

INDIA ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

Jeff Bartlett

Narrator

Dan Rein

Interviewer



**MINNESOTA HISTORICAL
& CULTURAL GRANTS**

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company

The India Association of Minnesota (IAM) was formed in 1973 as the India Club of Minnesota. IAM is a not-for-profit organization that represents people with an interest in the culture and heritage of India to **build** a sense of cohesiveness within this community, **represent** the community to the population at large, and **serve** as the focal point for advancing the educational, cultural, and charitable interests of the community. The organization is statewide, though the largest numbers of its members live within the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area.

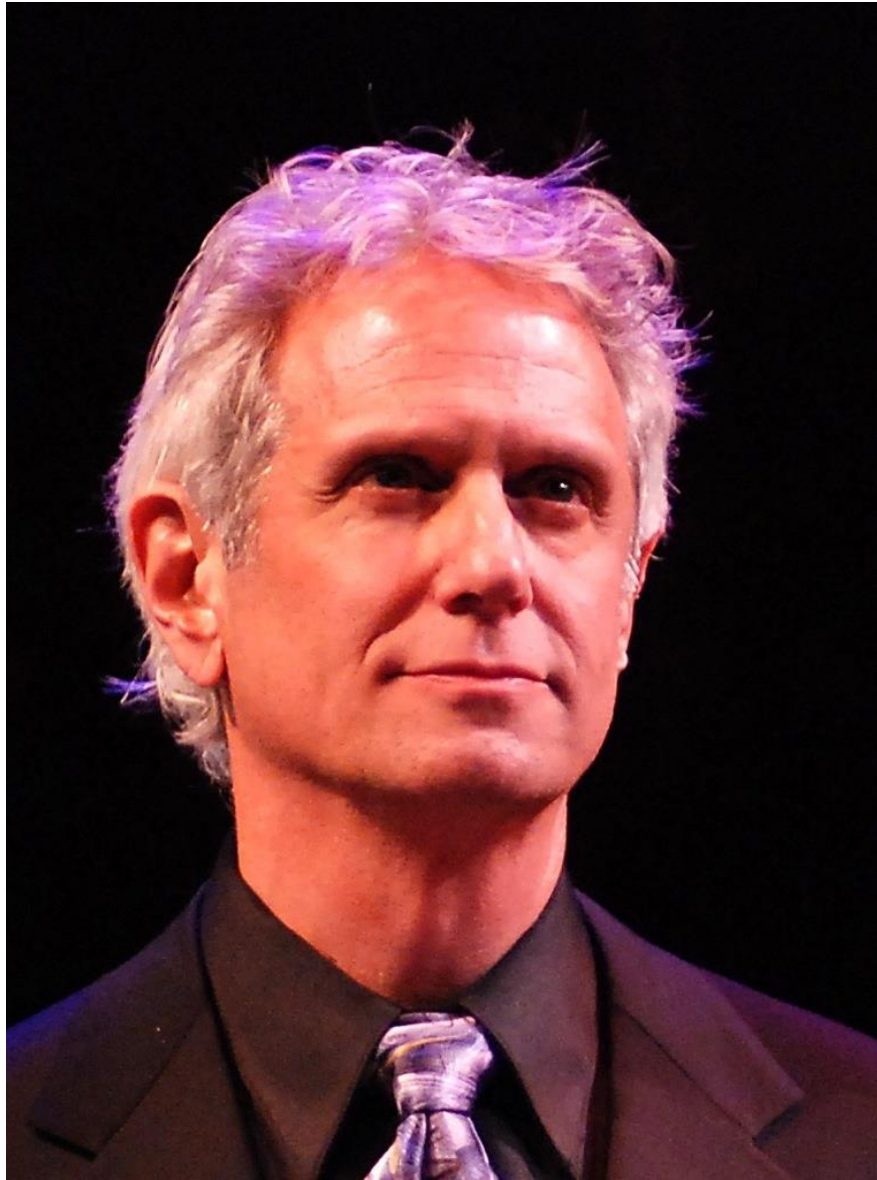
“Arts 2 – Ragamala Dance Company” is the seventh project in a series conducted over the past 17 years between the India Association of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society. This project has the following goals:

- 1) Create an oral history of Ragamala Dance Company.
- 2) To preserve the recordings of dance performances by Raneer Ramaswamy and the Ragamala Dance Company.

Acclaimed as one of the Indian Diaspora’s leading dance ensembles, Minneapolis-based Ragamala Dance seamlessly carries the Indian classical dance form of Bharatanatyam into the 21st century. Artistic Directors Raneer and Aparna Ramaswamy retain roots in the philosophy, spirituality, mysticism, and myth of their South Indian heritage, while using their art form as a rich language through which to speak with their own voices as contemporary American choreographers. They see the classical form as a dynamic, living tradition with vast potential to move beyond the personal and spark a global conversation.

Ragamala has a unique & compelling story, with deep local roots & broad international branches. Yet the origins & early history of the company have never been formally documented. As Ragamala celebrates its 20th anniversary, it is vital to document its history & prominent place in the life of the Indian community, the dance community, & the broad fabric of people & cultures that make up our state of MN. Thus a key goal of the project is to digitize video recordings of the early years of Ragamala’s productions (1991-2002), which are currently stored in antiquated analog formats that are in danger of being lost as the technology becomes obsolete and to preserve them at the Minnesota History Center for posterity. This will enable all Minnesotans, not just people of Indian origin, to reap the benefits of the very highest quality of Indian classical dance presented in Minnesota over the years, into the future generations. The archive will also serve as a resource for historians and scholars of Indian music, history and culture in MN.

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The Interview

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Narrator

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Interviewer

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DR: I am with Jeff Bartlett and Jeff maybe you can talk about your involvement, this part of the Oral history Project for Ragamala, and maybe you can talk about your involvement, when did it began, and how it is grown and developed over the years, as you said you are still working with them ...

JB: I am. Well, I believe, as you just said that if it's- if it's in a book, I don't need to remember it. So, I am not sure exactly what-when Ragamala first performed at the Southern Theater that I ran for quarter of a century plus. But I think it was about twenty years ago, in the early 90s and Ragamala came to me like all other artists did at that time who performed at Southern and continued to do and outlined their idea for a piece and I thought it sounded really good. But, I mean, I thought-I thought a lot of people's work sounded really good at that time. But, you know, even then, I have to say, it seemed like there was something a little bit special about-about Raneer, because at that time it was really Raneer, her daughters weren't really even of age yet. But just her vision and I was always fascinated by - by artists who were working with historical traditions and yet trying to make them relevant as a performance form in contemporary, in the contemporary world. I found that, all we, I did it and still do find that a really interesting razors edge that people try to, try to you know be on, and so, I just liked the sound of what they going to do, so I put them on stage, and then-and then I saw them, and then I was like "oh my goodness" this is really-really amazing stuff. And so, the facial expressions and the nuance of the-of the gesture and the nuance of the face, the nuances and the way in which their - they physicalized the music and the physicality and the music work together, it's really- it was really beautiful. So I worked with them for-for many years. Really their...the Southern theater was their primary home for performance in the Twin Cities and I was like enough to design the lights for all the shows that they did there, except for that very first one actually [clearing throat]. And so I just watched them over the years continue to get better and better at their work and first Aparna, then

Ashwini grew up and joined the company and anyway, I can talk more, but I'll take a breath and let you ask me a question [chuckles].

DR: Yeah, so.

[Background noise]

DR: Maybe you can, your background was with the Southern...

JB: Hm...Hm...

DR: And...

JB: [Clearing throat]

DR: lighting. Is ... that's your background?

JB: Interesting background...

DR: [Clearing throat]

JB: Depending on how we define background, and I don't know, you know, how much tape you have.

DR: Oh, we got ... we got about 14 hours ...

JB: I know it's not the tape

DR: [Laughter]

JB: I know it's not really tape [chuckles] but the sort of quick version, relatively quick version of the story is that I-I started out as a musician actually. I majored in music in college. I didn't really, I was a Bassoon player but I didn't really want to be a Bassoonist, I really wanted to be a conductor. So I studied some conducting in college and-and such and... bottom line was that my time as a-as a music student in college made me realize I really wasn't cut out to be a professional musician. So, even a- even a conductor. But as a conductor and this because it will come back later, what interested me, what has always interested me the most about music is the big picture of it – the arc and the sweep and the contours and the rising and the falling and that kind of thing. So that's what I got to sort of imagined and play with as a conductor, kind of. So, realized that wasn't a career path for me, tried it, a little of this, a little of that, I tried, but...because I was always really interested in the visual and I-I like mentally would take pictures of things, and so I tried photography for a while, tried film making for a while, and then I sort of stumbled into working in the theater in New York City, which is where I am from. I am from the East Coast. But I had come out to the University of Minnesota for a semester to study with my Bassoon teacher. So, I fell in love with the Twin Cities, but then I moved back to the East

Coast and then and that's where I started working in theater. But I didn't like the East Coast, so I decided to move back to Minnesota, to Minneapolis without really having an idea of what I would do, but I by this time I had gotten enough interested in theater that I thought well, I could at least you know get a job maybe [clearing throat]. Came back to town, I approached the Guthrie theater to see if I could do any internship and stage carpentry at the Guthrie. It didn't work out for whatever reason, but at the time the Guthrie was opening up this space on the West Bank, called the Guthrie 2, which was in the Southern theater building, which became the Southern Theater. I mean, it was originally the Southern theater, back in the 1900s. So, I got an internship working in [clearing throat] the building that was going to become the Southern Theater and that's when my career in a way sort of started, and it was all wrapped up. There were three components of it – that were all wrapped up together – Lighting Design, especially lighting design for dance, the Southern Theater building itself and the Twin Cities performing arts community. So, just to pick up that thread I dropped before, about the conducting part, it was (when) it was at the Guthrie 2/Southern that I discovered dance lighting. It was the first time I really did dance lighting and then when that happened, it completely clicked into gear for me – it was like “Oh, this is it! This is the visual plus the musical, and it's the theatrical and it's all in the mix and this is what I am going to do with the rest of my life, sort of, kind of.” But at the same time I was also going in the Southern Theater, sort of what I am going to do with the rest of my life also. And so, and this is, you know, we are talking a scarily long time ago 1975-76, so- so that began this this long arc during which I - I developed, if you will, relationships, I guess you could say, with-with all of these things. Lighting design and I just kept doing more and more and more and more of it. I am self-taught as a Lighting designer, working with the Twin Cities dance community, and building the Southern Theater as a venue / entity whose purpose in life was to make it possible for local artists to grow and develop. So there are lot of threads that also emerged in that - in that little room, and that you know kept me going, and that I kept going, you know, for a lot of years.

DR: And-and so then through the evolution you know basically you self-taught that you became more and more, you were involved in all these artistic projects along the way as well?

JD: I was through a greater or lesser extent but at the very least I would be involved in the-in the tech process the final few days before opening and sitting next to the choreographer, director, whatever at the tech table making you know taking the piece apart moment by moment and lighting it you know forming collegial, collaborative working relationships with these people. It's a lot like-it's a lot like a lot of dates in a way because you... everybody has their own way of interacting in their own degree everything... how much control they want to have or how little control they want to have and so every you know every week or two we were doing a new show. And then over the years I started

working across with the same artists [background noise] multiple times over the course [sirens] but there are always new people in the course of the years but...Yeah, so there was at least that sort of base level collaborative relationship as-as the lighting designer. But then depending on [pause] my personal relationship with any given artist I as the years progressed I would begin to see if there was a comfort level there with a little bit more of a-a collaborative role in the work not just as a lighting designer but a more verging more into you might call more dramaturgy or you know sort of critiquing it with an outside eye kind of thing and sometimes I would do that more and sometimes I wouldn't do it all, would totally depend on what [background noise] level of receptivity was in a given artist. And in recent years I have started to do that even more and-and in places where I am more welcome and it's great. I love it.

DR: You know I suppose this continual you know like because I know I have been to a number of shows and I saw a number of groups perform on the Southern stage and their impetus, evolution ...

JB: Right.

DR: Basically... so as the groups were evolving it sounds like you were evolving...

JB: Right.

DR: As well.

JB: Right.

DR: In you relationships with them as well.

JB: Both are true yeah. And-and also in addition to that just a-just a sort of you know will stop turn it, figure out what it's sort of like but anyway [pause] [background music] part of what is important to me as I decided which groups to bring back to the Southern over a period of years in which ones to sort of let drift away was their evolution. It was (art) the idea of growth, artistic growth and I don't really, wasn't too dogmatic about defining it in any particular way but some sort of notion that there was something that they were trying to find or explore and that they were making some sort of headway towards exploring that or maybe the headway which is the ...to better define what is it that they are trying to find or something whatever. That idea of growth was critical to me and it was when I would see an a group not really doing that then I would sort of say, "You know this wasn't really for you." So, yeah you are right it was all and yes I was developing, I was growing as a-as a lighting artist, I was growing as a presenter, I was growing as an arts administrator, [chuckles] not always greatly as I would have liked but you know I was getting, doing more and I was growing as a curator. So yeah that's all woven together...

DR: Hm...Hm...

JB: Very much.

DR: Yeah, yeah.

JB: Yeah.

DR: So then you know maybe you can address you know since you have evolved with Ragamala over a number of years how have you seen them evolve and you know do you remember any of those early productions and were there something that struck you that you just kind of wait a minute what's going on here?

JB: Yeah. Well, yes-yes to all of the above. I do remember those early productions. There is always things that struck me. [Pause] I guess thinking back to what I... in other words trying the best I can to put out of my mind things that I have learned in the interim but just going back to looking at them. Early on what I was struck with was the overall sort of energy, vibrancy, vitality. I am also going to say buoyancy. One of the things that I remember one of the things that I saw early on was Aparna jumping and when she jumps she just looks like she is like an anti-gravity machine. She just flies off the stage. It looks like she is bouncing off a trampoline. You know just boink up in the air and I, "wow how does that-how does that happen" [clearing throat]. Another thing that I was struck with early on was Ranee's face and what she could do with, without hardly even moving her body but just the stories that she could tell just with the lift of an eyebrow or the blink of a... or the-the heightening of a cheek or facial expression or... She just could convey this incredible amount of emotion and depth of feeling and just through her face and that [clearing throat] was you know one of the things that hooked me early on. But the thing that you know I don't know who is going to hear this or if anybody is going to hear this, these particular words but I-I've...especially when I was at the Southern I-I would always hesitate to you know do anything that sounded like comparing [background noise] one company to another. But what in my mind sets Ragamala apart, it set them apart early on and as the years have progressed it-it sets them apart more and more and more. It's the rigor of their discipline and the way in which they're relentless in their pursuit of continuing to get better and better and better. They know...rest; Ranee doesn't rest as an artist. If I thought Ranee's face was expressive twenty years ago, what she can do with it now, is just she's you know, she's just a master and watching Aparna grow as a dancer from somebody who was amazing to somebody who's like literally other worldly. I mean transportative kind of out there as an artist you know but...and-and-and one of the things that's been so great to be on the inside so to speak or in rehearsal with them is to watch the way in which Ranee and Aparna will not let their dancers rest. I mean they are always making in the theatre world they are called notes. (Rana) Ragamala has a word, they call them points. We make points and you know the finger when it needs to be here, not here, you know like arm, when you are doing that arm, it-it...and they will say things which I could quote exactly but they will not just talk about the physical way in which the body

needs to be. They will talk about the ideas that are infusing that physical body you know. You have to really feel that you miss him and he is gone and you really are living the how you know how-how hard it is for you to be apart from him. Say those kinds of things in addition to you know the arm has to be higher, no higher, higher, you know like that and-and they're just relentless, the only word I can come up with and I don't mean that in a bad way. They do it in a...

DR: More like persistent...

JB: Persistent.

DR: I think persistent has more of a positive connotation than relentless.

JB: I think it does.

DR: Yeah.

JB: Persistent is true but...and even though...but what I- what I'm trying to say is that it never lets up. They don't-they don't ever... I mean of course at a certain point you know it's five 'o'clock and the show is going to happen at eight so we are done rehearsing now but I'll be sitting them...I'll be sitting and talking to Aparna about a lighting cue and the dancers would be up there working on stage and Aparna has got one eye on the dancers and at all times and she'll inter...she'll stop listening for a minute and just say, "Wait-wait-wait I hear you but Tamara that has to be like this or this set like that and it's not, I mean I've seen other dance companies work and theirs are...there can be a kind of neurosis about it or a-or a...having a sort of power trip or a ego trip. It's not-not-not there at all. None of that's there and the company, the way they take the notes, the points, they are-they are just open receptors. They'll-they stand, they listen and they try to implement the best they can. So, it's just amazing symbiotic relationship between Ranee and Aparna as teachers and their dancers as-as disciples if you will. That just has resulted in the continual-continual artistic growth, uninterrupted artistic growth year after year after year after year and it just...they just keep-keep growing and I know there's dancers who have been for whom it has worked less. Well, I don't want to make it look like it's all one big idealized bunch of wonderful staff. I am sure there is hard things that go on behind the scenes I don't know about but from my perspective this is what I've seen.

DR: Hm...Hm...Hm...Hm...

DR: So I-I-I'm really curious Jeff as to the talking about how you know Ragamala has grown and how has this pushed you in this process since you are continually there throughout the years working on the lights and some of the tech things. So, how has this pushed you?

JD: Hm...Really good question and-and I you know there's [sigh] there is definitely ways in which it has. The best one-one way to track this if you will would be to talk about the

issue of face light, light on faces. Generally speaking in dance, lighting dance we light mostly with side light and we do that because it brings out the three dimensional form of the body and that's mostly what we care about in dance. But side light, one of the downfalls of sidelight is it doesn't light the face very well. So, I don't know anyway, sorry, glad this isn't live video, so early on when I started lighting Ragamala there was this tension between me and Raneer where Raneer was always wanting more face light and I was resistant because the typical way of thinking about face light in lighting dances that it makes things flat. It flattens things out. And so I would say, "Well yeah there is more face light but it makes things flat and we would usually we would stumble along and find some sort of compromise. This-this went on for a while and like a number of years and somewhere along the way I'm a little ashamed to admit this but somewhere along the way I got it for the first time. I actually got what the problem was. The way in which there's so much that happens with these-these dancers, they are not just working with their bodies, they are working with-with their face and they're working a lot with their eyes and the little musculature around the eyes, the eyebrows, the pupils, where they are looking, whether their eyes are looking happy or sad and so it took me a while, I was going to say a number of years to understand, "Oh we need to be able to see their eyes in a way that most dancers it doesn't really matter. I don't say, mean any disrespect by that but usually low angle front light is the last thing you want to put in a dance-dance lighting because it just makes things flat. But for Ragamala you need that to be able to see the nuances of what's going on underneath the eyebrow and the socket, eye socket. So it took me a long time to get that [background music]. So but then I did get it and so then how did it make me grow? So then the challenge becomes so how do provide the amount of face light that they need without it getting flat and how do you find a balance where there's still you know glisteningness and energy coming in from the side light and still seeing the body in the way you need to and also seeing the face in a way that is needed. So, that's-that's been a-a tremendous area of exploration and growth for me. Another issue is their skin color which I've also which I'm now actually actively trying to research to see what the...where-where there is science about...what's the science around skin tones and I've just now started to investigate it a little bit but one of the really challenging things about their wonderful-wonderful skin color is that it-it be...there is certain color tones that really don't work very well. When I first thought it's a light that might I used to use a lot of yellows and golds in it and it took me a while to realize it that doesn't always work so well with their skin because it tends to make it... it can tend to make it look...there-there can be a lot of green in yellow light and there's a certain amount of green in their skin and if you don't do it just right it's going to make them look kind of sick. So you know again how to find the color balance that works [chuckles] and has a vibrancy and a vitality to it, a richness, a dimensionality without...and also keep you know preserving the skin tone. It-it's-it's extremely this is...I don't know if I am conveying this at all but this is like a big thing for me in my lighting design mind right

now I'm spending a lot of time trying to figure this out in relation to Ragamala. So here I am you know after lighting them twenty years I'm sitting here saying I am really working hard to figure this out so there is that part of it. Not to do too much of a rounded answer but the other piece of working with Ragamala where for me working with Ragamala is unique in the sense of –of personal growth...isn't directly related to lighting but it does really which is the spirituality of their work because I'm a sort of budding student of-of Yoga and Buddhist meditation and things like that not by any means of scholar but I consider myself someone who's trying to make some sort of little bit of progress on some kind of spiritual path during my time on this earth and-and their work is-is-is unabashedly about spiritual things. I mean they talk about it in their PR materials [laughter] and not to mention that it exudes from the stage and so this whole idea you know how to realize the spiritual through art is...has been a sort of theme for me in general but you know do this more specifically with them and how can my work as a lighting designer help that because really light I mean you know not to get all woo-woo but there are spiritual teachers who say well we are all made up of light, so it's like sort of a having responsibility in a way it's like the work is about spirituality and you are the guy with the lights so boy you better do a good job.

[Laughter]

DR: Well it-it sounds like you know, because this-this process over the years of you know awarenesses and challenges I think is just this sure fact that you-you keep working together and it keeps push...they push...

JD: Right.

DR: You push...

JD: Right.

DR: And it is pushing you into different areas...

JD: Right.

DR: And even some people you know bring up the idea of spirituality so...

JD: Right, right, yeah.

DR: But you are talking about in terms of how do you like that.

JD: Right, exactly. How do you-how do you bring it out, how do you allow it to shine forth, no pun intended.

DR: Hm...Hm...

JD: But it's not like...maybe I'm not saying that there would be anybody who would-would do this but it's not like "oh, I figured out how to light Ragamala after my first five years of working with them and now I've got the Ragamala lighting that I just do. Nah...ah...

DR: [Chuckles]

JD: It keeps like I'm constantly you know, 'can I do this better...is there...what-what have I not learned about how pink gels respond with their skin and what you know, so I'm constantly experimenting and-and-and this has in a way becoming unburdened from the-the day to day challenge of having to make the Southern theatre work as a non-profit organization which ultimately I wasn't really able to do. There's a lot bigger story there. It's not quite that simple but yeah I mean, we never did find a financial model that worked. [Sniffing] No question but being freed up of that and now the work that I have done with Ragamala in the year since it's really enabled me to focus more energy, more time and energy on this...the artistic aspects for lighting especially since I'm...specially now after getting a full time job at Carleton where I really only got three or four lighting design clients and Ragamala is by far the most active of those. So, I'm really able to focus in the last...since-since I first lit them at the Cowles Center which I guess would be about two years ago, I've...the degree to which I'm thinking about this is-is exponentially greater than that has been in the past. So, I'm not [chuckles] I am definitely continuing to grow as an artist

DR: Hm...

JD: By working with them.

DR: Yeah.

JD: And very happy to be doing so.

DR: Yeah, yeah, it sounds like an amazing challenge...

JD: Hm...Hm...

DR: You know just the thought process of skin color and everything...what light does to them.

JD: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DR: Well maybe since you know you have had this whole you know this big long process with them, how have you seen their audiences grow and change...

JD: [Sniffing]

DR: Over the years?

JD: [Pause] That's a little harder to answer actually. You think you know that as the Sothern Theater guy I would have...I would-I would know...I will be able to quantify that but I...it's not easy. I-I have seen their audiences at the Twin...in the Twin Cities, their local audiences ebb and flow and I haven't really been able to [background noise] track why it is that it ebbs sometimes and flows other times. I have seen mostly from afar their audiences from outside of the Twin Cities mostly grow and grow and grow and they are developing as you know more national profile and getting more national recognition. But my actual knowledge if you will of what goes on with the audiences is pretty limited and pretty anecdotal and you know I had a good friend actually, one of my yoga teachers who said...I said you know...this was way years ago...I said you know "doing that Ragamala show tonight, you should come see it." She's like, "Well, I've seen them and one other thing about Ragamala is that their dances all look the same so why should I go and see them again?" So that's ok so I am thinking you know well that's what one person thinks, there's probably other people who thought, who think that. I know there is...I also am well aware that there has been a constant desire on the part of, consistent desire on the part of certain audience members to know more about what the gestures mean. This has been a-a theme and something that Raneer and Aparna and I have discussed at length is this question of how much should they be told and why is it that, you should, why is it that people care so much, why is it that this comes up, as you know, as opposed to Raneer will say, "People don't ask Martha Graham what that gesture meant, you know, why do they have to know what this gesture means? And my response to that is well because it's obvious that your gesture means something very literal. It's you...it's like a butterfly, you do a butterfly and then you do a snake and then you do some water. You're-you're saying nouns so we want to know how these nouns can act to each other so and I...there's no quick and easy answer to this but I'm-I'm aware that even in the most recent performance of theirs that they did here in the Cities, like a good-good friend who-who watches a lot of dance said, "You know, what they really need is sub-titles." Yeah and so-and so...yeah, you know this isn't really about how the audiences is growing...

DR: Hm...Hm...

JD: It's a little about audiences reaction. On the flip side of that, we did this show in some little basically some kind of community college way out in the Boondocks of...I don't even know what Pennsylvania, maybe it was and not exactly what I consider a cultural Mecca or a spiritual Mecca. And as we will do we had student-student crew and [clearing throat] there was this young lady whose job it was to stand back stage and be the stage manager. She didn't have a lot to do but she was there. She was backstage and she was watching and I you know did not give it a lot of thought. I was busy doing my thing, lighting the piece and everything and-and at the end so we did a rehearsal. I can't remember we rehearsed there once, one day or two days but we did it. A couple of rehearsals and then we did the performance. And afterwards she just said something like,

“Thank you very much” and she just started talking to me, “I just love this company. It’s so amazing. Their work is so amazing. I couldn’t take my eyes off them.” And then I realized that she had been standing there utterly absorbing every single iota of movement that had been done the whole time we’d been there, for a day or two. And so, I always think of her as being like so again if there is one person like that, I don’t know how many other thousands there are where they know nothing coming in. They don’t care what the gestures mean [chuckles]. They just clam on to it and the work speaks to them and they you know, they resonate with it. So, but I do know...I don’t know I did a show in New Jersey somewhere with them in a two thousand seat house filled with Indian people and they just leapt at her feet at the end of it. So no, they have a great deal of acceptance within the Indian community. It’s about all I know.

DR: So you haven’t seen their say even during the time of the Southern, you know there was...because I know, you know, the dance community was extremely interested in Raneé in the beginning and then you know along with that comes some Indians and some westerners...

JD: Right, right.

DR: And have you see it grown...

JD: That’s true.

DR: Either way?

JD: I can’t really identify a trend very honestly but I know that’s always been a thing and-and-and there was a while there where Raneé was especially before Aparna became more of a Co-artistic Director, Raneé was really going out there with Jazz and some other-other musical forms other than traditional, straight-straight-head traditional and music. And I-I heard actually people in the company told me that-that turned off some of their Indian audience. They...some of the Indian people liked the more traditional approach. So, I know that’s happened but I don’t really-I don’t really have an apples to apples comparison of...

DR: Hm...Hm...

JD: How that’s really trended over the years.

DR: Sure, sure. [Pause] So, I’m just...

JD: I do think there is some [pause] there are some elements in the dance community who... [Pause] well I don’t know you know, who else maybe envious of their success or maybe think that their success is because they are not white.

DR: Hm... [Chuckles]

JD: [Laughter].

DR: It never occurred to me [laughter] you know.

JD: Reverse...

DR: [Clearing throat]

JD: And what is it reverse racism, I don't know what it is, reverse discrimination.

DR: Yeah.

JD: But I'm not...I shouldn't say it's kind of gossip so I shouldn't say it.

DR: Yeah.

DR: You know this is...in this whole process then maybe you can maybe talk a little bit about some of the Ragamala's successes, you know as a dance company.

JB: [Pause] Yeah. [Pause] Why I actually liked some of the work that they did with [clearing throat] some of the non-traditional forms that 'Billie Holiday show' they did it an evening of work to Billie-Billie Holiday's music and I-I thought it really interesting to look at the way in which the Bharatanatyam movements can work with other musical forms. In a way-in a way they are sort of drifting back that way a little with this new work that's going to be at the Walker in May of 2014 but in a sense they are working with Jazz, saxophone player and jazz based guitarist but-but the musical basis of what they are doing is *raga* based. So it's jazz but firmly anchored in *raga* world. But, [pause] one of...for me one of the most powerful pieces that they did was this one called 'Bhakti' where they used Ruth McKenzie singing the music of Hildegard von Bingen and so they intermingled ancient you know, I don't know, I just ignorantly used the word Indian because I don't know if it was Hindu or what it was exactly, poetry but anyway it was medieval, from the medieval period and then you had Ruth McKenzie [background noise] singing the work from the western European medieval tradition and the whole theme of-of both of the-of the poetry from both traditions was about the beauty of the earth and you know the exploring and discovering the spiritual through nature and beauty of nature and just the way those themes interwove and the music interwove not to mention Ruth McKenzie's you know, killer, amazing person to listen to. I just thought that was a really-really strong piece and [clicking of tongue] I really-really loved 'Sacred Earth' as well the one with the projections of the *Warli* art, the traditional art out of India that just depicts enough you know natural-natural life style, earth based lifestyle and the way that the piece interacts with the visuals that are projected, really amazing for me. Those are just a few.

DR: Hm...Hm...Hm...Hm...yeah. [Sigh]

DR: Ragamala's impact on Minnesota? [Pause] How do you see their impact? [Pause]

JB: Hard to know. It's hard to know what the impact has been in the sense that I don't have a way of measuring how much their message has been received or to what extent their message has influenced people. Sorry...

DR: Hm...

JB: I don't mean to...really annoys me when people do what I just did which is start off with a negative but-but what I think of Ragamala as this constantly...it's almost like what's that eternal like an eternal flame kind of thing where there...they've just been this lantern that's just been burning in [pause] here in Minneapolis for-for two decades shining forth this light and what a light the-the-the message for me that comes that exudes from this light is a message about personal appearance, a message about you know, like knowing what you want, to achieve and not letting anything get in your way and continuing to persevere after that goal. It's a message about the beauty of art in the world and the place that art has in our world and art as an expression of spirituality and that-and that you don't need to be...you don't need to hide that relationship. In fact, you can celebrate it and people will respond in a good way. [Pause] Yeah and just, well I just said perseverance already. I wasn't going to say stick-stick to it if... but just again that-that measured one foot in front of another life long journey to continue to put out this influence through artistic creativity and] artistic expressiveness [background noise] that you know that there-that there is beauty in this world, there is spirituality in this world. Beauty and spirituality can go together and we can experience all that in a theatre and as they say this-this plotting con-consistency of that message over a period of years and in a way that never once lets you believe that they think that they-that they can rest or that they can rest on the laurels or that they reached a level of achievement that now they can coast, it's-it's cannot that perseverance to continually find more, do more. So has that had an impact on the state of Minnesota, well I am not sure but obviously McKnight Foundation thought they did. It did by giving Raneer one of the few, you know, the distinguished artists award that they have given out. So, it must be out there somewhere.

DR: Yeah.

JB: [Chuckles]

DR: Well, it sounds in a way like it-it well had an impact on you?

JB: Oh, totally.

DR: You know.

JB: Yeah, that's true, when I live in Minnesota.

DR: That's right.

JB: [Laughter]

DR: You know.

JB: I am a Minnesotan. And I vote I'm a Minnesotan and I like Ragamala.

DR: Yeah. But even-even your whole process of, you know...you –you're not through.

JB: Right. No.

DR: You are not through learning.

JB: Right.

DR: You know they are not through learning. It sounds like this continual, you know, evolution between the both of you.

JB: Right, right, yeah, very true.

DR: Yeah. So, is there anything you'd like to add you know that we haven't touched upon (uh)?

JB: I really don't think so. I think I have really covered...in fact, I've...you have really helped me unearth things that have been kicking around in my brain but I don't usually talk about. So, it's been great.

DR: That's good, good. Well thanks a lot Jeff.

JB: Yeah, it's my pleasure. Thank you.

DR: Yeah.
