves trying to write his poetry and [background phone call noise] with an umbrella over his head. [Laughs.] I am going to pick this up because it might be my daughter trying to reach me.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

[END MD01 TR01.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay, so back to how you came up with the *Paper Piece*.

MR. PATTERSON: Back to *Paper*, yes. Yes, so I had spent, as I say, maybe two or three days more or less in bed. I got up of course to eat and take a walk in fresh air trying to think of what instrument or music-maker I could come up that would be flexible enough and easily performed by a neophyte, so to speak. And then suddenly out of the blue came paper. One never knows from what corner it came but then, oh yes. And just considering all the various kinds of paper there are, from heavy cardboard to corrugated cardboard to wrapping paper to crystal paper to tissue paper to paper bags and boxes and so forth, there are just a whole universe of sounds that can be made with that. So then I first tried to construct a sort of set of instructions on how this should be performed for a quintet—five—performance and it's fairly formal: shake, break, tear, poof, pop, piff, and so forth, funny things. But after about the first, well, second performance, I guess, in an audience situation—well, an auditorium situation—it happened that pieces of paper—because it was getting kind of busy and violent on the stage—drifted into the audience and they started working with it. And after that I said, "Okay, this is how you start and then it just goes into the audience after that." And so wonderful things began happening after that and the whole audience got involved. So it became the classic work to end a Fluxus concert because after that you couldn't do anything else. It was just the great ending.

MS. GONCHAROV: Was this before or after the Wiesbaden concert? It was before, right?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, this was before.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay so it's pre—pre Fluxus things.

MR. PATTERSON: This was '61 I think—end of '60, beginning of '61, yes. Well, I guess it became a classic during the Wiesbaden concerts. But it was this series at Haro Lauhus where the first performance of it took place. Then there were some nude music programs here and there with the younger people. I think I remember Earle Brown and Carolyn Brown danced with Merce Cunningham. We were touring around Europe a lot at that point and Earle invited Cornelius, Behrman, Gertrude, and a couple other people to make performances with him from time to time. I remember we did something in Paris and I can't remember, I think it was at the American Center, but I don't remember. And then I do remember the evening at the little Fenice Theatre in Venice. Before the whole thing burned down there was a big Fenice and a little Fenice. And that was first trip to Venice and of course very exciting. Then Mauricio Kagel was directing a small chamber orchestra that played in the area of the classic, classical music and some contemporary pieces from time to time. So from time to time he would hire me as bassist for that. So we did concerts in Dusseldorf and Wuppertal, a few other places. But mostly one was on—you were on your own. There was no organized Fluxus situation at that point and groups of performing musicians hadn't really developed as yet. That came a few years later. Yes, so that was early days of the kickoff to the game, so to speak, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: And then—the real kickoff came in '62 with the—[background phone rings].

[Off-side conversation.]

MS. GONCHAROV: So where were we? Starting to get to 1962?

MR. PATTERSON: Okay, I'd talked about Kagel. Yes, there were no real organized new-music things outside of the big situations at the radio station and other things came later. Oh, then you were going to say the real kick off came in '62 with the festival, yes. Prior to that there was a—Maciunas had guests come to Europe in September. It may have been the beginning of '62 in January or something. I'm not sure exactly when he arrived. But by '62 I was living in Paris then and married my first wife. And oldest son was born in Paris. And it

was not easy for American expats, youngs, to get a job unless it was with an American company at that point. And the only thing that was readily available was the sort of fly-by-night companies that sold books and other things to American service personnel. So I became a door-to-door salesman touring through American bases in France and Germany knocking on doors and selling—trying to sell *Encyclopedia Britannicas*. [Laughs.] And my underlying—I hit many low blows, but the underlying pitch was, “Well, madam, do you really want your son to grow up to be a sergeant?” [Laughs.] “With this *Encyclopedia Britannica*, he’ll grow up to be a captain or a colonel.”

Awful, but in any case at some point ended up in Darmstadt where I met Emmett Williams. Well, I’d known of the name before through just the concrete poetry. And everything was intermixed then—the visual arts and poetry and so forth. And met and spent—whenever in the area, spent time with them. And so when Maciunas arrived, he latched onto Emmett very early. And so Emmett helped him organize, plan this, and I was in on some of the organizational meetings then too. And George’s idea with Fluxus originally was to publish a quarterly magazine of the new arts, primarily music-oriented or music-derived things, which he had been introduced to by concerts that had taken place in Yoko Ono’s loft here on 42nd Street back in the, well, ’60, ’61. And George decided this had to be spread to the world and so forth. And he had come up with the title for this quarterly in the back of his head, *Fluxus*, because that had been the title that he wanted to use for a magazine earlier planned for the Lithuanian immigrant community in New York about politics and culture in the old country. And it was to be called *Fluxus* because in Lithuanian “fluxus” means liberty or freedom as the first definitions. But there was no interest in the magazine so that was dropped but he kept the title. And so when he decided to do this quarterly on the newest of new, new, new, new stuff and decided to use the title of *Fluxus* for that. I’ve always joked that [it was] good that he had that title because if he had decided that the title of his Lithuanian magazine should have been “Time” we’d have been called “the Time group” or “the Life group” [laughs]. He hadn’t decided or recognized what the genre that we were working in should be called, or would be called Fluxus. And at that point he still thought of it as Neo-Dada. And so the first presentation he made in Wuppertal at the Galerie Parnass in June ’62 to announce this festival, his speech was entitled *Neo-Dada in New York*. And so it was about that. And that was, I would say, my first coming-out in a larger public situation in Wuppertal of summer party at the home of Jean-Pierre Wilhelm, a garden party thing. And many people were there. And George had wanted Nam June first to perform but Nam June sort of was—well, I won’t assume what he thought, but claimed that he had no time. But I think he was really trying to keep his space between he and George. And Nam June suggested that I should be the performer and so I did *Variations for Double Bass and Duo for Voice and String Instruments* and that was in June. About this Neo-Dada business, recently a friend, a Fluxus scholar at Libby in Paris, Bertrand Clavez, found the half of correspondence, a series of correspondence, between Maciunas and Raoul Hausmann at the end of ’62, December ’62, where Hausmann is telling George that you can’t call it Neo-Dada. He said, “Dada was there. There can be no “neo” from what happened then.” He said, “Look, you already have a good name, Fluxus. Why not call it that?” And so at that point, starting after that George began to think, oh, Fluxus, yes, it’s a movement. And so then it became. Then he started formatting the whole thing under the title of Fluxus and then came the manifestos. I call it the André Breton model [laughs] and so forth and on from there. But until then it was really Neo-Dada for George.

And then came September of—well, in June then after this Wuppertal thing, which was early June. Then later in June, I had been friends with Robert Filliou in Paris. And, well, when I arrived in Paris I guess I’d known Spoerri [ph] before. He’d been to Germany even though he was living in Paris often and so forth and so I met up with him through Daniel. I met Robert and we had like three times a week at least met at some place or other, usually in Daniel’s apartment just to jabber on about whatever was new and so forth. Robert was living in the Rue des Rosiers, which was off the Place des Rosiers, which was a quarter, or area, 99 percent Orthodox Jewish families. And so in this square, Place des Rosiers, there were always at least a dozen gentlemen in their long black coats, which as tourists would come by, they’d flip open, and here was a strong of watches attached to the inside; you know, genuine Rolex, genuine Patek Philippe and so forth. So Robert had the idea that he would have also a gallery built into his clothing, a galerie dans le chapeau—a gallery in his hat. But it would be a legitimate gallery. [Laughs.] And so it became known as a Galerie Légitime.

And so for I think it was probably the only exhibition that he had, he invited me to exhibit in his gallery. And so at that time I had been making what I called *Puzzle Poems*, which were for better or worse letter-sized paper, sometimes longer or shorter, cardboard, or some sort of thicker paper and images and text, image-text, image-text, which worked up to what I thought a poetic thing. All the images and text were collected from the nightly garbage in Paris—magazines and so forth. And so those were pasted down and then cut up in pieces as a puzzle, so you had to assemble the thing to get the poem and, again, participate in the physical participation and the realization. And many were also two-sided so you had that problem as well. So those were nice. I decided then that I would make miniatures of these so they would fit into matchboxes or cheese boxes, which he could carry in his hat.

Then our next decision was since we were mobile rather than inviting the people to come to us we would go to where they were. And so there was—the invitation was actually a line chart of a map of Paris with various

destinations—stopping points—listed where we would be at such and such a time, how we would travel to the next one, by bus or metro or foot. And that was a 24-hour vernissage, starting in Les Halles at about 10:00 at night I guess and ending at—the penultimate end was at Café La Coupole and then went on to Galerie Girardon. Ursula Girardon, who was an American woman with some fair amount of money, in a large house, and was completely forgotten in the unsung now but extremely important for much of nouveau realism in Paris. Like all of those people—Arman, César—all had their first exhibitions in her gallery. And so we, after the stop at Coupole, then went to Girardon where there was a sneak Fluxus preview because there was to then be a big Fluxus after Wiesbaden was to go to Paris. And so we performed a few works there. And that was the end of that. Then came September. But while we were on this galerie légitime vernissage—when is it, the 7th of June now, some people, a group of people in Paris, wanted to do a reenactment of this vernissage, so I have to go but it's only going to be ten hours now. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: And who else is going to do it?

MR. PATTERSON: Huh? This Fluxus scholar Bertrand Clavez that I mentioned before will be [Robert] Filliou and we're going to keep the cheese boxes and this is what I have to do when I go back is finish *100 Poems*, which will all go on DVDs [laughs] in cheese boxes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh okay.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, so it will be a collection of one hundred. Well, I call them the *One Hundred Poems*, which can be read either as 100 poems or poems with 100 in them. So if I don't get 100 written, they all have 100 of this, do 100 of that, do 100 of the other thing, and now do you feel better, worse, or the same? [Laughs.] And so they'll be in cheese boxes and Bertrand is looking for a tall, Lincoln-style stovepipe hat so that he can fit all the cheese boxes in it. Yes, but so the route he is revising and circling out a new route because Paris has changed completely since then. And I won't have a chance to go and study that, but we will start in what is now Les Halles Beaubourg. And a must is [that] we had a rest stop then and we'll have a rest stop now on the tomb of Gertrude Stein in Père Lachaise for 20 minutes. We had our little rest break at 3:00 in the morning I think it was. And we'll end at La Coupole this time where the French have organized a birthday party again. So that will be nice. Okay back to '62.

MS. GONCHAROV: So this is what you were doing while you were in Paris. How long were you in Paris? How long did you live there?

MR. PATTERSON: A year-and-a-half, came back beginning of '63.

MS. GONCHAROV: Came back to the States?

MR. PATTERSON: To the States, yes, and the intention was we loved Paris and it was good, but the idea was to come to the States, earn lots of money, and go back and buy an apartment, a small apartment. Of course, it took 35 years and still isn't done, but yes. So that was that and then. There was September of course, the Fluxus business in Wiesbaden, which astounded the world or something or other, and that was the birth of Fluxus as we now know it. I would say it was interesting that it probably could have only happened that I had such an impact in Germany at that point because the coverage was in every newspaper of any standing, local as well as national, and I recently learned that there was even a reportage in two papers in East Germany over this at that point. I'd never seen that before, but somebody mentioned that to me that found them recently and were sending copies to me. So when I get back, I'll find them I think.

The German press—public, cultural life—was not just hungry for whatever was new; they were consequent about following through on the thing. I'm certain, based on what happened here in New York, later there would have been no reaction. There was just too much. One thing was overwhelmed by—overshadowed by Pop Art at that point. And generally, the press was too conservative. It was only I think after the first couple of years that Tom Johnson began to cover some things in *Village Voice*. That was the only outlet or press outlet. But there was press and the first film moving image of anything Fluxus happened at this concert when the Hessischer—Hessian radio sent a film crew for news report and was about a six-minute clip that they showed and, interesting, I never saw it during that time although I kept hearing from people, "I always saw da, da, da on television last night." I saw it a couple months later and even years and so later it kept being repeated sort of around various times and I kept trying to find a copy of it and I didn't know who had done it but I assumed it had been West German radio from Cologne because they were very aggressive in finding new things and never thought about Hessian. So I'd written there and so forth, no answer, we can't find it, whatever, and then in I think it was '92-'93 in Wiesbaden Erbenheim and the collector patron there Michael Berger was having one of his summer parties and standing outside talking to two or three people about my search for this film. And suddenly somebody taps me on the back of the shoulder and I turn around and it was somebody I'd never met but he had overheard the conversation from behind and he says, "Oh that's easy, I was a cameraman." [Laughs.] And so the next day he sent me a copy of it. I gave a copy to Michael and he made an edition of it and so it's circulated around the

world. So that's our visual documentation of that and very nicely they devoted about two minutes out of these six minutes to *Variations for Double Bass*, because that and the piano were the two big spectacular things as we were—well, the double bass didn't get damaged but it was used in unconventional ways, mistreating the instrument perhaps. But the piano was of course, you know, damaged, and those were like sacred instruments in Germany at that point,

[Off-side conversation.]

[END MD01 TR02.]

MR. PATTERSON: I was in New York, presumably to earn a lot of money and go back to Paris.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, right, right. Okay, that's where we are. You're earning a lot of money. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, I'm earning a lot of money. [Laughs.] My first job was with the New York Public Library at 42nd Street. I had met during the Wiesbaden festival, of course, Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, and mentioned that we were going to come back to New York, I thought. And so I would be looking for work and whatever. And Dick said, "Well, go to the public library and see Florence Tarlow who was the director of public relations or something then, but also a performer and a reader and so forth in the new scene in the East Village and so forth, and friends with all of the people." And so I went to see Florence I guess the second or third day I was here. She said, "Oh, with your résumé, just by chance, we're looking for somebody in the music division to do cataloguing." [Laughs.] So I started the next day more or less as a cataloguer in the music division, and spent the next year in the stacks going through material. And that was actually quite wonderful because it moves fast and every day you've got a truck of material, little carts with piles of scores to be catalogued in; you know, not too difficult. And I knew enough German and French to catalogue in practically every language. And after a while—the Hungarian and Czech and Russian I didn't do because I didn't know the alphabet at that point. But the others had a Latin base you could work with. So I did that. But, no, most of the other cataloguers were elderly gentlemen and 80 percent were refugees from Europe at that point. And they were a bit slower and had gone down. But I finished my truck usually by noontime and then would wander through the stacks to see what else was there. So that was my second degree. [Laughs.] I read everything imaginable that was there, which was good. And then I stayed with the library for I guess it was 5 years. And, at some point or other, the—well, it had obviously been planned before, but the plan came to move to Lincoln Center. And the Rogers and Hammerstein Archive of Recorded Sound, which had existed not even in name at that point, just boxes and boxes of records that Philip Miller, who was the director of the music division at that time, his passion was recorded sound, music. And so he collected donations from everybody he could find. And I remember that every morning when he came in, the first thing he did was open to the obituary side in the *New York Times* to see which collectors of recorded work had died. [Laughs.] And he was a day later on the telephone with a widow. [Laughs.] And, as it turns out, it's next to the Library of Congress, the largest collection in the world. So then I was transferred to this Rogers and Hammerstein archive and moved to Lincoln Center and spent the next two years cataloguing that and getting that in order with two other people then at the time. So I was there for the move to Lincoln Center and at some point I realized that the library had a program that would pay for me to go to Columbia. And if I did my degree, my salary would increase. So I did that and got my Master's in Library Science at Columbia University. It's going to Columbia University to learn the Dewey Decimal System seemed a bit overdone [laughs] so I decided I would do a few other things and took some wonderful courses on the side including two years of Russian, which I've forgotten most of, but a few other courses in philosophy and contemporary culture which were, yes, very good.

MS. GONCHAROV: Any art history?

MR. PATTERSON: Hmm?

MS. GONCHAROV: Any art history?

MR. PATTERSON: No, no. I stayed away from that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Why?

MR. PATTERSON: You know, that was the past. Part of the ethos perhaps in Germany in this '60s period was that—and I always think that's why Germany and Japan were so strong in Fluxus in the beginning—that they had both suffered bad culture, so to speak, prior, which led them to the war and the defeat and destruction. And so as things got reasonably rebuilt and life began to almost normalcy, the idea among the intellectuals and artists was, you know, that's how we got here. We've got to start all over again. So it was one magazine at that time, published primarily concrete poetry and writing, experimental writing. But it was called *Zero*, meaning starting at ground zero and going on. And I always thought of concrete poetry being very exemplary of that because it's

just hard-edge stuff. So there was not a rejection, but we had to start from someplace else. So the time is spent doing something else rather than going back to that. So my art history background is not dates and dates and dates. Though the music background has lots of dates within it. That was what I did study.

MS. GONCHAROV: Were you making—I knew you were doing the concrete poetry, but were you drawing at all or—?

MR. PATTERSON: At that point, no. And the visual stuff began happening with these puzzle poems that I mentioned where it was alternative image-text-image-text-image-text. And then, at that point, I published something called *Methods and Processes*.

[Off-side conversation.]

[END MD02 TR01.]

MR. PATTERSON: —a reprint of *Methods and Processes*, which a gallery in Tokyo did for an exhibition when I was there. And they decided that it was important enough to reprint it. The original was in '61. And so this is in Japanese and English. [Laughs.] And the original was in this size, letter size, and whatever the cheap reproduction method was then.

MS. GONCHAROV: Done on a typewriter, I suppose.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, on a typewriter. And then they decided that they thought people would like to carry this around in their handbag and perform the little pieces because they were intended mostly to be performed by yourself, for yourself, whenever. And so they decided on this format. But everything else was—

MS. GONCHAROV: But, I mean these pictures have nothing to do with—

MR. PATTERSON: No, they were just thrown in.

MS. GONCHAROV: [Laughs.] They threw in the Pope?

MR. PATTERSON: No, those were all my originals.

MS. GONCHAROV: You threw in the Pope. Oh, okay. So the Pope was there.

MR. PATTERSON: —all of the original illustrations, yes. So we had the Pope and there is Pablo Casals. And the lady falling off the horse is—I think her name later became Onassis. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: But this they added.

MR. PATTERSON: That was on the way that's set up now. It was originally an accordion fold. I'm a fan of accordions. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Fan of accordion fold. Yes, I know. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: And so the back section had this lady with the ball in various sort of gymnastic things, doing that. So this was sort of the return to visual work, as it were. And this is a little catalogue that the [inaudible] Kunstverein just made for exhibition of Ben Patterson—well, photographs about Ben Patterson by friends and [inaudible]. So I thought you might like to have that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yes, oh, look at that.

MR. PATTERSON: A series of photos from various performances, yes, not all.

MS. GONCHAROV: That's a good picture. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, great, thanks. That's good, too. [Inaudible] King Lear.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, King Lear.

MS. GONCHAROV: Wonderful, okay. So you were back in New York, you're working at the Rogers and Hammerstein and then—

MR. PATTERSON: Public library.

MS. GONCHAROV: But you're performing during this time, too.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. Fluxus was still very active at that point.

MS. GONCHAROV: And you're back and forth to Europe?

MR. PATTERSON: No, at that point, I wasn't back for a number of years. The big money, you didn't make it at the public library, [laughs] as you can imagine.

MS. GONCHAROV: When you had the plan to come here to make a lot of money, what did you think you'd be doing?

MR. PATTERSON: I had no idea. You know, it was one of those dreams that you have and I had no idea what New York would be like and so forth. No, in the end the scene had shifted here from Europe and it wasn't necessary to go back to Paris. It would have been in a sense going into isolation having gone back to Paris at that point. Yes, Maciunas had a loft on Canal Street so there were a series of performances that took place there and [I] participated in most or all of them during that time. And towards the end—maybe '65, I'm not sure, it must be listed there someplace. I made my first appearance at Douglass College at a class—Bob Watts' class there—and gave my famous lecture on death, which was about two hours. And, at that point, nobody was talking or writing or anything about death. And so I just—well, that was part of—New York Public Library, scratching here and there and finding materials and so forth. So it was a multimedia presentation with film and slides and lectures—a bit rambling, but still apparently, made a big impression because years later I would meet former students here in New York who said that that lecture really changed my whole attitude towards many things—and making art and so forth.

MS. GONCHAROV: Who were some of those students? Do you remember?

MR. PATTERSON: I don't remember names, unfortunately, no. And later, as I began making objects and pieces—this is much, much later—went back to this lecture and several larger pieces were—I called them *Illustrated Lectures*. So there would be text and then little funny figures or objects as illustrations of that. And the lecture on death has large three-piece panels, I remember. It was about 72 or—no, 36 times 3 is 102. Yes, 102-by-36 or something, yes. Yes, it was a diversion. And so I was active in all of that until about '66, '67. And, at that point, I had been gradually leaning in that direction, I guess increasingly, and what was being Liegel-presented as Fluxus sort of went out of the area that I was interested in. It became a series of ritualistic events: Fluxus dinners, Fluxus weddings, and neon Fluxus funerals, and so forth like that. And what can I say? Perhaps my problem was becoming simply a parody of life rather than invention and finding new directions, new material. And it just didn't interest me. I wasn't excited by that. And I gradually sort of drifted away from that.

And then about that time, '68 I guess, through various circumstances, I met some people with a little bit of money that were interested in new music. And so I became a concert manager and first presented a series of new music programs. And my idea was to—you know, because everything was located—Canal Street. The furthest uptown you got was the Judson Theater with the dancers. And I felt very insular for the Fluxus things. Our audience was generally 25 people or less, of which 23 to 25 were the regulars, always there, and they would perform the next night or something or other like that. So it wasn't reaching any kind of an audience outside of there. So I thought, okay, I'm going to bring at least new music stuff uptown and [I] made this series—and it was known then as Steinway Hall, which was a little concert hall above Steinway Piano Company—

MS. GONCHAROV: On 57th Street?

MR. PATTERSON: On 57th Street. And then the smaller—well, what I thought would be smaller audiences were there, and then the one big one at the Barbizon Plaza Hotel, and they had a big auditorium there where I did an evening with La Monte Young there. And, yes, that was rather interesting. And it did end up attracting at least the attention of the New York State Council for the Arts, and that was still the time when it was adventurous. John Hightower was the director then. And I got a call at one point, "Would you like to come in and talk to us about what you're doing, and so forth?" Then they said, "Would you like to create a program for new music for us?" So that became what first was known as *Composer and Performance*, then later *Meet the Composer*.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, so you founded that.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes. And so the notion was, once again, to have the act of participation of the composer in the performance to present an evening of his work rather than the standard thing, which was we sneak in one new music piece in the midst of Mozart and the other things. And I said, "You know, that's not the way to introduce or educate an audience to this. You need complete submersion and see that this person that wrote this is a real person and he can play, or whatever, and can talk and so forth." And so, that was the basis of the program, and we put it together. And my insistence from the beginning that new music was not simply serial music—the Charles Wuorinen school or Stockhausen and so forth, but also jazz, so jazz was part of the program

from the beginning.

MS. GONCHAROV: Who were some of the jazz performers you had?

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, Archie Shepp, Sun Ra. You remember—

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, I know—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: I remember, actually I did a concern with Sun Ra years ago.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, I remember once we did a program. Where was it? Albany, and I accompanied them with the whole thing. His band was about 90 percent ex-cons and so forth, but it was a rehabilitation program in a sense, they all lived in the same house sort of dormitory style. He was just this wonderful guy, gentleman, sat there very calm but, nobody got out of line. So that was—spending three days with them—a wonderful experience. And Cecil Taylor, you know, anybody that was anybody.

[Cross talk.]

MS. GONCHAROV: You know, Archie Shepp's son is an artist.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, I didn't know that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, he's here in town, yes.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. Well, you know, it's a ways back. [Laughs]. So we had Lenny on the board of directors—Bernstein—and so forth. So, I mean, it was really—Aaron Copeland—it was very well respected situation. And, yes, I don't know what the status is now, you know, for a number of years after I left. And then finally, N.E.A. money and then it became a national program. But, as I say, I've been out of touch and now I don't know what's going on, although I understand the N.E.A. has gone almost to zilch now.

MS. GONCHAROV: I think Obama put a little bit more into it but it's still—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes, but it's going to take a long time to bring it back.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's nothing like it was, yes.

MR. PATTERSON: So, as a result of that and that, we started being invited for panels on the NYSCA, and then to the N.E.A. and music panels there and so forth. And Kitty Carlisle Hart was the director then. That was great. And Walter, Walter, Walter—I'm forgetting the last name—a black man that was the head of the music part of the N.E.A. He had been chairman of the music program at Antioch, and oh, it's almost there. Walter—okay, it will pop back. And I had met him years before because my cousin had gone to Antioch and so I had gone once to visit her and she introduced me to Walter and we had a very brief but very cordial relationship there, so it was nice to meet up with him again there and so forth, yes. And then it became sort of management days. And after —

MS. GONCHAROV: Then you went to DCA, right?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes, I was just trying—that was from there to DCA, and August Heckscher was the Commissioner for Parks, Recreation, Cultural Affairs at that point. And a man by the name of Courtney Callender had had my position before, and for whatever reasons—I don't remember now—but he decided to leave to do something else and suggested me because I seemed to be able to organize things and so forth. And so I went to DCA as the Acting Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. There's this nice photo of me and John V. Lindsay being appointed and so forth. And so I was there until the end of the Lindsay administration, I guess about two-and-a-half years. And those were good years. And then Abe Beame was elected and I was asked to stay on, but I took one look at his Commissioner for Cultural Affairs and I said, "I don't think I want to be here so long," because he was just a political hack and something or other. And so, luck came my way, and they had been looking for a Chairman for the Department of Performing and Creative Arts at Staten Island Community College for a while. Phil Niblock was teaching there at the time, and so he said, "Ben, we've been looking for somebody. Why don't you come in and throw your hat in the ring?" And so I did, and Bill Birenbaum was president then, who went from there to Antioch, which is—Antioch keeps turning up. And so the interviews—I think I had two with him—took place in some bar down near Wall Street over several whiskeys, and I became a presidential appointment as chairman and professor —[laughs] my first academic position. I'd never even been a teaching assistant before.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, that's how you have the TIAA/CREF, right? [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, exactly. But the thing was the position was not so much about academics, but at that point City University had decided that the community colleges would be restructured as magnet colleges, and Staten Island was supposed to be the center for performing and creative arts since they already had a department there. And so there was going to be a whole new campus and buildings built for this, and so my job was to basically to oversee this building project and help design a curriculum to fit in that and look for faculty that could do that. And everything went along swimmingly for two years, until the commencement of whatever year that was when Bill was—Birenbaum—had the model of the new campus already in his commencement speech. Two weeks before commencement, New York City went bust, and that was the end of that. So I decided that it was clear nothing was going to happen there for a number of years, and I decided I wasn't interested in staying around as chairman, which was basically—then would have been teaching one or two classes and doing my bit at the personnel and budget committee meetings, which was the death of everything, and signing change of grade cards. I said, "Thank you very much," and resigned and went my way, you know. So those were my two big careers.

MS. GONCHAROV: What did you do after that?

MR. PATTERSON: Then it went into various sort of consulting things or as director of smaller organizations, and usually fundraising in one way or another. For a few years I was Director of Development for the Negro Ensemble Company, and during the time that the Soldiers Play. My big coup then was I got Citibank to give us \$100,000, which was—

MS. GONCHAROV: A lot of money then.

MR. PATTERSON: —in those times a lot of money.

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MS. GONCHAROV: Really a lot of money.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. But I topped that a few years later, organizing the monies for the Solidarity Conference for the Struggles of the Peoples of Southern Africa and Angola, South Africa. And we got together \$250,000 for this international conference in six weeks. Okay, we don't have to say it on tape, but there was a major amount of that that came from someplace out East through various little channels here and there, partially under the auspices of something called the A.C.P., the American Communist Party, or whatever, because those were the friends, you know, at that point. And so, well I never got to Moscow until many years later, [laughs.] but thank you in any case. And it worked. Within two years after that, the liberation came. And so I got to meet Nelson [Mandela] and—

MS. GONCHAROV: Did you really?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. And—

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay, now I'm really impressed.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, and [Thabo] Mbeki, also he was at the U.N. as the—it wasn't an official position. What the hell was it called—Observer I think—in the office. And [inaudible]. So all of them, yes. Yes, so that was a big meeting. What was his name, the big Presbyterian Church on the West Side—a Cathedral?

MS. GONCHAROV: Cathedral of St. John the Divine?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, St. John the Divine was the major host for the thing. I'm trying to remember the name of the minister that—you know, it was already liberation theology then, so to speak. So those were some of the things.

MS. GONCHAROV: So the New York era, so—

MR. PATTERSON: Hmm? During the New York years—

MS. GONCHAROV: So why did you leave and go to Germany?

MR. PATTERSON: Okay, so—

MS. GONCHAROV: And what year did you go?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, so this is about '90, '91. Beginning in the mid-'80s, from time to time there would be something where I would be invited to join the Fluxus gang. Once, I remember, with the Negro Ensemble Company was sitting in my office. We were in 42nd – or, no, Broadway, and I guess was right across from where the TKTS booth is, but after that is 45th, 46th. And [I was] sitting there, and there was a gentleman with me trying to sell us insurance for something or other. I was just listening to be polite, but wasn't really interested in what he was doing. And at some moment the secretary comes and says, "Ben, you have a call from Milan." And I said, "Oh, okay, well, I'll take it. Excuse me. Da, da, da, Sao Paulo? Next Monday? Well, I think I can probably arrange it." And this guy said, "Well, I think you have better things to do," and he got up and left. [Laughs.] I mean he thought he was the big guy in the totem pole doing something and then, "Oh, Milan, Sao Paulo, da, da, da." [Laughs.] Okay, so that was Fluxus' exhibition within the Biennial in Sao Paulo in '83. And so, Italian collector/publisher Gino Di Maggio had—

MS. GONCHAROV: Sure.

MR. PATTERSON: You know Gino?

MS. GONCHAROV: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, okay, had organized that. And so he called to invite me for that. Oh, you know Gino?

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, I've met him—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: —through Emily [Harvey], actually.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, yes, and have you seen Mudima, the museum?

MS. GONCHAROV: No, I have not.

MR. PATTERSON: Okay.

MS. GONCHAROV: I would like to.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, it's a wonderful space. Once again blocking on the name, and I keep thinking it was Spoerri, but it wasn't Spoerri. But in any case, Gino invited me to make the second exhibition in Mudima after it opened, which was in the '90s, later. But I thought that was great because it was not like a huge space, and I had to do a lot of new work for that but it was well worth it.

MS. GONCHAROV: And what did you do?

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, a lot of different things, yes. There were some installations, some stand-alone pieces, and a few old pieces, but most of it was new. And it was still more or less between Europe and New York at that time, but mostly in Europe. And I said, when they decided to do this, that I would—you know, it was going to be a lot of work to do and it would be easier just to do it someplace in Italy because there was still sort of border crossing problems then with artwork or lots of paperwork in any case. And so, as it turned out, Gino and two brothers in Mudima formed a syndicate to buy the exhibition before it was even started. And I was invited to live with this one family, Carlo Catalani, for the six months that it took to prepare it, which was, oh, mama mia! [laughs] Oh, was that wonderful.

MS. GONCHAROV: That sounds fabulous. The food capital.

MR. PATTERSON: Huh?

MS. GONCHAROV: The food capital.

MR. PATTERSON: The food capital of the world, god. So it was wonderful times.

MS. GONCHAROV: Fantastic. So some of that work is going to be in the show in Houston, of course?

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Still existing, or are you going to recreate it?

MR. PATTERSON: Most of it still exists, yes. Some of it has disappeared—well, not disappeared, gone to other collections, but a lot of it Gino still has, and some of it the Catalanis have. So, yes, I know where the work is and we have earmarked a number of pieces from that show there.

MS. GONCHAROV: Was that your first museum show?

MR. PATTERSON: In terms of—yes, I guess so. Yes, certainly the solo show. You know, individual pieces in the Silverman Collection when it had gone to various places in purchase where Mrs. Delaney [sp] was before, and she mentioned—

MS. GONCHAROV: Delaney.

MR. PATTERSON: Delaney, yes. Yes, but the first museum show, as a group situation, was at MoMA, and okay, there was a librarian in the library at MoMA who was like—I can't remember his name now.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, I know who it is, Harry—not Harry.

MR. PATTERSON: Steadman, I think.

MS. GONCHAROV: Phil something.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, Phil something. And he was very interested in Fluxus and I think especially—

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, I remember him.

MR. PATTERSON: —the publications from the Something Else Press. And so he had a small exhibition in the library of little pieces and so forth like that. And so we opened up the MoMA.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, now you're in the collection if you're part of the Silverman Collection, of course.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: They're still trying to figure out what to do with them.

MR. PATTERSON: I was about to ask if you knew—I'm certain it's all in boxes in the basement, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, I think the whole problem there is it's so departmentalized: This is painting, this is sculpture, this is prints, this is—

MR. PATTERSON: Nobody knows whose turf it is.

MS. GONCHAROV: Exactly. So I think that's the big issue.

MR. PATTERSON: Nobody knows who has jurisdiction. [Laughs.] They're going to have to restructure the museum.

MS. GONCHAROV: Absolutely. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: One collection blows it all up.

MS. GONCHAROV: That's right.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes. That's funny.

MS. GONCHAROV: So then you moved to Wiesbaden—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: —kind of permanently. Why there?

MR. PATTERSON: Okay, the story is that I've been back and forth, back and forth, and each year it would be longer and longer in Europe, and then it seemed to make sense to at least have a pied-à-terre someplace there—beginning not necessarily full-time—and my thoughts were in Italy, someplace where I had many more connections and so forth—although my German was much better. I still don't speak very good Italian. But on the way back to Europe at one point, [via] Frankfurt airplane, and then stopped in Wiesbaden and Erbenheim to—it's only 20 minutes from the airport—to see my old Fluxus friend Joe Jones, who was living there in Erbenheim. And so we talked and I told him what I was thinking about. And he said, "But why?" And he said, "There's an empty apartment here in the house and we would have the house together for ourselves, and Michael Berger is a nice guy," and so forth. So I said, "Okay, why not?" And so I settled there and then discovered, reasonably quickly that Wiesbaden is exactly in the middle of my working area of Europe. In other words, it's the same distance to Paris, eight hour then by train or car. Eight hours to Paris, eight hours to Copenhagen, eight hours to Milan, eight hours to Vienna. And so, all the rail transport crosses there north,

south, east and west. And the Frankfurt Airport was 20 minutes from the door, which is nonstop anywhere in the world. So logistically it was, you know, the perfect place to be. And there was this collector/patron Michael Berger in Wiesbaden, who was very helpful and helped to arrange things, and so forth. And generally, although Wiesbaden was not a big, new arts scene, but they did have, at that point, a very good—from my perspective at least—Oberbürgermeister, Chief Mayor of the town, Achim Exner, who was a Fluxus fan. So in many ways it fit well. And then, when people asked this question, I explained that, in the end, as every good policeman knows, the criminal always returns to the scene of the crime. [Laughs.] And so I'm back at the crime scene again.

MS. GONCHAROV: Do you think about coming back to New York?

MR. PATTERSON: Not really. I mean, I'm enjoying this period, and I think, you know, by the time you get to my age. I say that "New York is wonderful for young people, and either you need all of that energy that young people have or you need a lot of money, and I don't have either" [laughs] at the moment. I have a fair amount of energy still, but I would rather not spend it beating my way through the subway and all of that. In Wiesbaden, I can walk to every place I need to. I have no problems finding supplies or material or anything like that. And then, I am always underway traveling someplace or other, the East, Hungary, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, France, Spain, wherever. So, there's no lack of stimulation or stimulus or inspiration because I meet interesting people doing interesting things everywhere. So, yes, I'm very happy with the time that I spent here in New York. It was something like 35 years, I guess, altogether. And as I sometimes say in Germany, look, I've served my time. I've paid my debt to society. [Laughs.] I'd just like to get on and live a normal life now.

MS. GONCHAROV: So what are you doing there? You have a studio and you're making art.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, I make art.

MS. GONCHAROV: And what kind of—what are you doing?

MR. PATTERSON: So, it—well, it's on both sides of the table, you might say, which is one of the nice things about being a Fluxus artist, that you can do more or less anything you want and nobody says, "Oh, but you are a visual artist; why are you doing music? Oh, you are a performance artist; why are you doing visual work? Or, oh, you're a musician; why are doing this, making prints?" And so, I am enjoying working in, well I guess several different media. I do, oh, I'd say about a fifth of the time is devoted to music, improvisationally electronic or amplified instruments and so forth, concerts here and there and so forth. Another part of performance is classic Fluxus things and when it's in new territory and I do my missionary work [laughs] or new works, performance-oriented-based or new operas, and then things that you hang on the wall or stand in the corner, objects or things like that that are exhibited in galleries and so forth.

MS. GONCHAROV: Any new work you're particularly excited about right now?

MR. PATTERSON: Well, let's see, coming up on the 27th of May, sort of a birthday present to myself: I've invited two musicians that I've worked with, both separately and in duo format; in improvisational, free new music things, amplified things. We've all worked together in duo formats, but never as a trio. So as part of my birthday present to myself, I invited us to do a trio performance in Wiesbaden. So it will be Keith Rowe with—just listed as amplified harps, electronic; and Rhodri Davies—oh, no, Keith Rowe, amplified guitars; Rhodri Davies, amplified harps, electronics; Ben Patterson, amplified strings, electronics. So that, I look forward to. Then I have another project for a wall piece, mural-sized; 3 meters by 1.5 meters for a conference room. It's a commissioned work of a company of accountants in Treviso.

MS. GONCHAROV: A company of what?

MR. PATTERSON: Accountants.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, accountants. [Laughs.] I thought, a contessa, okay, very nice, in Treviso.

MR. PATTERSON: Well, one of them is a partner in a gallery where I just had an exhibition, and he was very happy with it and he said, "You know, we've been looking for something for our conference room for a long time." And he said, "I think you're the person." So I began to, well, what do I do with this, you know? Nice room, nice space, but da, da, da. And I was trying to find out about accountancy, you know, and discovered that the so-called father of accountancy is a gentleman by the name of Luca Pacioli, who was born someplace else, but became a Venetian in the 16th century, a friend of Leonardo, and wrote the big treatise on mathematics. He was basically mathematician in all the mathematical practices at that time, and wrote the first treatise and consolidation of practices for double-entry bookkeeping, which was the founding of accountancy. And then, beyond that, wrote the first—well, at that period, Renaissance book on chess, illustrated by Leonardo. And in his mathematics book there are also a number of illustrations by Leonardo in that. And he also wrote a couple of books on magic. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, yes. That's the first book on magic ever written, too.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, the first book on magic.

MS. GONCHAROV: The first book on accountancy and the first book on magic.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, and all of these things—

MS. GONCHAROV: And this is the descendant of—this is the—

MR. PATTERSON: No, it's not the descendant. But he was Venetian, and he was a monk also, and there are some very interesting theological tracts that he wrote and so forth. So I decided this would be a big piece on Plexiglas, printed digitally, and in several sections with illustrations on the book from accountancy and then on mathematical things and the religious stuff and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And the text sort of runs, it is said that he did this, it said that he did this, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. "Well, if he did all of these things, why wasn't he a saint, or why isn't he a saint?" is the way it ends. [Laughs.] And they loved it because he said, you know, the church doesn't like this kind of stuff, you know—nothing—no reality and so forth. So that has to be finalized and printed and installed sometime in June. And the 30th, the day after the big birthday party, I go to Budapest, and invited to make a performance there. And over the last couple of years, I have developed a program, which I call *Nano-Fluxus*, so it's a collection of little things to perform. I guess it's about 30 different classic Fluxus works, and I define classic—

MS. GONCHAROV: Of the arts?

MR. PATTERSON: Hmm? No, of—

MS. GONCHAROV: Of everybody's?

MR. PATTERSON: —everybody, yes. I define classic works as the works from '58 to '62, '63, this period.

MS. GONCHAROV: So this is like your valise of—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, and so it's the valise and there are little boxes with the materials to perform each of these works in miniature. And so I sit at a table and there's a space here, and I do it like this, but [by] video camera with live projection on a screen. So what you see is the hands doing drip music with a little stand and a little thimble here and a little metal cup down here, a little saucer to pour—a pitcher to pour water in there. And then it's amplified so you get the whole thing and you see it up there. And so, the whole thing is this *Nano-Fluxus*. And it's introduced with a lecture, of course, about Fluxus and blah, blah, blah.

MS. GONCHAROV: And this box exists? You made all of these little things yourself?

MR. PATTERSON: Well, it's the valise, as you say. And I just recently found in an old junk shop there the perfect thing, which is about like this, like this, like that, and like— Well-off people traveled with in Europe, so it's a black with the brown leather thing, and in wonderful condition still. There's a little bit of scuff marks here and there so that you know that it's genuine, but in good perfect condition otherwise. And all these little boxes, which I found at IKEA [laughs] from this size to that size to that size, covered with cloth, and so things all fit in there. Then at the bottom there's a larger box that size in which the toy piano goes. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Ah. So you finished the score for Margaret.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, I heard that you did.

MR. PATTERSON: I presented it at the concert to her, and two days later I get an e-mail from a woman in Germany, to whom I also owe a piece for a long time, not a music piece, but some sort of art thing. And the e-mail said—and I haven't been in touch—well, not regularly, maybe every three to four months. It said, "Oh, so I see Margaret Leng Tan got her piece; where is mine?" [Laughs.] But it was light and joking with me, but I was surprised how fast that got—and then I remembered they were friends because Sabina used to live in New York.

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, Margaret is performing again at Emily's next week.

MR. PATTERSON: At Emily's, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: And maybe she'll perform that. I know it's Nam June and Cage again.

MR. PATTERSON: And Cage, yes—Nam June, Cage, Kaprow. I don't know if she'll have time to—or even if she

even likes the piece, which is another—

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, I'll let you know if she does.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Or I'm sure you'll hear from other people too because I'm going to go to that.

MR. PATTERSON: So, where were we, or weren't we?

MS. GONCHAROV: We were talking about what you're doing now.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, yes, yes. So that is this *Nano-Fluxus*, and—

MS. GONCHAROV: Can we edition that? Is there a way to edition that one, the *Nano-Fluxus*?

MR. PATTERSON: It would be a bit hard because some things I just found here and they fit perfectly.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, right.

MR. PATTERSON: I mean, with effort, yes, I could go around and find the equivalent, I'm sure.

MS. GONCHAROV: Because I was talking—you know, I asked Christian—and he was going to do this—to curate a Fluxus portfolio, which would end up being like the valise or something. And he was all excited about it but then he has decided he doesn't have time because he's helping Julie all the time and he's got so many things going with the foundation. But I'd still like to do it. This would be an interesting alternative because, as I say, it's all the classic Fluxus works that you would find and any, well, classic performance that I would do, so it's Brecht, Watts, Cage, Paik, da, da, da, you know, all the pieces we all loved and know. And there are, you know, little things to do all of them with. And I should get to—

MS. GONCHAROV: There should be some kind of a way—I mean, it doesn't have to be the box with the objects because that's too hard to do, but there has got to be some way to do it, and I think it should be done. And new pieces too, new pieces—

MR. PATTERSON: By the time I get back—

MS. GONCHAROV: New pieces would be good.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, by the time I get back there should be—they apologized for not having sent it before, but a DVD from a performance I did with this in January, I guess, in Zamora, Spain, which is northeast. And that was a good performance. And so, I'll send you a copy of that and then you can see how it works. And, you know, I was about to say the chief and simple way would be just to do an edition of the DVD but that's not the same.

MS. GONCHAROV: It's not the same.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, you just stand and watch it. Having the equipment and the scores to perform it, because I have—last performance I made—you know, I guess it was in Zamora, and the lecture is entitled, *The Golden Age of Fluxus*. [Laughs.] It's about six minutes or so and, you know, it's—

MS. GONCHAROV: I have a better idea—

MR. PATTERSON: —the kind of text that is similar to what I've done for this, so it's concise but hits all the major points. And then there's a little intro: one, two lines for each piece, that's already written up. And I have, of course, the scores for all of them, so it could be complicated. It could be also—

MS. GONCHAROV: It could be, or it could be simple.

MR. PATTERSON: It could also be simply put together, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: How about getting a game programmer to do a Fluxus game?

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, where is it? You won't believe this—

MS. GONCHAROV: A videogame.

MR. PATTERSON: A videogame, but let me show it to your first.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, okay.

MR. PATTERSON: It came out of their personal collection that they decided I should have it, a gift from Randy and Kate.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, look at that.

MR. PATTERSON: It's a card game called Flux, in which—

MS. GONCHAROV: Where did they find this?

MR. PATTERSON: —in which the rules constantly change. [Laughs.] So you think—I haven't read it through yet; they just explained it to me—

MS. GONCHAROV: "MadLabRabbits.com: Our mission is to multiply." [Laughs.] This has to be Canadian. What do you think?

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, it could be, could be.

MS. GONCHAROV: I bet it is.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes. And so you think you have this strategy and a hand of cards that's going to win, and then the rules change and you're, you know, completely wiped out or whatever.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, this is great. I have to ask him where he got this, or who did this. But a videogame—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, that's also a possibility.

MS. GONCHAROV: I mean, that's what kids are interested in now *Grand Theft Auto* Fluxus style.

MR. PATTERSON: Well, Christine, she saw this cover that I have made with the White House floor plan and the heads all lined up in that with the—she said, "You know, it looks like a videogame." [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, see? Maybe you have—

MR. PATTERSON: And I didn't even know it. I don't play them. I hate them.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, me too.

MR. PATTERSON: But, you know, it's—I'm infected.

MS. GONCHAROV: But it's kind of the perfect next step.

MR. PATTERSON: Step, yes, I know. Well, that's—hmm. Yes, that's—

MS. GONCHAROV: Some young, geeky programmer.

MR. PATTERSON: A young, geeky programmer and—yes, it could take the classic works in this miniature form and, you know, geeky program it into a game format, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: And it can be in a limited edition.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, yes.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay, let's do that.

MR. PATTERSON: Okay.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay.

MR. PATTERSON: Okay.

MS. GONCHAROV: I'll find a geeky programmer.

MR. PATTERSON: I'm up for whatever is the newest of the newest of the newest.

MS. GONCHAROV: That is the newest of the newest, yes.

MR. PATTERSON: That's what keeps one younger than they seem to be, and alive. Yes, sure. The golden—

MS. GONCHAROV: I'm digressing. I keep forgetting about the tape but we're digressing here. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: The golden age of flux, the videogame.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: Well, I'm glad that many of our colleagues are dead so that they won't be able to argue with me about it. [Laughs.] Oh, yes, that's one of the advantages of being one of the last; nobody contradicts you. Now you get the real version. [Laughs.] Anyone want to contradict me? Were you there? [Laughs.] Oh, maybe we want to turn this off for this little note. You know John Hendricks—

[END MD02 TR02.]

MS. GONCHAROV: Ah, okay. Here we go. So Emmett Williams—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, okay. So this chapter is about how the—

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, Emmett Williams was in Wiesbaden. That was the point of the conversation you—

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, of course he was in Wiesbaden. I mean, there are photos of him, you know, banging away at the piano and carrying it out and performing the *Homage to Olivetti*, and other things reading with Allison [sp]. It was absolutely—no doubt I was there. I saw Emmett, you know, and so forth. And so this part I was going to talk about is—no, I'm just going to call this the chapter about how the first sponsor of Fluxus was the United States Army. [Laughs.] Well, as you know, George Maciunas, when he came to Wiesbaden, was working for the Army at an Army/Air Force base in Erbenheim.

MS. GONCHAROV: What was he doing? I didn't know what he was doing. I know he was there, but I didn't know what he was doing. I should know that.

MR. PATTERSON: He was a graphic artist and doing architectural renderings and so forth for buildings and things there. His training was as an architect, you know, at Carnegie Tech, of course.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, that I didn't know, either.

MR. PATTERSON: Well, you see, this is another chapter about how Pittsburgh is really the secret center of contemporary art. Andy Warhol is from Pittsburgh. George Maciunas studied at Carnegie-Mell—at Carnegie—yes, it was no, I think it was still Carnegie Tech then. And Ben Patterson was born and raised in Pittsburgh. And if you go back a little further, Franz Klein, who was, you know, a Pittsburgh boy, da, da, da. Not to say anything about all the jazz musicians who came from Pittsburgh, but okay. So George was here as civilian draftsman, graphic artist working in Erbenheim. And so all of the print material published, you know, announcing the things were all the ends of print runs [laughs] that were being done for Army projects and so forth. So late at night, the printer was still grinding on printing this—hmm, what airplane is called Fluxus? [Laughs.] And stuff like that. So yes, that was his gig. And then Emmett Williams was working for the *Stars and Stripes*, which was the American military newspaper—daily newspaper—as the travel editor. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: I didn't know that either. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: So as this thing is approaching—the festival—somehow or other —well, the editor had complete freedom, but I don't know how he justified it to himself. Well, he didn't have to; he wanted to do it so we did it. And it was an interview with me about this forthcoming festival. [Laughs.]

MS. GONCHAROV: In *Stars and Stripes*?

MR. PATTERSON: In *Stars and Stripes*.

MS. GONCHAROV: Have the Fluxus scholars found this yet?

MR. PATTERSON: I think many of them have, yes, because I generally mention this as the first publication about Fluxus, even before—and it was—I can't remember exactly how the quote goes. Emmett, you know, plays the straight guy in this and says, "Well, tell me, Mr. Patterson, what can we expect?" And something about, well I'll try to find the article and send it to you—something about music, "How can you define this as music?" Or something or other like that, or "How will you recognize this as music?" And I said, "Well, it will be quite easy; it's like the sound of elephant-steps on cotton," or something like that. [Laughs.] It was a complete idiocy thing on and on, but it looked very straight. [Laughs.] So that was our first mention in the press. That was like a long article, like two columns or three columns, and funny little illustration. I don't know who did that. And I was earning my living, then, selling door-to-door these encyclopedias to military personnel. So you know, the U.S. Army was the principal sponsor of Fluxus-Wiesbaden 1962. [Laughs.] Yes, yes. What else do you want to

know?

MS. GONCHAROV: I don't know. What else do you want people, decades, a hundred years from now, to know? You know, this is Smithsonian. This is going to be in their archives forever.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, well, this is just off the line, but during the days that I was doing Composer in Performance things—programs—here in New York, one event was with Max Neuhaus. Do you know him?

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, I remember Max. Yes, sure. He died recently.

MR. PATTERSON: No!

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, he did; yes a couple months ago.

MR. PATTERSON: Ei yi yi, I didn't hear that. I saw him less than—within one year—yes, and someplace in Italy. Where was it? Oh, god. This is a horrible year. I mean, that's about three people that I didn't know that had died that I've found out about in the last six weeks. Okay, well, in any case, we did an underwater concert. Were you there?

MS. GONCHAROV: No, I wasn't. But when I was an undergraduate, Max Neuhaus came and did an underwater so I swam in one, years ago.

MR. PATTERSON: Where was this?

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, it was in Michigan.

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, yes, because the first one, I think, was here at NYU in the swimming pool.

MS. GONCHAROV: This would have been in Michigan in, like, the early '70s. This probably was the same piece.

MR. PATTERSON: It's the same piece, I'm sure. This would have been about '69 or something like that.

MS. GONCHAROV: And this would have been '71 for me.

MR. PATTERSON: Yes, and the head of, sort of, public programming-or-what at NYU then was a woman by the name of Janet Solinger. Do you know the name? And after that, she went to the Smithsonian. And I'm trying to remember—we did something there, which was sort of interesting. But she was always a funny lady and, you know, an early Fluxus type, which was very interesting. And NYU wasn't NYU of new film and so forth then. It was still pretty conservative. And she was, you know banging doors and so forth. And then, from there to the Smithsonian, which I thought was very interesting. Okay, what do I want people to know, remember? Well, I'll just talk about Fluxus things that I thought were unique to it as a, "group." It's hard to call it a movement because I always thought that not being dogmatic about—that Fluxus has to be the short pieces à la Brecht, which some people sometimes tried to say, that's Fluxus. But some of those people that say that also make extremely long pieces, too. There were so many different media and approaches under this rubric, Fluxus, that it's hard to call it a genre, as such, except in the sense that there was a kind of common spirit of experimentalism and wide-open experimentalism, and a good dose of humor, I think, within the whole thing and so forth. I often tried to describe it as a circus, right? And so you had lion tamers and you had the high-wire—

MS. GONCHAROV: What were the lion tamers?

MR. PATTERSON: I don't know who fit where, exactly, but there were, you know, the high-wire trapeze artists and there were the clowns and the people that rode bicycles and the horseback people—I mean, so all of these different disciplines. And the training came from different places and it came from different countries. You know, like the horseback people came from Austria and the clowns came from Brazil and the high-wire people were Russians, or whatever, like that—so all this mélange of talent, highly skilled talent, trained talent. And there was the majordomo; that's clear. It was George Maciunas in the center cracking the whip. And it was all under this big tent, which said "Fluxus" around it. And you went to the circus and you enjoyed yourself, and had fun and thrills and a little bit of laughter and there was the band playing. But you know, the only unifying thing was that it was under this tent. Everybody had the ambition to please the crowd is not exactly the right thing, but to hold their attention and show them what can be done, yes. And that's always fit for me as a good definition of Fluxus. And somehow or other they all got together—I mean, were able to work together and live together. Okay, so there could be a little feud here between various people, but the circus went on and traveled to the next town and the next town, and so forth. And so it was sort of like a neat analogy or a model.

Then I was going to say that, so far as I know, it was really the first international movement in all senses because there were artists equally important from Japan, from Germany, from France, from the USA, from Italy, even a couple stuck behind the Iron Curtain, or came out from there, like Milan Knizak and so forth, who were

contributing from the very beginning. It wasn't that they came and looked and said, "Oh, I'm going to do, like, that." There were, you know, the buds germinating in Japan and in the Czech Republic and so forth—well, Czechoslovakia then before Maciunas brought us all together. And then it continued, you know, as well, George, in his way, eventually divided up the world into Fluxus East, Fluxus West, Fluxus Asia and so forth, and there were chairmen of each division and so forth. But beyond that, it was really international from the beginning, and continued. And then the first, I think, movement where women were as equally important as the males were in presentation, in invention and so forth. And it was interesting, I think, that percentage-wise, perhaps the most women came from Japan into the movement, where, among all places, they had least liberation, and so forth. So there were the Japanese-Americans, of course. In Germany, not really anyone that continued on. In France, Esther Ferrer, with Zaj, but that was always—could have been Fluxus. Maciunas tried to incorporate them, but Hidalgo and company wanted to maintain their own identity. But I'd done many programs with Esther, and so forth—and Italy, not really, no. But in any case, I don't know of any other art movement where—I mean there were women in Dada and so forth. But they're just being discovered now, that they were actually there. And in Fluxus, they were there from day one, you know. And okay, minorities—they even had a black there. [Laughs] And lots of Jews. [Laughs] And some good WASP and Japanese, so we were right out there.

And then there was—what other thing—oh, and then the other thing is, what other art movement has ever had the—okay, for lack of better word; my English fails now sometimes—the staying power to celebrate a 40th anniversary and people still come, turn up and work together and keep in touch and, you know, do their thing together? I don't know of any other thing that even lasted 10 years, much less 40 years. So those are some of the, I think, unique aspects beyond whatever the aesthetic was which made it what it is.

MS. GONCHAROV: Anything else before I turn this off?

MR. PATTERSON: No. I have this suspicion there's not going to be a 50th anniversary. [laughs] Two people, maybe. [laughs]

MS. GONCHAROV: Well, maybe there'll be younger people who—somewhere, that come along. In fact, I think more so all the time. There's more and more interest.

MR. PATTERSON: There's a lot of—well, it's gone through many different waves, which I don't follow, of Fluxus online, chat boxes and so forth.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh really, there are?

MR. PATTERSON: Oh, starting maybe 10 years ago.

MS. GONCHAROV: Who started that?

MR. PATTERSON: Ken Friedman and company.

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, of course, of course.

MR. PATTERSON: So you know—

MS. GONCHAROV: Oh, of course I know Ken Friedman.

MR. PATTERSON: No, I mean, so you know what you could expect from that.

MS. GONCHAROV: Yes, absolutely.

MR. PATTERSON: And doesn't mean that they don't do good work, but dozens—multi-dozens of people claiming to be Fluxus artists whose names I had never heard of, you know, and never seen. You know, okay, well so—

MS. GONCHAROV: You have to do a search for Kenneth on Facebook. I'm sure he's got a name. [Laughs.]

MR. PATTERSON: Okay, you can turn this off now for a moment.

MS. GONCHAROV: Okay, let's do that.

[END OF MD02 TR03.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]