

OHMAR

Fall 2008 Newsletter

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

PAGE 2

**JEFF FRIEDMAN RECEIVES
POGUE AWARD**

PAGE 3

SPRING 2009 CONFERENCE

PAGE 6

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION

PAGE 9

**FALL WORKSHOPS TO BE HELD
AT LLOYD HOUSE IN OLD TOWN
ALEXANDRIA, VA**

PAGE 11

REGISTER NOW!
FILL OUT THE FORM ON PAGE 11

WWW.OHMAR.ORG

ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION TO MEET IN PITTSBURGH OCTOBER 15-19

By Marjorie McLellan and Donna M. DeBlasio

What do Fred Rogers, Andy Warhol, Rachel Carson, August Wilson, and Andrew Carnegie have in common? All were from or are connected to the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This year's theme, "Oral History in the Digital Age" is a fitting one for our host city. Long associated with the iron and steel industry, Pittsburgh, throughout its history, has been a center of technological innovation. Home to the world's first billion dollar corporation, U.S. Steel, and the site of major developments in electrical technologies, energy conservation, communications, and plate glass, Pittsburgh emerged from the shadow of the rust belt to remake itself into one of the nation's most livable cities, with a dramatic contemporary skyline, wealth of cultural sights and activities, and vibrant historic neighborhoods.

The conference opens on Wednesday evening with a public program at the Senator John Heinz History Center featuring a HistoryMakers interview with Pittsburgh activist and long-time City Council member Sala Udin. The Thursday plenary, featuring Stetson Kennedy, will commemorate and celebrate the 75th anniversary of the New Deal. The

(continued on page 4)

OHMAR'S SPRING CONFERENCE A SUCCESS!

From March 13-15, 2008, nearly one hundred and fifty artists, performers, teachers, students, activists, and academics from around the country and the world came together in New York City for OHMAR's spring conference on Oral History and Performance.

The conference organizers approached the theme from three different directions, soliciting papers and performances that explored the oral history interview as performance, the use of oral histories as the basis for performances, and oral history as a means to document the history of the performing arts.

The conference opened with an introduction to oral history workshop taught by Columbia University Oral History Research Office Director Mary Marshall Clark and a

(continued on page 6)

**OHMAR TO HOST
FALL WORKSHOPS IN
ALEXANDRIA, VA, ON
NOVEMBER 7, 2008.
DETAILS ON PAGE 11.**

JEFF FRIEDMAN RECEIVES POGUE AWARD

Interview With 2008 Pogue Award Recipient Jeff Friedman

Conducted By Shaun Illingworth, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, July 8, 2008

[From a complete 20 page transcript visit the www.ohmar.org website]

Shaun Illingworth (SI): *Before you went into oral history, you were a very accomplished dancer.*

Jeff Friedman (JF): I had trained in classical ballet early on as a child and was socially ostracized for that, because in rural Pennsylvania where I grew up, that was not an activity for boys. I quit, but always retained an interest in the arts. When I went to study architecture at Cornell, I began taking classes again and progressed quickly. I had opportunities to perform in other people's choreography, to create my own choreography. Eventually, after the third year in school, I took a leave of absence and perform professionally between New York and Boston.

SI: *Early on, your career was primarily based on the East Coast, but you eventually made the move to the West Coast.*

JF: In the spring of '78, there was a marvelous opportunity. A major choreographer named Twyla Tharp was performing in Boston and also holding a workshop, for the first time, where she was providing access to outside students. The Humanities Council of Massachusetts offered scholarships to men and John Carrafa and I received scholarships and we attended this workshop. It turns out that she was auditioning for a male in the company and John Carrafa was certainly a skilled dancer, but also was, I think, able to handle that pressure better. I think Twyla made the better choice to select John Carrafa.

I decided that I would go back to architecture school and finish my degree. I walked into an architectural bookstore at Harvard Square one spring day and was interested to see a book called *The Pattern Language* and several others by the same author, Christopher Alexander. I saw what it was that I had been missing in my architectural education at Cornell. It had ecological approaches, it was



Jeff Friedman receiving Pogue award from past-OHMAR president Dave Winkler.

humanistic; Cornell was focused on formalism. Right next to *The Pattern Language* was a book called *The Oregon Experiment*; the University of Oregon School of Architecture had attached itself to the aesthetic of Christopher Alexander. So I applied to the School of Architecture in Oregon, completed my degree in one year, '78-'79, continuing to dance pretty actively at the university. I decided to visit San Francisco and stayed with Nancy, a dancer friend from Cornell. She took me to a class at the Oberlin Dance Collective and I loved it and I stuck around.

SI: *You were there for quite awhile, about nine years.*

JF: I was with the ODC for ten years. The Collective was a group of faculty and students from Oberlin College, in Ohio, an inter-arts program led by Dr. Brenda Way. Eventually Oberlin College said, "Are you a performing group or are you faculty and students?" They said, "We're a performing group," and they bought a big, yellow school bus and they drove to San Francisco in 1976.

My interest in oral history emerged out of the particular confluence of my personal life having a kind of crisis, having a major back injury and going

(continued on page 5)

The FOREST C. POGUE Award:

In its continuing efforts to recognize and promote high standards in the field of oral history, OHMAR created an annual award for outstanding and continuing contributions to oral history. The award honors Forrest C. Pogue. Pogue pioneered the use of oral history in combat during World War II and also served as an early president of the Oral History Association.

JEFF FRIEDMAN RECEIVES POGUE AWARD *CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3*

through physical therapy. For a dancer [who is] constantly working with their body, to step out is really an identity crisis. At the same time, the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco was emerging. So, there was, as any good oral historian will hope, the intersection of individual and historic circumstances.

The moment that catalyzed that intersection and created something new was my physical therapist went home and died of pneumocystis in Texas, without knowing he was seropositive. I remember vividly, sitting in a studio in San Francisco with a large group of grieving people. In the middle of the big wooden floor, there was a video monitor with very small flickering images of Joah dancing. I said to myself, "We can do better than that to honor the lives that dancers." Certainly, video is a great documentary method but, for me, I felt that interviewing gave somebody the chance to speak in their own words about how that life developed. Giving dancers the chance to speak in their own voices was not common; dancers are often seen as nonverbal entities. People are often surprised how articulate dancers can be.

The New York Public Library Dance Division had an oral history program. Lesley Farlow, the director, was compelled, as I was, with the AIDS epidemic and its affect on the dance community. So, together we decided to look at people in early and mid-career who were dying and disappearing. Over a year's time, from 1987 to 1988, LEGACY was developed with Lesley's help, and some training with staff from the Regional Oral History Project [Office] at Berkeley.

SI: *When you first began the LEGACY Project, did you find that people were hesitant to talk about it?*

JF: Yes, I think there was a stigma attached to being HIV-positive or having AIDS. I can remember when I would contact certain individuals, they would react quite angrily. I'd say, "I care about you. I want to offer you this opportunity to speak in your own

words about your experience." Those were often the only words that people needed to hear. I think people perceived quickly that the chance to speak in their own words about their lives and be listened to is a great opportunity.

These were years of great conflict, individually and societally, around the issues around medicine, questions of homosexuality and legitimate access to care. Whether or not gay men were worth saving, I'll just put it bluntly. I think that, in a small way, LEGACY was able to make our case that lives were worth saving. We couldn't save them medically, but we could at least create an archive of their own words.

SI: *What do you remember about those early interviews, when you were just getting started?*

JF: Well, my first response is that I did a lot of interviews. I felt like I was carrying the lives of these individuals forward for them. It was emotional. I did an interview with a man who was one of my most wonderful teachers, Aaron Osborne, a visceral performer with the Lar Lubovitch Company in New York, but also a marvelous teacher, greatly beloved by the community of dancers who studied with him, including me. I interviewed Aaron after he had been paralyzed from the waist down due to an AIDS-related infection. Here was a man who could not locomote himself, but whose identity as a dancer was intact. I can remember watching Aaron in bed, sitting up from the waist, demonstrating the subtleties of breath techniques, saying that, "You arc over your sternum." Then, of course, Aaron taught himself how to walk again, and then, he lost the sight in one of his eyes. So, it was seeing people struggle and succeed, and have setbacks. You lived that experience with them and their families and their caregivers as you commit yourself to that human relationship.

Maybe as a consequence of this process, I decided to choreograph a work titled *Muscle Memory*, produced in 1994. By 1993, LEGACY had a collec-

(continued on page 7)



Jeffrey Friedman

tion, maybe there were twenty by then. I decided that I would work with some interviews from the collection and create some performances. Everything, all that heavy emotional lifting, it had to go somewhere. For me, it went into the creative process. I needed to process that reality for myself, holding all those lives, and channel it in some way. So, Muscle Memory, perhaps, was the choice I made to achieve that.

I worked with two separate interviews, one with Frank Everett and an interview created by my friend, Mercy Sidbury a performer in the modern dance world in San Francisco, who interviewed a wonderful mentor named Eve Gentry. Eve Gentry was eighty-four, I think, at the time and Frank was twenty-eight. Frank Everett and Eve Gentry (though very different in gender, age and location and, in many ways, in life experience) shared several crucial turning points in their lives as artists. That seemed like a very interesting opportunity, that such different narrators would actually have shared experiences, though they'd never met.

I thought, "Okay, this is a dramatic opportunity. How can I provide insight through choreography?" So I developed strategies, creating what I call "fictional interpersonal dialogues" between narrators. Then, several aspects of one person's interview edited together, so that they spoke to themselves at different times in their life, became "intrapersonal dialogues." These two strategies enabled me to show both the personal conflicts and developments of each individual, and then, also, the shared experiences of both individuals. I also framed it with my own experience as a listener, what was it like for me to listen. For example, the first thing you hear in Muscle Memory is me saying, "Listen. What is it like to listen, deep inside my body?" [I introduced] the idea that listening actually goes into the body in some ways. In a way, Muscle Memory is what emerged out of that listening experience.

Muscle Memory became a driving force of my touring career, and that was from 1991 to 1997.

Muscle Memory emerged in '94, so that touring really took off for those last three or four years of my performing career. During that time, I started being asked to speak at various conferences. I would first say, "I'm not a historian, but this is what I do." I did that enough times and started to ask myself, "Why couldn't I be a historian?" That was when the opportunity to do graduate school seemed to make sense. That was 1997; I identified the right program at UC-Riverside, which is the first dance history and theory program developed in the world for Ph.D. work.

The case I was trying to make is that, as the phenomenologists suggest, we are pre-verbal sensorimotor beings who build a world through perception.

SI: *What was the focus of your doctoral work there?*

JF: I walked in with an idea to do something with oral history and LEGACY, but, as one of my professors, Linda Tomko, said, "If you walk in with one idea and it doesn't change, you really haven't done graduate school." Eventually, it did change, for me. It transformed into a focus on, "What is the role of nonverbal communication in the interview process?" This was something that most people were not looking at in oral history, as far as I know. What I discovered is that there's a great deal of literature on nonverbal communication, especially from the '70s, where it was very popular but most people were doing what I would call microanalysis, looking at very short bits of film in micro-time, the shifts in what people were doing, and I was interested in looking at it at the macro-level of narrative.

The case I was trying to make is that, as the phenomenologists suggest, we are pre-verbal sensorimotor beings who build a world through perception. In many cases, especially Merleau-Ponty, you see him focus on visual perception, a very powerful mode of perception but not the only one, of

(continued on page 8)

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION

Maryland

October is a busy month for OHMAR, Board Member, Harriet Lynn of Heritage Theatre Artists' Consortium and her "East Side West Side Life Stories" oral history program cast. She will be presenting with Jo Ann Cason, of the Baltimore City Recreation and Parks - Senior Division about the process and success of the "East Side West Side Life Stories" oral history theatre program at the National Recreation & Parks Conference held at the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Center in October 2008. It will include a short live presentation as well by cast members. Harriet Lynn will be on a panel with regional associates of the International Museum Theatre Alliance for the Mid-Atlantic American Museum (MAAM) Conference in Washington, D.C. speaking about the concept and effect of oral history theatre programs on museum audiences. Harriet Lynn will also present the "East Side West Side Life Stories" program at the 34th Annual Social Theory, Politics and the Arts Conference also held in Baltimore in October.

The "East Side -West Side Life Stories" cast has been invited back to present a third time at the Reginald

F. Lewis Museum of MD African and American History and Culture (also in October) for a special event focusing on education. The cast will also be performing in the Free Fall Baltimore venues at the Fells Point Corner Theatre in Baltimore on October 25, 2008.

There is now available a video program of the oral history program (taped at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum), a cable program taped at the Historic Sykesville Colored Schoolhouse for the Carroll County oral history cable project by the Community Media Center and a Key Note & Power Point presentation created by Harriet Lynn available as well. Contact Harriet Lynn at 410-235-4457 or hlynn@umbc.edu if interested in acquiring any of these programs.

Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania State Archives announces that a new Oral History web community has been added to the PHMC website. You can find it by going to the PHMC homepage at www.phmc.state.pa.us and clicking on "Research" in the left navigation bar. Most of the excellent work for this resource page can be attributed to former Bureau member Linda

Shopes and student intern Sascha Wiessmeyer.

Among the resources that you will find there includes a brief history of oral history in PA, guidelines for designing an oral history project, guidelines for conducting an oral history interview, form templates, a bibliography and links to other OH websites, and a listing of the OH collections in the State Archives.

West Virginia

OHMAR member Troy Lynn Pritt has just published a book drawn from a series of interviews he conducted with his father. Mr. Pritt provided the following summary:

When Mr. Troy Wye Pritt's wife lost her memory to Alzheimer's disease he decided to record his own memories on audio tapes. His son transcribed and edited the twenty-four tapes and put them in book form. In the foreword he describes the process by which he preserved their integrity as oral history. TROY WYE PRITT IN HIS OWN WORDS: Oral History, 1916-2005, Elkins, West Virginia." The book, ISBN 978-0-615-23951-4, is 202 pages long and is available from Mtnpride Books, PO Box 212, Wilmar, AR 71675, for \$19.95 plus \$3.05 postage and handling. ■

FALL WORKSHOPS TO BE HELD AT LLOYD HOUSE IN OLD TOWN ALEXANDRIA, VA

Constructed around 1796-1797 by John Wise, a prominent entrepreneur in the early town who also constructed Gadsby's Tavern (1785), Lloyd House is one of the best examples of Alexandria's late eighteenth-century Georgian style. On Friday November 7, its North Hall will host a pair of workshops. The morning "Beginner 101" workshop will kick off at 8:30 AM and conclude before noon. After lunch at one of Old Town's many restaurants, the afternoon "The Utility of Videotape Interviews" will start at 1 PM and conclude before 4 PM.



LLOYD HOUSE, ALEXANDRIA, VA

Former OHMAR President Dave Winkler will lead the beginner course that will focus on the basics of starting up and maintaining an oral history program. Dave founded the Naval Historical Foundation oral history collection program in 1996 and has volunteers across the country capturing the recollections of navy veterans. His program is affiliated with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. He will be assisted by Jan Herman of the Navy Bureau of Medicine who will go on in the PM to focus on why video-recording should be considered when doing oral history. He has used video recorded interviews of Navy medical personal who were at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, suffered during the Bataan Death March, participated in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and served in Korea and Vietnam, to make powerful documentaries used to prepare Navy doctors and nurses for combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. ■

Lloyd House is located in the heart of Old Town Alexandria at 220 N. Washington St (George Washington Parkway). Parking is available in city garages within a short walk (Follow parking signs.)

REGISTRATION FORM FOR FALL WORKSHOPS:

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Session: Beginners: ___ Using Video: ___ Both: ___

Cost per session: ___\$35 (member) ___\$45 (Non-member)

___\$ also Enclosed for 2009 OHMAR Membership

Please Make Checks Payable to OHMAR
Mail to OHMAR, c/o Constance Behinghove, Assistant Treasurer
642 East Capital Street, NE #1, Washington, DC 20003
Questions: connie.beninghove.ctr@navy.mil

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Established in 1976, OHMAR is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and improvement of oral history in the Mid-Atlantic region, and serves both professional and amateur oral historians, librarians, archivists, teachers, folklorists and independent researchers in Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

Each year, OHMAR sponsors two public forums—a fall workshop and spring conference—and produces two newsletters, one in the early Fall, the other in the early Spring. The deadlines for ads and submissions to its Winter 2009 newsletter is **January 15, 2009**. Send all information to the newsletter editor: dwickler@navyhistory.org.

Membership is for the calendar year. Benefits include newsletters, advance notice of, and reduced fees to, OHMAR events. For more information about membership, contact Constance Beninghove at connie.beninghove.ctr@navy.mil.

OHMAR
c/o Constance S. Beninghove
Assistant Treasurer
907 6th Street, SW #206
Washington, DC 20024

For further information:
www.OHMAR.org