

James Panowski Interview  
Marquette, MI  
February 27, 2012  
Subject: NMU and Forest Roberts Theater

#### START OF INTERVIEW

Russell Magnaghi (RM): Interview with Jim Panowski, Marquette, MI February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012.  
Today's interview will focus on Dr. Panowski's years at Northern Michigan University and his involvement with the Forest Robert's Theater. My first question for you: What is your birthdate?

James Panowski (JP): 1/18/Wizard of Oz or Gone with the Wind (1939).

RM: Could you tell us a little about your background, where were you born and where did you get your start?

JP: I was born and raised in Waukegan, Illinois, home of Jack Benny, Ray Bradbury, and Jerry Ovak. Actually, my biggest role and what got me hooked; in \_\_\_\_\_ I played the warlord, sitting on a stool with a map around my face saying, "Woe is me! Woe is me!" I guess I caught the bug. In high school I was a wannabe jock, not very good at it, but I was a pretty good football player but not the greatest baseball player. I remember watching with a friend of mine who was the trainer, a production of *Time-out for Ginger*. Jack nudged me and said, "Jimmy, you could do better than that! I said, "You know, I probably could." The next audition was for *You Can't Take It With You*. I got cast but I forgot that I was also on the wrestling team and I had to tell the coach, who was also the father of my best friend that I had to quit. He asked me why and I said, "Well, I'm going to be in a play." And that started it all. I was in about three or four shows when I was in high school. I went to Illinois Wesleyan on drama scholarship then went on to Bowling Green to get my Master's and PhD.

RM: That was what year?

JP: 1974 is when I got my PhD.

RM: When you were going to graduate school, was there any particular focus that you had or was it just theater in general?

JP: I think the focus always was performing. When I got into PhD work, I got interested in directing. I did as much of that as I could. I had the opportunity during the summers to work for a carousel theater in Lake County, Illinois. They did musicals and the producer liked me and gave me an opportunity. I had about a dozen musicals under my belt by the time I finished my Master's.

RM: Do those summer internship experiences continue today or is it sidetracked for those in drama now?

JP: Yes, but not as much as it used to be. It's kind of a shame because we've been lucky having students from Northern going on and appearing on Broadway. Truckey, Leah Hocking, and Brian Johnson all appeared on Broadway. They had much more opportunity to get the experience when they were growing up and going to school than kids do nowadays. The big thing is somebody is going to say, "What kind of experience do you have?" And you say, "Well, I had a couple of leads in college." And that's it; there is not a taste of the real world.

RM: What do you think caused that?

JP: Simply, less theater throughout the country. It used to be that every little nook and cranny had a straw hat, that was the term, and now little by little, theater is very costly. It is also trying to compete for disposable income and that's not always easy. Woody Allen said, "Pain and agony doesn't sell tickets in Peoria." When you do get the opportunity it's generally really light fare musical theater. Nothing wrong with that, those are a lot of jobs to be had, but as far as real opportunities, not as much as it used to be, at least from what I can see.

RM: What was your work career after you finished graduate school?

JP: When I was in graduate school, the summers I spent I was doing summer stock at one place or another. I spent 7 years at the Milburn Playhouse in Pennsylvania, which was great for me because I always had a job to go back to. For a lot of the other people it was tough to find employment after the summer, but that's the courtesy of being an artist I guess.

RM: How did your career progress from graduate school?

JP: I swore up and down, left and right that I would never teach. I had the opportunity to do it as a teaching assistant; both in my Master's and PhD work, and I liked it. I thought that a teacher has a lot more security than an actor or director. I can go and play in the summer and have a full-time job with benefits in the fall and winter, and I thought that wasn't too bad. Even back then, it was very difficult to get a position, even with a PhD. I think I had the advantage because I had a lot of summer stock experience both as a director and actor. It evolved naturally that the jobs that I interviewed for all called for somebody that could direct. From Sterling College to Hardin-Simmons University to Northern Michigan University, all of the jobs that were open were jobs for director/teacher and I had the director experience which gave me a foot in the door over a lot of the other people, who had the academic agreement on the experience.

RM: And this also goes back to your work in the summertime?

JP: Yes.

RM: If you didn't have that summer experience, what would have your experience in academia actually have been?

JP: Zip. Nothing, it's hard enough to find a position that you are comfortable with. I would have been teaching speech communication. There is nothing wrong with that, but it's teaching public speaking the rest of my life and that's not what I wanted to do. I wanted something more creative and directing is the way to go.

RM: Tell us about your move to Northern.

JP: After I got my PhD, I was lucky enough to land a position of director of theater at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. That not only included teaching and directing but also administrating the program. There I got my first taste of being a producer on a very small scale and I liked it. I was good at it and I promoted well and filled the seats. From then on I wanted to move on to a bigger school. It took me three years of looking while I was working at Hardin-Simmons and I get a phone call from Jim Rapport saying, "Hello, this is Jim Rapport from Northern Michigan University." And I thought, "Who the hell are you?" He said, "Your name bubbled up to the top looking at people." I had sent out dozens and dozens of letters. I couldn't find the letter so I just listened essentially for about an hour and a half and he convinced me to come up and interview. I thought why not. I flew up from Abilene, TX to Marquette, MI in the dead of winter to interview. I liked the students here, thought the program was ripe for improvement and evolution and I was lucky enough that Jim and the rest of the people thought, "Hey, let's take a chance on him." I got hired about 34 years ago. I feel like so many people at NMU the thought is, "Well, I'll use this as a stepping stone before I go on to Ohio State, etc." And suddenly you are seduced, not only by the area, which we all know is a beautiful area, but also I think the academic and creative environment at Northern. When I got here, the theater program was a halfway house for students who had problems. I was lucky enough to follow the footsteps of a director of theater that was ineffective and Jim Rapport essentially said, "Do your thing." And I said, "Well, it's going to cost money." That was the start of it. Slowly but surely we developed a program. I say we because Suzanne Keyesby at the time was one of the other faculty members who was very active and dynamic. She pushed me, I pushed her, and we pushed the students and it evolved into a program that was much more professionally centered, not just recreational.

RM: Is that how you would describe the program before you got here?

JP: I think so, kind of recreational and debutante, it was fun to do theater and drugs at the same time and we can smoke and drink and whatever. I think that was the case before I came.

RM: So it wasn't set up so that the students who were performing in the theater would go on to a profession?

JP: No. One of the things that we developed early on and that we still use today is an audition class, where you are taught how to get a job at a theater. That was one of the things that were instrumental in giving our students a foot in the door. Both Suzanne and I had some professional background, knew a little bit about theater and once they got their foot in the door they had the talent and were able to go for it. That was one of the big programs for us that I'm glad to see they are still carrying that one today. And in any field it is very difficult to get a job and what happens when a kid graduates, it's like, "bye-bye, out of the nest" and you think by God, what am I going to do. At least they have the tools and they know what they are up against. They know how to follow through and the rest of it is luck. Everybody is talented in the profession of theater and just because you had a lead in college doesn't mean that you are going to be stuck upfront on Broadway. The people that I mentioned, Paul Truckey, Leah Hocking and Brian Johnson were lucky. You've got to have the talent, opportunity, and when you have a chance

knowing what to do and how to do it. All of the time in the world doesn't do you much good if you can't step up to the plate.

RM: Some students in history have come back and said, "You know, I was a good student, I knew all the book knowledge, but when I got out and went into the classroom, it was a whole different world."

JP: From that the program has evolved and students have done well. There are a lot of students that are working in television, costuming and teaching. One of the things that I think that the Forest Roberts Theater program evolved into, and I always told this to parents when we were conducting campus tours, one thing about having a theater major is that the skills you gain as a theater student, whether on stage, backstage, or in the house are going to serve you well in whatever career you take. That's very important. That's why we have good students who are bankers, lawyers, and other wonderful jobs that are not connected to the theater.

RM: What year did you come to Northern?

JP: I believe it was 1977. In 1974 I got my PhD and I spent three years at Hardin-Simmons and so yeah, 1977. When I did show up, I met with the theater faculty. Dan File – Tech Director, Suzanne Keysbey, and the dear departed Chet Hartworth. We had our first meeting and they said, "Jim this is what we want to do and by the way Suzanne is going to Washington, Dan is going to St. Louis to do some theater work, we want to start a play writing award competition. Do it." I had the whole summer to ponder – what the hell am I going to do? By then, the season had been chosen. This is when I discovered that I'm going to be a pretty good producer. Then we did a "new faces" production where the only qualification to be in the show was you could not have performed on the main stage at Forest Roberts before. We do \_\_\_\_\_ as the new faces production, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Comedy of Errors* and \_\_\_\_\_. And with that, I was supposed to put one of these on the CDs. It was a real challenge but it was then that I really learned the ins and outs of marketing. That was how I gained my experience, I hadn't done it formally before and I decided I liked producing as well as directing as well as teaching. That three-fold approach has carried me through 30 some years.

RM: How did the physical structure of the theater develop under your offices? What was the theater like when you got here and did the facility expand over the years?

JP: No actually they weren't. Forest Roberts Theater has a very workable, physical plan as it were. We've upgraded the dressing rooms, the counterweight system and all sorts of stuff but essentially, Jim would say it's a proscenium thrust theater with portals below the proscenium, which is very unique, but for a director it is neat for entrances, exits and etc. And we had scene designers, Dan File and then Vick Holiday who were willing to adapt the physical space to whatever they wanted and whatever we needed. It's nice to have that kind of flexibility. The only thing that I feel stifled about was the fact that we didn't have an elevator orchestra pit. If we wanted to elevate we had to build the platforms ourselves. But we got through it and I think from day one except for the lighting equipment and what have you, the physical facility is very good, especially for a theater that is that old.

RM: During your time though, there were various renovations?

JP: Yes. Dressing rooms, the counterweight system, the lobby was totally renovated and it all looks pretty good.

RM: What were some of the high points of your career here?

JP: I think number one was creating a playwriting award competition, I think that is very important. It was, and is, and hopefully will continue. We setup the audition class that I'm very proud of. The first student to make it on Broadway, Leah Hocking – that was kind of neat. Then the first time she had a lead. Right now she's touring the country and Billy Elliott as the dance teacher.

RM: What year was that and what did she perform?

JP: She was in *Grease*, *Hairspray*, *All Shook Up*, *Jekyll & Hyde* and she's stepped in the lead for a month, *Guys and Dolls* she stepped into the lead for a month. Never quite name above the title, but always a working actress and one hell of a singer. I think getting the community involved with our annual production of *Ebenezer Scrooge* we had munchkins seven or eight years old and grandparents who were in the show. I think that was a very important step for the Forest Roberts Theater to take and I lament its loss right now, not only because we lose income that was very helpful but a lot of people look forward to it and each year it was a little different because it had a different director and cast. Early on when I got here, we did a children's theater tour and when Bob Glen was provost, he would subsidize it and we would charge like \$100 to go to Engadine and do a one hour show in the gymnasium floor, it was great fun. It got to be a little too costly and insurance wise we couldn't continue. I guess another thing that I'm proud of is setting up a high school matinee. Then the final production of the season was always a "classical" show. It could have been Shakespeare or Arthur Miller; I did *The Crucible* one year, *Lysistrata*, and bused in kids from all over the U.P. Not only was it exposing them to the theater but also great PR for the University. Angeli has continued to do that now with some of the shows, I'm happy to see that.

RM: You went from a more theoretical and academic theater program to one that broke out of those constrictions to prepare people for the real world?

JP: Yes, very much so.

RM: During your 32 years, were you able to get students internships in the summertime?

JP: Yes.

RM: That's still a possibility?

JP: Yes.

RM: But more difficult?

JP: Yes, very much so. Like anything else, if students want it bad enough, there is the opportunity but they have got to be prepared. You and I are talking and you suddenly say, "Hey, I'd

like to see you do a classical piece.” And I’d be able to jump to my feet and go into an excerpt from something.

RM: This is something that they would have to be thinking about and perfecting a bag of tricks of things that they should be able to do.

JP: Absolutely. Part of the audition class is how do you select material? And how do you prep and present the material? Even if you are doing a musical cutting, how do you prepare the music for an accompanist? Never sing a cappella, God forbid. How do you setup a cue, so you don’t have to go, “I’m done with my monologue, now hit it Louise!” It’s all the Polish that you learn and our students over the years have done quite well.

RM: We’re talking about the students that have gone on and made it, you mentioned the one student. Could you talk about some of the other ones like Paul Truckey?

JP: Paul Truckey went through our program here. He was working at a bank in Seattle and got tired of it. I was doing *Into the Woods* and had community wide auditions and he heard about it way out in Washington. He said, “Pete, can I audition for you?” I said, “Sure.” He came back and of course he’s got a voice that can knock your socks off. So he was in the show as one of the two brothers who were princes. It was wonderful. He did a couple of outdoor dramas and then had an audition for the producers of *Les Miserables*. For Paul, that became his career, *Les Miserables*, both on the road for three or four years and then on Broadway for another three or four years. I kept kidding him, “Paul, you’re going to get a new headshot.” He said, “Why do I need a new headshot when I have a job?” With a mega hit like *Les Mis*, he certainly did. I think now having Paul on the faculty is very good for the students because you have someone who has been there and done that. Leah Hocking is a very interesting story because I would never tell this to a parent who has a son or daughter coming to the theater; Leah is one of those people that didn’t need college. She was one of those rare people where college was a waste of time and money. She followed Suzanne down to Ohio State and hated it, lasted half of a semester and went to New York. She connected with a group of kids who worked at the same summer theater in upstate New York for three or four years. They clustered together and supported each other and little by little Leah got nibbles and bites and now she is very well respected.

RM: She did this on her own?

JP: Yes.

RM: She attended Northern?

JP: Yes for two years.

RM: You said there was a third person?

JP: Brian Johnson. Here is someone who attended Northern, very bright kid, playwright, costumer, actor, and director. He never finished his degree. He decided that he wanted to go to New York with a group of kids in his class and after knocking around off Broadway, doing wood stuff with his own material presented, he stepped into *Mamma Mia!* That was about six years ago. *Mamma Mia!* was Brian’s debut, like Paul with *Les Mis*, *Mamma Mia!* was his calling card.

He's done some TV work, little bit of this and little bit of that, he's got a long running job with *Mamma Mia!* after all these years. John Oval is an associate producer on *Kelly*; it used to be *Regis and Kelly*. Dan Hicks is a costumer for *As the World Turns*. You don't have to be an actor to be a director but you need the tenacity and that's part of what we teach in audition class. Be prepared for rejection. Be prepared period, at any time or place to get up and do your thing, persevere and take risks. That's what some of the most exciting theater is, taking risks.

RM: It's something they have to either experience or learn?

JP: Yes, very much so.

RM: In terms of the students that you have that pass through the program, were a lot of them from the Upper Peninsula or were they a mixed bag group of people from all around?

JP: It's pretty much a mixed bag believe it or not. We get students mostly from Michigan and then from the Midwest. You get an occasional weirdo from Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. I think it's a good mix of students from all over, of course, primarily from the Upper Peninsula. At one time the U.P. had a very strong high school theater program. Escanaba was tremendous early on, when Shirley Smith was heading the program at Marquette Senior High School, Pauline Lackonen running at Westwood, a lot of good high school programs that they don't have anymore. It's tougher and tougher to recruit from the area even though we've got a very visible theater program.

RM: The program that they started down on the lake?

JP: Lake Superior Theater.

RM: Is that program a rarity?

JP: Yes. Lake Superior Theater has evolved into being a summer theater. It started out with a goal of historical significance of the U.P. and a couple of their shows written by Shelly Russell were appropriate. Now they have kind of put that to the side and doing this and that which is fine. It does give students the opportunity to do summer theater. I did ten years and one week summer stock where you did one show a week, boy do you learn fast how to deal with it and how to save your ass nine times out of ten when you need to. I think that summer stock experience for me was tremendous. I learned to be a quick study, how to protect myself and it worked well.

RM: I have a question; I'm always flabbergasted at people who can do it. How do you learn your lines and basically memorize a play?

JP: That's a very good question Russ! Everybody has a little bit different technique. I learned by wrote where I will put a note card over the script and reveal so much of it. I would memorize three or four lines, go back, look at the cue, try and recite it out loud; it's kind of a building block approach. I also make it a rehearsal. When you get your blocking, I try to set the line with the movement or the stage item. That's part of the one week stock, you learn a role real quick and you learn to make use of the time you are spending in the winds, unlike when you have six to eight weeks in University Theater where you have time. But in summer stock, every eating,

waking moment you are on the lines. I've found with me, I don't know how it is with everyone else, that the quicker show closes, the quicker you discard it so that you can move onto the next one. You cannot have all that crap layered in; you have to let it go.

RM: So when a presentation, like at Northern, is thought by the audience to run more than two weeks, for the actors it's too much to handle?

JP: Yes, I learned as a producer to never say, "They are flocking to us, let's do this show for another two weeks." And then nobody shows up. I've had that happen with many productions, for example a production of *Carousel*. We did an extra weekend and we had maybe twelve in the audience.

RM: In Forest Roberts?

JP: No, back in Illinois. We had tremendous success with *Carousel*, we sold out literally for the entire run. The co-producer, Dexter and myself got together and said, "Let's give it a shot." And literally we played empty houses; we played to the orchestra. As a Broadway producer once said, "If people do not want to come to your production, nothing can stop them." Think about it. It's very true, which is probably the same thing that happened with *Near East*. You hate to see light houses there but there are a lot of performances that were sold out and there were no shows. It's very frustrating to the director and producer. However, there is nothing that you can do about it.

RM: I've put on activities on campus over the years, not that I was performing but I would put something on like a dinner for example and then sit and wait and hope to God that somebody would show up. So then this an on-going thing and happens on Broadway as well?

JP: Yes, you bet it does.

RM: It must be a very precarious business to be in.

JP: The stock market is a better bet. I also have learned a great deal when I was doing my graduate work at Bowling Green. I invested in a couple of Broadway shows, I became an angel. I remember Angela Lansbury was going to do a big, lavish Jerry Herman musical. She had just finished *Mame*, which Jerry Herman wrote music and lyrics and dear lord, I thought it was a sure bet. Put money in it. The show ran for three months and I lost my ass. Overall, there were a couple of other shows that I put money in that I didn't play with my heart, I just thought it looked like a good bet. One was a Peter Cook and Dudley Moore review called *Good Evening*. The producer offered the angels, the investors, 60%, rather than the 50/50 split. I made my money back in six weeks. I made not a lot of money but some. When you are a producer, you are there literally for the money. "It's show business," I would tell my students. Show is the art, business is the business aspect, you have to have business so that you can have the show and vice versa. It's crazy; it's a wonderful business. Whether there will ever be another mega musical, I don't know, *Wicked* is holding its own right now. *Les Mis* and *Phantom of the Opera* are still running but are rarities.

RM: Tell us about your involvement in taking students to Broadway. Would you do it on semester break?



JP: We did it generally on spring break. I started going there when I was down in Texas. Abilene is a long ways from New York City. I had done some summer theater and I had some contacts and I wasn't too sure how to set the trip up. There was a field studies group that I worked with to set the hotel and get tickets for and I would arrange for the seminars, meetings with professionals and etc. I think it's so important that students must take a field studies experience, either in New York City or Stratford and meet, talk, and see professional theater. You have to interact with them. Fortunately, many of the people that we interacted with were former students who were in New York, whether in the business or living in the city.

RM: Usually people are amenable to this?

JP: Yes, it's amazing. I don't know how to approach it. Many of my contacts were personal. Paul Truckey has a number of personal contacts from being in *Les Mis* for a number of years. It's an eye opener for the students to get insight into the career. It means a lot more than, "Oh, isn't it nice. There's a barn, let's do a show." It's very important that students get that exposure.

RM: You did that the whole time that you were teaching?

JP: Yes.

RM: Does that continue today?

JP: It does, in fact there is a group that left for New York today. They will be there for six days, five nights. They will see four shows and meet with Nick Wyman who is the president of Actors' Equity, the actors union. Nick performed with Paul in *Les Mis* for a number of years. Nick was one of the originals in *Phantom of the Opera*, a great guy. It's an eye opener. They are going to see *Porgy and Bess*, *Book of Mormon* and *Warhorse*. That's a pretty good spectrum and they are going to hear some voices if they are considering musical theater. *Porgy and Bess* and *The Book of Mormon* will give the students a good example of professional musical talent and these people are doing eight shows a week. It's tough work. I know Leah had to struggle. Cigarettes and alcohol were tough. She said, "I'm doing a Broadway musical, I can't smoke and I've got cut out the drinking or I'm useless." And if you are useless, you're out and if you're out, word spreads real quickly.

RM: What you're saying is that, bottom line, to be a good actor or actress you have to be highly disciplined?

JP: Very much so, disciplined and reliable. It's a very small world in theater. Someone like Paul has a very good reputation and same with Leah. They can get hired on the spot without auditioning which doesn't happen often. There are other people who have burned bridges and they'll never work again, at least not in theater.

RM: Students going into it don't realize the human element. Get out of the textbook and into the business aspect. Over the years, what were some of the plays that you directed and plays that you were in? Not all of them though.

JP: What's your favorite play? Who do you love more, your mother or your father? I used to say that my favorite show as a director is the one that I'm directing now. To certain extent that is very true with a director because you are passionate about what you do and all your efforts are directed in one direction. I have very fond memories of my swan song, *The Tempest* at Forest Roberts. It was a very complex and good show. It was my favorite Shakespeare and I was delighted to have the opportunity to direct it. Believe it or not, in the black box theater, we did a little goodnight show that came out of a modern drama class. We read a script called *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom* by Charles Bush. It's a hoot. It's a satire. It runs about an hour and ten minutes and I mentioned to one of my gals that it would be fun to do this as a midnight show? We ran it the entire semester on weekends in the black box theater, filled it every night. It was kind like *Rocky Horror Show*, a cult thing. I think I had as much fun with that as I had with *Into the Woods* on the main stage.

[SIDE A ENDS]

[SIDE B STARTS]

JP: As a performer, I don't think I care if I ever get on stage again as an actor. One of our graduate students directed a production of *The Fantasticks* in the Black Box Theater about five years. Ben Schneider got Paul to do El Gallo, the lead, and I played Henry the old actor and I had a ball doing it. Again, in the alternate venue it doesn't have to be main stage. The same is true in New York; everything doesn't have to be Broadway. There are a lot of interesting things happening off Broadway. I'd be at loss to say that, "this or that was my favorite." I loved playing Alfred P. Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, two scenes and songs: Get Me to the Church on Time and With a Little Bit of Luck.

RM: I guess it's almost like asking someone if you have published books or articles, which was the best? It's the one that you are working on and focused on. Once the play is over, you are moving on to the next one.

JP: That's the temporal aspect of theater. That's what makes it so frustrating and wonderful. It only occurs in the time and space during which it is being performed. Once it's over, it doesn't exist.

RM: It's like a whole world unto itself.

JP: Yes.

RM: How many plays have you directed over the years?

JP: About 75 to 100.

RM: Were any of them repeats?

JP: Yes, a couple. I did *The Importance of Being Earnest* twice, once at Hardin-Simmons and once here at NMU. I did *The Madwoman of Chaillot* at Hardin-Simmons and I repeated here with a guest artist, the wonderful Evelyn Page as Countess Aurelia. Normally I don't like to repeat but sometimes it seems like I didn't have any guest artists to do a particular show and a role that

would attract somebody. *The Importance of Being Earnest* was a good show for the students here because it's a diction show. You learned to articulate and how to do light off-handed humor. Sometimes you do shows for the educational benefit of the students.

RM: If you had a choice, once you've done it, you move on to something new?

JP: Yes, there are so many shows and much literature.

RM: The challenge is the type the show?

JP: My final show directing at Northern was *The Tempest*. I had never directed a Shakespeare play before. I've been in one, but never directed. That was neat. When I did *Lysistrata*, I had never done a Greek play before. Of course it was good for the students by doing Greek but it was also good for me as a director because I had to make it work. And it did. It was wonderfully obscene. The promiscuity of the women of Athens going on a sex strike to bring the men home from the battlefields, it was great fun. *Tartuffe* was the other one. With *Tartuffe* you have a script that has no stage directions whatsoever except enters and exits, just like Shakespeare. It was challenging to create a world on stage with nothing but words. That was part of the director's task when staging and blocking the show, along with conceiving it with your costumer and etc.

RM: When it was written, was that done deliberately?

JP: Yes, that was the way it was done; it was one of the conventions.

RM: You mean for all plays at that time?

JP: Yes.

RM: Was there a reason?

JP: It was convention.

RM: They left it to the director?

JP: Correct. It was challenging to say okay. I would double translate it. There was a situation in *Tartuffe*, how can I contemporize it for myself. "Dad's coming home from the office, puts his feet up, and his maid is not going to serve him tea today and he's upset," okay, I've got it, I had to translate it into terms that make sense on stage.

RM: With plays like that, you can easily contemporize it?

JP: You could. I'm not big on that, Shelley is. I think that plays will speak to an audience universally if it is a decent play. I hate that term "play". You are directing a "play". You are in a "play". It sounds like going into the sandbox and building sand castles. Theater can be very powerful, moving and there are moments that can never be duplicated again. In *Man of La Mancha*, which is the *Don Quixote* story, when the drawbridge comes down and you hear the strange, "Dream the impossible, dream!" And you are just weeping for what's happening there.

There is a segment in Billy Elliott, the show Leah is touring in, with a kid, young Billy, who dreams about what it would be like to go to the royal ballet school. And he actually flies with an older Billy and a younger Billy to Tchaikovsky, which puts me in tears. I've got a copy of the show that Leah did. That is the power of theater and life is hard to duplicate. Musical theater is even more powerful because music appeals to emotions. It's amazing why more theater productions do not make use of music the way film does. A lot of the effect of film is the underscore and how music is used. I thought the music for Near East was quite good but it was used for scene change. That's valid; it's for changing the mood. I'm not suggesting that they should underscore the show but it would be interesting sometime.

RM: Let's get back to doing a play. I don't think most people are familiar with this, when you did *Tartuffe*, did you have to pay a copyright and what is the copyright situation?

JP: If the show is in public domain, you are scot-free, Shakespeare etc. For several musicals you are going to pay big bucks because you have so many people to pay: a writer, composer, lyricist, directed on Broadway by addition etc. A majority of the expense of a lot of shows is what you pay for royalty. I firmly believe that authors deserve their fair share and too many people are trying to do it without paying royalty, especially with musicals. If you do it and it's publicized, all leasing companies have clipping services all over the country and there's a title, *Rocky Horror Show*. I think Al Keefe is stepping on thin ice skirting paying royalty for that. I don't know all of the details but I do know that he's not paying for all of the performances that they do. They cannot only shut you down but you will never again do one of their properties, so it's not worth it. It's like changing something, the only person that can give you authority to change something in the script; gender of the character for example, is the playwright. And if you want to do that you have to go through the author's union.

RM: Obviously you have to give a reason.

JP: Yes. Sometimes it's easy and other times it's not, some authors are lenient others not so much. Some say, "You do not change a period, not even a comma. You do my show as it is written." That's a bother.

RM: Do they learn this at some point?

JP: They learn if they take a Panowski directing class or theater management. College actors don't have to know it but it would be a good idea to learn it before they go out on the real world. I always thought that it was important to talk about the show business in directing theory and theater management where you are talking about producing, PR, and marketing.

RM: It's always been my feeling that there are three areas in the university, and you can comment on it, that have the best outreach or opportunity for outreach: music, art & design, and theater departments.

JP: I totally agree.

RM: These departments bring everything out to the public.

JP: I totally agree with you Russ. You can't have a university with good PR without music, art, and theater put in front of the community. The trick is how do you promote and produce it to get people to come? There was an interesting article in The Mining Journal last week, the girl wrote, "Why don't more people come to music recitals or the jazz band?" The answer is very clear, it's not promoted. Is Don Grant still head of the music department?

RM: Yes, but he's stepping down at the end of this year, that's what I heard. I think there are five department heads that are stepping down. That's just arts and sciences but that would be a third of the department heads.

JP: Those of us in fine and performing arts wage a constant battle against athletics for money and exposure. I always say, "Hey, Mining Journal. Why are you printing this? You spend at least a fourth of your paper promoting sports. You are giving them free advertising." How do you fight it when you keep battling and making inroads with the right people? "Can you get this into the paper for me?" and stuff like that. You need material that is worth disseminating because if nobody knows about it, nobody is going to come.

RM: This is another aspect of theater, getting the audience?

JP: Yes, and it promotes the university. Rarely, I hear, "We loved your production, it was so wonderful." And then somebody will nitpick about something, "How can you say that word on stage? Our young people are exposed!" Chill out! I couldn't change that word if I wanted to. Only the playwright can. Nobody goes out to offend an audience and I always felt that if you have a show that is controversial, promote it as such so people know what they are getting into. Don't put it all in the program, nobody reads that until they get home.

RM: Or it upsets them because they say, "I was lured in here. And now they tell me in the program."

JP: That is where I finally stole a little bit from Stratford, their signs say, "This production contains smoke, firearms, violence, etc." Before they go in the theater there is a sign there but yet again some people just complain. I think it's part of your responsibility as a producer to be truthful in advertising.

RM: Did I miss anything or do you have anything to add?

JP: I think the theater program has been very lucky to have an administration for the most part has been very supportive. My first summer here was when Jamrich was president. I'd had one year here and we opened a rec theater on Mackinac Island. It turned out to be a nightmare because the general manager of the inns of Mackinac, where the facilities were located, was in a political tug of war with people from Milwaukee who owned the property. We were caught in the middle of it. It was the best of times and the worst of times. Bob Glen stuck with it afforded the excess baggage as it were. I couldn't do it a second or third year. I kept saying, "If you give me a second or third year and give me three years and now that we know how to do it, I think that I can make it work or make it break even." Mackinac Island is its own universe as you are well aware of. Talk about being a producer and trying to cover all of the bases. That was a real eye opener. It was a good experience for me.

RM: That was in the 1970's?

JP: Yes.

RM: Do you think that Mackinac is a place that is looking for something for people to do? They talk about people going to Mackinac Island but once you bike around the island and buy the fudge that is kind of the end of the day, and then what? What was it like having the theater there?

JP: Before we got the official go ahead I had about a month to prep everything and it didn't work. The trick is getting people to stay on the island to see a theater performance. When does the last ferry leave for the mainland? And you think, "Oh my God, we've got to worry about that too!" And you have to deal with ferries. There was a lot of stuff that ambushed all of us but I will say that Bob Glen was tremendous about covering the loss. We had kids from all over the country as part of the company and that was really good publicity for us. They were vaguely aware of the political stuff going on.

RM: That was 1975?

JP: 1975 or 1976.

RM: Didn't you also have a summer dinner theater production in the Charcoal room?

JP: A couple of times in December we had a musical review.

RM: I think I remember. When you talk about Mackinac I seem to remember going to a performance with dinner.

JP: That was on Mackinac Island. We did three or four legitimate shows: *Sherlock Holmes*, *Guys & Dolls* and *The Great Cross Country Race*.

RM: And you ran it through most of the summer?

JP: Yes.

RM: Wasn't there a big thing about the theater at the hotel had the finest sound?

JP: It was home of Moral Rearmament. They had a hollow wood soundstage and a fairly antiquated Proscenium theater. We left it and fled. Stuff was sitting there and prime real estate for development but you needed money and cooperation and we got none of it. My success was just keeping my head above the water and making sure that none of the students fled and that they left with a good feeling in their mouths and it did, which I am happy to say.

RM: That is the little known aspect of the theater. I forgot to ask.

JP: It seemed like a great idea and it would have been if we had three years to develop and work things out.

RM: So it ended up being a one-shot deal and the university backed out because of the confusion and cost?

JP: Yes.

RM: You were talking about the administration, have most of the presidents been supportive?

JP: Yes. Vandament was responsible for getting the lobby renovated. Who else did we have? Judy Bailey.

RM: Appleberry?

JP: Yes, he was pretty supportive. He was there for all of the shows. Al Donovan was a vice president. He was somebody who was instrumental for getting us equipment and money and Bob Glenn too, when he had the position of provost.

RM: Jamrich was the Bob Glenn type as well.

JP: That's true. Who was after Jamrich?

RM: Then Appleberry, Vandament, Bailey and then Wong.

JP: Yes, Les was very supportive.

RM: So they have been supportive, you haven't run into a lot of obstacles?

JP: No, that has been a blessing. The obstacles were at the Dean level. I guess I rubbed Terry the wrong way at the wrong time.

RM: Having been department head for years, I see where you are coming from.

JP: All I'm doing is fighting for what I believe we deserve.

RM: I think again that is important because as I said the outgoing role that these departments play in terms of promoting the university and showing it off is powerful. You would be talking to parents and the top line that came in is, "What have your students gone on to?" This is fine; I think you have a wonderful program, now show me some results.

JP: I think that is another outcomes assessment.

RM: Which they won't count.

JP: Of course they won't.

RM: Which is probably the most important one, not the academic, how many pages did you read and how many tests did you pass?

JP: When somebody says, "My son is going to be a theater major, how is he going to find work? What is he going to do?" I would say, "What would you like to see?" They'd respond, "I'd like him to be an English major? What do they do? Read, write, and teach? Maybe teach." There are a lot more opportunities in theater than in English. What does a philosophy major do, you think? The cost of education these days, you can't blame parents for asking.

RM: Good thing you brought that up about the Mackinac plays.

JP: Would you be interested in a set of scripts from Moral Rearmament? The scripts that we confiscated, I found them in our van that I discovered cleaning out my basement. I used it for a program one time at a convention, an action prop drama.

RM: Yes.

JP: We were afraid of the jackasses that would toss them in the dumpster.

RM: You saved all of them or some of them?

JP: I've got about 35 to 40 scripts. Some are stage scripts, some are film scripts, they did film and television.

RM: This wasn't just projected they actually did it?

JP: Yes.

RM: This theater and everything they had connected with it was in use at some point?

JP: Yes.

RM: I'm kind of vaguely familiar.

JP: I wish I had more time, instead of saving my ass, saving my reputation with Northern, to really dig into it. Suzanne said, "Jim, go ahead. Put them in a box and we'll maybe accidentally put them on the truck."

RM: Nobody said a word?

JP: They didn't know where they were; they didn't even know they moved.

RM: Tell me more about Moral Rearmament.

JP: It was a worldwide peace organization.

RM: It came out after the war, and then they built that little complex.

JP: At the ends of Mackinac, I don't know if they do now, they had a dome ceiling with a mural of all the world leaders and all the people were for "moral rearmament."



RM: I remember over the lobby or desk there was a large artistic mural. That was all being discussed. Now if you were to bring up moral rearmament even over there, maybe a few of the old timers might scratch their heads and say, "I kind of remember something." Then it went to the religious group.

JP: They had a college building and a library.

RM: They had Up for People. The students were going to go there in the winter and then in the spring and summer would travel the world with Up for People. I think they built some kind of ski run on one of the hills behind of what became the hotel, Mission Point. That's a whole part of Mackinac that has vanished; I've never seen anything written about it talking about what was going on.

JP: I will dig and sort.

RM: If you have anything related to that, posters, pamphlets, things that were connected, save them because I don't know of anyone that has any of that. Any final words?

JP: Go White Sox!

RM: This is good; we're getting a good overview of your life and times in theater, thank you.

JP: You are most welcome, my pleasure.

END INTERVIEW