ROBERT WILSON

with RUFUS WAINWRIGHT, LOU REED, LUCINDA CHILDS

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LIVE from the New York Public Library

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Celeste Bartos Forum

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening, good evening, and sorry for the wait! I hope it's worth it. I'm sure it will be! My name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of LIVE from the New York Public Library. As you know, my goal at the Library is quite simply to make the lions roar, to make a heavy institution dance, to make it, if possible, levitate. And the way we do this is by bringing extraordinary people together, such as tonight. Tonight you have come to hear Bob Wilson, who is celebrating his seventieth birthday, I believe, on Monday or Tuesday. **(applause)** Happy birthday, Robert Wilson!

Happy birthday! **(applause)** Other people who are not celebrating their birthday also need an applause. We have Lou Reed, Lucinda Childs, and Rufus Wainwright!

(applause)

It's a great pleasure to welcome Lou Reed back. We were here about a year and a bit ago, celebrating the reunion of the Velvet Underground, an evening I think he remembers fondly, an evening which me rock and roll for the very first time. I must say it was a great pleasure and we followed it up by having Keith Richards at the library, by having Patti Smith, and I even interviewed Jay-Z at the library. When I told Lou Reed that I had interviewed Jay-Z, he said, "*You?*" **(laughter)** He is right. I approach my subjects with the euphoria of ignorance, **(laughter)** I knew very little. And when I said "the euphoria of ignorance," Lou Reed said, "that's not your line." He was right, also.

At any rate, I hope you will join our mailing list, I hope you will become Friends of the Library, I hope you will support this great institution. I hope you will come and hear Harry Belafonte and Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons. I hope you will come and hear Joan Didion and Diane Keaton and Anish Kapoor and Gilberto Gil and so many other people who we will have here at the Library. Not only people who write books, but people who create, who think, who think differently, for whom the life of the mind is a pleasure. And who better to have here tonight, and who I will bring up now to have a conversation with first, but Bob Wilson? Bob Wilson.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Did you recognize that music?

ROBERT WILSON: Yes, I did.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You have collaborated with Tom Waits.

ROBERT WILSON: I have. Tom and I have made three works together.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What were they?

ROBERT WILSON: We first did a work with William Burroughs called *The Black Rider* and after that Tom and I worked with Paul Schmidt and we wrote a piece called *Alice*, which is based on *Alice in Wonderland* and a few years after that we did *Woyzeck*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What do you think it is about people, artists, who—why do you think they find you so attractive?

(laughter)

ROBERT WILSON: Well, I think what I do is—I studied architecture.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: At Pratt.

ROBERT WILSON: At Pratt Institute and I make a kind of megastructure.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This gesture is not innocent for you.

ROBERT WILSON: Let's say that an architect designed a building, an apartment building, and Paul lives in the building and I love in the building and Lewis Cullman lives in the building and we each can carve our homes, design them as we want, our apartments, with very different aesthetics but there is a cohesion because of this megastructure. Paris is a beautiful city, and we can still build in it today, Frank Gehry can, Jean Nouvel, because it has a very clear city plan. So in a sense what I do in collaborations and working with other people is I make a form and a structure that allows other people to fill it in.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And when they come and fill it in their life is transformed and so is yours.

ROBERT WILSON: Mine is because if I work with Lou Reed, if I work with Philip Glass, if I work with David Byrne, they're very different personalities. Tom Waits is very different again, so that I'm different and the work is different because of the collaboration.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What do you think it is about certain artists that gets you

most excited? For instance, if you think about, and we will bring him up soon, Lou Reed. What is it about Lou Reed that will make you want to work with him rather than with someone else?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, Lou is a brilliant writer. I like his lyrics. I like his music. The first piece that Lou and I did together I really began to appreciate loudness of sound. And I followed that work with Luigi Nono's *Prometeo*, which is a very quiet and meditative piece, and I could appreciate Nono's music maybe more having just worked with Lou. So I think Lou—I don't know, there's so many sides to his music and the lyrics. I like his humor. The irony. I was once with him in Hamburg. There was a press conference. It was in early June, and it was raining and snowing and sleeting and someone from the press said, "Mr. Reed. Do you like Hamburg?" "Yeah, I like Hamburg." "Why do you like Hamburg?" "'Cause I like the weather." **(laughter)** That's why I love Lou.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You were talking a minute ago about Nono and silence, and you've always been quite fascinated by the notion of silence.

ROBERT WILSON: Well, my first works in the theater were written with a deaf-mute boy who'd never been to school, and he knew no words and the people with whom he had lived didn't understand that his problem was one of being deaf, and he was going to be institutionalized. It was thought that he couldn't learn, that he was uneducable. And in 1967 I went to court. He had no legal guardian to adopt him and to prevent him from

being institutionalized. Much to my surprise and everyone else, the judge awarded the boy to me and so he came to stay with me and as far as I could tell he knew no words, and I was very curious as to how he thought, because I thought I thought in words, and I thought he was intelligent, perhaps highly intelligent, and it became apparent after a short period of time that he thought in terms of visual signs and signals. I never studied theater. In fact when I came to New York and saw Broadway shows, I didn't like them so much, and I still don't for the most part.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you didn't like opera, either.

ROBERT WILSON: And I didn't like opera so much, either.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you still don't like opera.

ROBERT WILSON: Not too much. **(laughter)** But I loved the dance, I loved the formality of George Balanchine's work, the classical constructions and those patterns, and to hear music and especially with the abstract ballets of Balanchine, that was sublime. And I liked being in that space, that virtual space, that mental space, and later Merce Cunningham and John Cage for many of the same reasons. So my first works in the theater were written with this deaf boy.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And how did that work?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, it was based on observations of the boy, dreams he had, drawings he made, and it was silent. And I worked for several years on a work called *The Deafman Glance* and I showed part of it here in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and I was invited to show the whole work, which was seven hours long and silent, in France and we went for two performances and much to my surprise, it was a huge success, and we ended up playing five and a half months to two thousand, two hundred people every night. As John Cage said, there's no such thing as silence. Sometimes when we're very quiet we become more aware of sound than when we make a lot of sound. So usually I start rehearsals or any work, whether it's with Lou Reed or Rufus Wainwright or whatever, I start with silence, and listening to the silence, and then we can begin to fill it in.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Your very first experience, really, of encountering an artist was in fact encountering somebody who helped you overcome a disease you had early on —by disease I mean something that made you feel ill at ease, which was a stutter. How did she do that? And bring us back to her and what she told you.

ROBERT WILSON: Well, as a child I stuttered and did so into my teens, and my parents had taken me to see people in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, all over the United States to see how this could be cured or corrected. And nothing really worked. And I met a woman who taught ballet, who taught dance. And she was a painter and pianist. She

loved classical music, loved to play Mozart, and she also worked as a physical therapist with athletes who had injuries or people with learning disabilities. And by accident I met her and I was stuttering and she said, "Bob, take more time to speak. Slooooooooow the speech dooooown." And I went home and I started to do it and within six weeks I was more or less over the stuttering. It was almost as if I was speeding, speeding in place. It was just a very simple thing, but it clicked and worked with me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You've been annoyed sometimes when critics have said that you slow things down in plays **(laughter)** and you say, "No, I don't. This is how it happens in nature." And, you know, I want to just say something quickly. I read that comment today of yours while going to the Reading Room, our great Reading Room up here, because in my office, you know, the phone was ringing with everyone wanting to come to this evening tonight. So I went to the Reading Room and I read that comment and then I looked up and I saw the clouds, not on the roof of our building, but outside, and they were moving slowly. And I said to myself, "No, they aren't moving slowly. They're moving at a natural speed."

ROBERT WILSON: Right. Well, I think that time has no concept, and if I go to pick up this glass and I move slower than I normally would and I think I'm moving slow, it's boring. But if I don't think about it and I just experience this movement, everything is going on. **(laughter)** It's like a battery of energy that's every speed in the world is in this gesture. So in that sense time has—for me, it has no concept. It's something we experience. And to experience something is a way of thinking.

I was once directing a play in Cologne and there was a child in the play and I said, “Jan, what are you thinking about this play? Do you like it? Do you enjoy it? Do you think it’s going to work?” “Eh!” I said, “Come on. Tell me more, what do you think about this play?” “Eh!” I said, “Come on, you can say more than that.” He said, “You know, Bob, it’s a little slow.” **(laughter)** I was directing a play in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and I had a Japanese costume designer, and I said, “Yoshi, what do you think of this work? Do you think it’s going to work?” “Ahh.” I said, “Come on, tell me what you really think.” “Ahh!” I said, “Come on, tell me what you really think.” He said, “You know, Bob, it’s a little slow.” **(laughter)**

Now, my sister, I hadn’t seen her in more than twenty years. She lives in Texas, and she had never seen my work in the theater. And I called her, and I said, “Hi, Suzanne, this is your brother Bob, and I have a play in New York and I’d like to invite you to come see it.” “Oh, that’d be real nice. I’d love to come to New York to see your play.” **(laughter)** I said, “Okay, I’ll send you a ticket and I’ll meet you at the airport, and we’ll have lunch and you’ll see the matinee performance on Sunday afternoon and you can fly back to Texas that evening and I’m going to Europe.” “Oh, that’d be real nice.” So I met her at the airport and we had lunch and she saw my play and afterwards I said, “Tell me, Suzanne, **(laughter)** if you didn’t know your brother had written, directed, and designed this play, would you know it’s my work?” She said, “Sure.” I said, “How would you know?” “Because it’s so slow!”

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So are they right?

ROBERT WILSON: Time has no concept for me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Take us back, if you would, before we bring Lucinda up onstage, and the various collaborators, and we'll of course continue speaking about the work of collaboration between you and them with them. Take us back to the Byrd School and how it is that a boy from Waco, Texas, **(child screams in audience) (laughter)** creates—that was planted!—such a school and what its intention was and why you had to dissolve it.

ROBERT WILSON: Well, I finished my studies at Pratt. In order to support myself I worked with hyperactive and brain-damaged children. And someone from Harvard had observed some of the work I was doing, and she invited me to give lectures during a period of a year I did twelve lectures, one almost every three or four weeks. And I did them sort of like performances. I did the first one, I had a black hood on my head, and a white hospital jacket, white pants, black motorcycle boots, and a black rubber snake, big rubber snake, they had here coiled around my neck and the tail down my back, and I stood at a podium at Harvard and talked about the work I was doing with hyperactive children. **(laughter)**

And many people who were educators attended these lectures and as a result of that, surprisingly, I was offered jobs as an educational consultant, and I worked in Head Start programs, preschool, first grade, second grade, public schools, private schools. I worked at Goldwater Memorial Hospital with people in iron lungs. I worked in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem in depressed areas as an educational consultant. And it was very curious, and I would work in Far Brook School in Short Hills, New Jersey, with Du Pont children and the next day I would be in Bedford-Stuyvesant in a depressed area and how that our society was so fragmented and—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Categorized.

ROBERT WILSON: Yeah, categorized. So I—when I met Raymond Andrews, this deaf boy, I thought then to create a work with him that would bring together many different kinds of people, so I had housewives in New Jersey, I had a banker, a lawyer, I had a homeless man from the street, I had a child, I had an elderly person. They came together, and this group of people who normally wouldn't come together, we created my first works in the theater. So we gathered people together. It's a little bit like—let's say we were going to—the four people here and you and I, we're going to have dinner tonight, so this woman says, "I'll make a pasta," and this one said, "Well, I'll make a salad," and I say, "Well, I can't cook but I'll wash the dishes and set the table." Anyway, we get together and we make a meal and then we sit at the table and we share this meal together. So in a sense that's how we made the plays—that we came together and each had very different background and different personalities and most of those people were

nonprofessionals, nonperformers, and this all happened at my loft, on 147 Spring Street.

And at the time I met Raymond Andrews, I met Daniel Stern. Dan was head of the department of psychology at Columbia University. And he'd made over two hundred fifty films of mothers picking up babies in natural situations when a baby would cry. The baby would cry, the mother would reach for the baby, pick up the baby, and comfort the baby. And Dan took the film and slowed it down so you could see frame by frame, and there were twenty-four frames in a second. So you could see one-twenty-fourth of a second. In eight out of ten cases, the initial reaction of the mother in the first frame is the mother is lunging at the child. **(laughter)** The child is—the next two three frames, the mother is, the child is something else, the next two, three frames, the mother is something else again. So that in one second of time, it's very complex what's happening between the mother and the child. The mother, when she sees the film, is shocked and terrified. She says, "But I love my child!" **(laughter)** So perhaps the body is moving faster than we think, but it was these almost imperceptible movements, or Susanne Langer talked about the impingements on the body as a language that Raymond the deaf boy was reading.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So you think the deafness in some way exacerbates the possibility of reading signs?

ROBERT WILSON: I think so. But what was interesting was if you took a man coming from science who is not involved in the arts was a confirmation and he was with me in the loft in the developing of *Deafman Glance*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: because when I reading about your early ailment of having a stutter and overcoming it, I was reminded of one of the books that Sartre wrote on Flaubert called *The Idiot of the Family*.

ROBERT WILSON: Yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Please don't take this badly. The point of it is that Flaubert's father called the young young Gustave the idiot of the family. And the reason he called him the idiot of the family is because the young Gustave had trouble—I mean, it's hard to believe now, but he had trouble reading. What would happen to him is he would see words individually. And because he would see them individually, he couldn't make sense of them, so the father would kind of dismiss his son, who became a fairly well-known writer, by saying he is the idiot of the family. So in some ways that ailment of extreme slowing down, if one will, made him able to read in a particular way and overcome it, and I'm interested in that phenomenon and I'm also interested in the phenomenon of the relationship to the father, because you were speaking about your sister but you had a lot to prove to your own father and it wasn't always easy.

ROBERT WILSON: Right. My father had never been to the theater, and he came to see one of my first plays.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Did he think it was slow?

(laughter)

ROBERT WILSON: Well, he said, "Son, not only is this sick, it's abnormal!"

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Did you take it as a compliment?

ROBERT WILSON: "It's abnormal!" He came to see *Einstein on the Beach*, which we did at the Metropolitan Opera, and it was about the second or third thing he'd seen, and there was a standing ovation at the end after five hours of the opera, and he turned to me and he said, "Son, you must be making a lot of money!" **(laughter)** I said, "No, Dad, I'm not. I'm a quarter of a million dollars in debt. I produced this work myself and I'm a quarter million dollars in debt." "You're a quarter million dollars in debt? I didn't know you were smart enough to be able to lose a quarter million dollars!"

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I think this is a perfect moment, since we're talking about *Einstein on the Beach*, to bring Lucinda Childs on the stage. **(applause)** Now, I asked each one, each person here tonight, to give us a seven-word biography. Robert Wilson said, "Visionary director, visual artist, playwright, and designer." Lucinda Childs had

more trouble making it quite that short, but she said, "Performer, dancer, choreographer. Began to collaborate with Robert Wilson in the seventies." So maybe you want to talk to us a little bit about the early collaboration with Robert Wilson and you were going to read something from that collaboration.

LUCINDA CHILDS: Yes, *Einstein*, actually, was the first piece that we worked on together. We've worked on a number of—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Can everybody hear?

LUCINDA CHILDS: *Einstein on the Beach* was the first collaboration, the first opportunity actually that I had to work with Bob Wilson, having seen *Letter to Queen Victoria* in 1974, which was amazing to me. I mean, I'm a dancer and a choreographer. And I loved his work, I loved everything about it. The performers, the text, the music, and I met Bob, I think a few months later, somewhere in New London and he talked to me about *Einstein* and he asked me if I wanted to work on it. And I was thrilled. It was a wonderful chance to do something really very, very different, something that I'd never really done before. In the process of working on *Einstein*, which actually is going to be revived next year, it will come to the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the fall.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That's in 2012?

LUCINDA CHILDS: 2012, right, so we'll be part of the Next Wave festival. So one of the things I thought I would like to do this evening is some excerpts from *Einstein* of the text, written mostly for the most part by Christopher Knowles, and I contributed also one text which was part of the opera. The Christopher Knowles texts are from the first second Knee plays and the text that I contributed is from the Trial/Prison, the third act, and then there's also one more of Christopher Knowles's texts.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Would you like to say something about Christopher Knowles, and by the way if we could make the room a little warmer? I see people shivering here.

ROBERT WILSON: Chris. I met Chris by chance when he was not quite thirteen.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You meet people by chance.

ROBERT WILSON: I heard an audiotape that he had made and was fascinated by it. And Chris had spent most of his life at the O. D. Heck School in Schenectady, New York. It was an institution for—it's a horrible label—for brain-damaged children, and I was fascinated by his writing, his texts, his recordings, and I went to the institution and observed what was happening. And it was barbaric for me. And I went to the head of the school. I said, "Why are we correcting this behavior? I would encourage it. I would encourage him to do more." Anyway, one thing led to another and I spoke to his parents

and finally it was agreed that he would leave the institution and come and stay with me for a period of time.

And we collaborated together on my first play that had a spoken text, that was *A Letter for Queen Victoria*. Chris, his mind works in phenomenal ways. He's concerned with mathematics and geometry and sometimes you can read a text this way or you can read it that way or you can read this way or this way. There are multiple ways. He can do things you and I can't do. He can look at this room and say, "There are six hundred and twenty-two chairs in the room," in one glance and look at a page of a book and say, "there are forty-eight words on the page," and you count them and there are forty-eight words. Anyway, he was doing phenomenal things with words and language. So I asked him to write some of the text for *Einstein*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Please, and let's make the room warmer, please.

LUCINDA CHILDS: Would it get some wind for the sailboat? And it could get, for it is. It could get the railroad for these workers and it could get for it is were. It could Frankie. It could be Frankie. It could be very fresh and clean. It could be a balloon. These are the days my friends, and these are my days my friends. Would it get some wind for the sailboat? And it could get those for it is. It could get the railroad for these workers. And it could get for it is were. It could Frankie. It could be Frankie. It could be very fresh and clean. These are the days my friends, and these are my days my friends. Take these days of eight hundred and eighty-eight cents in one hundred and six coins of change. These are

the days my friends, and these are my days my friends. Make a Toyota on these, these, are the days my friends. Loop. So if you cash the bank of the world traveler from ten months ago. Do you remember Hans, the bus driver? Well I took the red ball and the blue ball and the two black-and-white balls. And Hans pushed on his brakes and the four balls went down to that. And Hans said get those four balls away from the gearshift. These are the days my friends, and these are my days my friends. Would it get some wind for the sailboat? And it could get for it is. It could get the railroad for these workers. These are my days my friends, and these are my days my friends.

Do you know they just don't make clothes for people who wears glasses? There's no pockets anymore, so if you take your glasses off they're easy to lose or break. Well, New York Aphonic Center has the answer to your problem. Contactless lenses and the new soft lenses. The Center gives you thirty days and see if you like it, and if you like it, and if you don't they could refund your money except for the examination fee. So if you're tired of wearing glasses call New York Aphonic Center. For sight with no hassle, please call BR9-5555. BR9-5555.

I was in this prematurely air-conditioned supermarket and there were all these aisles and there were these bathing caps that you could buy that had these kind of Fourth of July plumes on them that were red and yellow and blue. And I wasn't tempted to buy one, but I was reminded of the fact that I had been avoiding the beach. I was in this prematurely air-conditioned supermarket and there were all these aisles and there were these bathing caps that you could buy that had these kind of Fourth of July plumes on them that were

red and yellow and blue. And I wasn't tempted to buy one, but I was reminded of the fact that I had been avoiding the beach.

I feel the earth move, I feel the tumbling down, the tumbling down. There was a judge like puts in a court and the judge have like what in able jail. What it could be a spanking or a smack or a swat or a hit. This could be where of judges of courts and jails and who was it. This will be doing the facts of David Cassidy of where in this case of feelings—that could make you happy, they could make you sad, they could make you mad, they could make you jealous. So do you know what jail is? A judge and a court could. So this could be like in those green Christmas trees and Santa Claus has about red. So now the Einstein trail is like the Einstein on the beach. So if you know the f-f-f-f-f-acts, this could be like Lucy into a kite. You raced all the way up, this was a race. So now the eight types could be into the pink rink, and this way could be so very magic. This could be like scene where woman comes out to grab her and this is what she grabbed her. So this could be if you lie on the grass. So this could be if you feel the earth move or not. I feel the earth move, Carole King. I feel the earth move, I feel the tumbling down, the tumbling down. I feel some ostriches like into a satchel, some like them. I went to the window and wanted to draw the earth. So when David Cassidy tells you all of you to get on going, get going, get going, get going, so this could be like the WABC. Jay Reynolds from midnight to six a.m., Harry Harrison from six a.m. to ten a.m., Ron Lundy from ten a.m. to two p.m. Steve O'Brien from four-thirty a.m. to six a.m., Steve O'Brien from four-thirty a.m. to six a.m. I feel the earth move, Carole King.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What went through your mind as you were hearing this? I mean, I know there was a mosquito flying around, which was rather disturbing, so sorry.

ROBERT WILSON: What went through my mind? Well, I think that Chris's—the text is something that you can freely associate with, so it's very different from let's say a text of Shakespeare or Heiner Müller or Tennessee Williams or David Mamet. It's a text that can be very free in terms of the associations and it doesn't follow a narrative line. It's a kind of music, it's a kind of pattern, it has its own structure. Chris's way of constructing thoughts, is in some ways are classical in that there's theme and variations. He's never afraid to destroy his codes. If I say, let's say if I'm in China and I say "Hello how are you? Hello how are you? Hello how are you? Hello how are you?" regardless if the Chinese don't understand the English, they understand something. But if I say once after a while after they begin to discern the pattern, I can go, "Hello how are OOO?" So I'm destroying my codes, and Chris in that way in speaking extemporaneously. Through the repetition and the structure of language is once the pattern becomes discernible he destroys it and then reconstructs from the deconstructed pieces and makes another language from them. That's fascinating.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: How do you think your collaboration now will work in 2012? Will the piece be changed, will it be transformed, will it be adapted?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, I don't really know until we do it, but yes, I think it will be different because the people are different and no one can speak a text the way Lucinda does, we wouldn't expect someone to try to copy her voice and so we have to see what happens.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And when you say the people are different, you also mean the tolerance of the audience is different?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, the audience, but the performers are different, so the work is different. Watching you know the work of Balanchine, you will see a dancer doing a role for a ballet, and then some years later you would see it performed by someone else and the work would look very different, and Balanchine would change it because of the personality of the performer, of the dancer, so basically we'll follow the same structure, but the people will be different so therefore—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Will you be involved, Lucinda, in it?

LUCINDA CHILDS: Yes, I will be involved as a choreographer, because my company will be performing the two field dances.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you are working now with Bob on a re-creation at REDCAT.

LUCINDA CHILDS: That's of *I was sitting on my patio, this guy appeared, I thought I was hallucinating*. Yes, that would be REDCAT.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thirty-five years later, you're doing it again.

LUCINDA CHILDS: Exactly, yes, that's the two-act play that Bob wrote in 1977 that we performed together.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What will have changed, do you think? You can answer the same Bob did, you'll know it the moment you're doing it.

LUCINDA CHILDS: We don't yet really know who the actors are going to be. We've had a number of possibilities but we don't actually have the cast, the casting has not been completed. So it will be very—it really depends.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Are you worried in any way?

LUCINDA CHILDS: No, I'm very excited to work with an actress, it has to be right for her, it has to work for her. It's such a beautiful text and I'm excited about having a chance that it's done again.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I'd like to bring up now Lou Reed, who also has collaborated with Robert Wilson.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Quite a different evening than the one you had last time here, Lou.

LOU REED: Thank God.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank God. It wasn't bad last time.

LOU REED: It was okay.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's make this special.

LOU REED: I think it already is.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I think so too. I'm quite moved. You have worked with Bob for a very long time.

LOU REED: Time is relative with Bob.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Time is relative. I can see the conversation we're about to have.

(laughter)

LOU REED: How slow is it?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Slow.

LOU REED: Maybe we'll perk it up.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Okay, we'll perk it up. Precisely you worked on H. G. Wells. Do you want to say something about that?

LOU REED: *Time Rocker*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you want to say something about that collaboration and what it was like to work with him back then?

LOU REED: I was thrilled what an amazing opportunity to branch out of where I was into—is that me doing that? **(Microphone adjustment)** It was this great idea about one of the great plots. Like they say, there are seven basic plots, and the time machine is probably one of them, and Bob wanted to rework H. G. Well's *Time Machine*, I forget

what it's actually called, but anyway it's about traveling through time, and it was a great chance for me to bust out of the straitjacket of the twelve-song LP.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Then you also worked with him on Poe, *POEtry*.

LOU REED: I still love the cover he drew for that. Of Poe hyphen try, try, Poe-try.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Very first time.

LOU REED: Only Bob would do something like this, and that's why I'll love him forever, no matter what he does is I said, give me an opportunity, he said, "You know, you should write this." I said, "I've never written anything like that before. He said, You're made for this. You should go do this with me," and so I sat down to rewrite various things from Edgar Allan Poe that appealed to me. Like I said, I've never done that before but I figured, "Bob really knows this and if he says I can do it, then I can do it."

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Why did you think that Lou was made for this? I mean, what is it in you, and this comes back to my original question. What is it in you that seems to think you know what people are made for?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, I don't know. It's not something I really can explain. I wouldn't—let's say with David Byrne, I wouldn't think David would be exactly the right

person to do Edgar Allan Poe to me. For Lou, his voice seemed right for that material. It's not something really I can explain so much, it's just the feeling I have.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I remember that the first second you and I met, the way I got your attention and your kindness was by telling you that the New York Public Library had in its collection a bit of Edgar Allan Poe's hair.

(laughter)

LOU REED: And I wondered how you'd gotten it.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You know, I don't know.

LOU REED: Somewhere in the bowels of the library. Poe didn't die in Baltimore, he's in the bottom of the—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you were so excited, and I knew it, and I knew you would be. You said, "Really?"

LOU REED: But I was much more excited by Bob's idea, **(laughter)** because, you know, I trust Bob and I'm not a big one for thinking, it's really feeling for me, and if Bob

said I could do it, I thought I could do that, because we had such—or I had such a great time with *Time Rocker* because Bob has a great sense of humor, you know, and you'd say, "Wouldn't it be funny if so-and-so runs over there the way you have him but then a tree falls on him?" And five minutes later Bob would do that, completely open to it. And I was beyond thrilled.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Is thinking overrated?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, like I said, I usually get a kind of structure together and that's very formal and quite rigid and then within that I can be free. But if I don't have the structure, then I don't know what to do and I don't have the same freedom.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So what you're expressing here is that audacity is only possible if there are rules.

ROBERT WILSON: Yeah, well, I think that our only chance of beating the machine is to become totally mechanical and when we're totally mechanical we're free.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The only way of beating the machines?

ROBERT WILSON: Or when you—Yes, or competing with the machine. To find a freedom, the freedom of mind, if you—my mother said she liked to type on a typewriter because it gave her time to think. She could type very quickly. Or if you ride a bicycle,

the first time you do it, you think about it, and it's a bit awkward. And after a while, you can just do it and not think so much about it. It's more automatic, so it becomes in that sense mechanical. I mean, I think it's like learning a dance or something. I mean, it's—you sort of mechanically learn the steps and then after a while you can have a kind of freedom, not that you—you can be two years old and start to play Mozart and you can be eighty-two and still playing Mozart, and you're still learning how to do it, but there's a different freedom.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Bob turned to you, I suppose, because he feels that you would understand from the point of view of a dancer.

LUCINDA CHILDS: Every day—even though you're doing the same thing almost, the same exercises, every day is different and you can never really go back to the day before, you know, so in that sense, it's very mechanical, but it's not mechanical, you know. This is something that you experience every day in a different way.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I've always liked the story about Miles Davis, who one day met a friend of his who said, "You know, one day I'd like to come to a concert of yours." And Miles said "Sure, and anything else you want?" And he says, "Yes, my friend really loves 'My Funny Valentine,'" and Miles Davis said, "Tell your friend to buy the record." **(laughter)** Now, Lou, the most recent collaboration is with Metallica.

LOU REED: Well, Metallica via Bob.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: How did that happen? I mean, that's—

LOU REED: It's the same thing that happened the last time. Bob said, "You can do this, this is a really good idea."

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You have a lot of power.

(laughter)

LOU REED: I take Bob really seriously when he says something. He's not just talking to talk. He said, "I have a real dream that it's so and so to act in this and you to do the music for this and I've been thinking about this a long time, and it's a great dream and I really, really want you to do this." So it's Bob talking to you. From my point of view, if Bob says that, then I'm game to try that. If he thinks I can do that, then I will. I said, "Well, should I listen to the Berg opera?" "No, don't bother with that." "Should I look at *Pandora's Box*," "No, don't bother with that." Well, I mean, I did bother with that and then I saw why he didn't want me to bother with that **(laughter)**, so I saved myself a couple of hours with the opera.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What did you understand when doing it that Bob was trying to make you avoid?

LOU REED: No, he wanted me to do what I do, not what they do. I mean, that's what I think.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So it's a way of setting you free.

LOU REED: Bob had an idea and he was making a little template and this is the way to follow through on the idea, and you can do over there, which is a waste of time, or take my word for it and just go over here and since we'd already done that in *POEtry* I just pretty much did exactly what Bob asked. Not pretty much. I did exactly what Bob asked. **(laughter)** I mean, he's the director, he's got an overall view of everything, he knows who can do what. And I'm not looking at it that way, I'm only looking at it from the music.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I read that in London the poster you were going to do for *Lulu* had some difficulty.

LOU REED: What? Who believes what you read anywhere?

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But they didn't want you to post it because it looked too much like graffiti.

LOU REED: Oh, you mean the thing with Metallica. Well, that's actually true, but it's insane. It's so stupid that it's great publicity. **(laughter)** I mean, it's amazing to me they can still be that dumb.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What did they say, I couldn't quite understand.

LOU REED: They said that the poster resembled graffiti.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What's wrong with that?

LOU REED: They have a gang problem with graffiti. I'm only telling you what I was told.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's play the track.

LOU REED: I hope it's loud.

(Lou Reed/Metallica collaboration plays)

(applause)

LOU REED: So that's not the version Bob's doing. Bob was with the Berliner Ensemble theater and they're not going to do that. So there's the version over here and then I—had

a thing with a group called Metallica, who I love, my metal brothers, and we thought, "wouldn't it be great to take a crack at *Lulu* this way?" so we did.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That's coming out—

LOU REED: In October in Europe and in November here. And that's, quote, a single.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This should satisfy you in terms of it being loud.

LOU REED: Well, you know, about loud, you know what Bob says about loud. But when he did *Time Rocker* and he suddenly had an effect in there of an elevator with someone screaming and he had it as loud as anything I've ever done and then all of a sudden it gets very quiet for another four hours. **(laughter)** So I remembered that for the next time around.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you ever propose to Bob a project?

LOU REED: No.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you? **(laughter)** I sense fear.

(laughter)

LOU REED: Bob's the director. He's got the overall vision and what he's looking for, so no one knows better than Bob what—where he wants to go or take it or take some of us with him.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you know?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, as I said, I think I perform a frame. I could never write the music, or dance, I can't do those things, but I can provide a frame for other people to fill in. So that's more my function.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So is your function one of congregation?

ROBERT WILSON: Yes. It's a collaboration—when Lucinda and I first worked together on *Einstein*, I said, "Okay, I made drawings, and here's a train that's going across the stage, it'll go one third and then it will leave and then a vertical line of light comes in, and the train comes back, and it goes halfway across the stage, leaves, a vertical line of light comes in, the train comes two-thirds of the way across the stage, then leaves, the vertical line of light comes in, this is about twenty-three minutes long, you have three diagonal lines in relationship to the entrance of the train, or something, that's all I said. And then she figured out the choreography and the movements, but she knew the setting, she knew the time, I made the structure, Phil took the structure and he wrote music, so the music for the first scene that was in three sections, three parts, and Lucinda made the choreography, but I did the kind of bones, the skeleton, the structure of the

work.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Is this what you try to—to instigate, to provoke, in the center you have, at Watermill, there's a fantastically beautiful new book out. I think it's out today.

ROBERT WILSON: Yeah, it just came out today.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's absolutely gorgeous. I think Bob will be signing it at the end, I hope.

ROBERT WILSON: Actually this is what the Center's about—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Don't ruin my book.

ROBERT WILSON: This is a large sturdy element in the Center of an object, you can see it being so far away, it's essentially a very empty minimal space and that's how I arrange it or something that I do and then a few, then I invited Jonathan Meese, a German young artist, and I gave him the whole building to do an installation, so he painted on the walls, filled it in in a completely different way. I think that's what the Center's about. I don't want to have a school or any one way of thinking or doing things. I think that diversity is our strength, and I always say we have to do what no one else is doing. If someone else is doing it, there's no need for us to do it. I started the Center in 1992, and I

knew at that time if I wanted, I could spend the rest of my life working in the major theaters throughout the world, and I wanted to go back to my roots. And a little bit like what I had in the loft on Spring Street in the sixties and seventies, where someone like Daniel Stern, who was then head of the department of psychology, a scientist, could come together, could work with a child who had no education, who could work with very different disciplines, different people from different economic, political, social backgrounds.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: After you discovered the space itself, a defunct electrical plant.

ROBERT WILSON: It was a plant for a scientist who did studies in telecommunications. But this kind of meeting, of people coming together and working, couldn't happen at the Paris Opera, it wouldn't happen at Lincoln Center, it wouldn't happen at Yale University or Harvard, or the Berliner Ensemble or the Piccolo Teatro di Milano and so I went back to my roots and established the center. That is a space where people can come together for an exchange of ideas from very different backgrounds. Being seventy years old now, I want to return to the earth what I have been given, having been blessed, and I see it as a way to help in supporting emerging young artists.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You call it a laboratory.

ROBERT WILSON: A laboratory where they can develop work, and then helping to

promote the work to—with affiliations with various institutions.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, I'd like to bring up our last guest, Rufus Wainwright. **(applause)** And we would like to wish you well, Bob, and Rufus will start us off.

(Rufus Wainwright sings "Happy Birthday.")

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: Blow out the candles!

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you so much. Happy birthday!

ROBERT WILSON: Thank you.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Happy birthday! I think that's quite wonderful. At one point I was thinking of Marilyn Monroe singing "Happy Birthday," I thought, why have her sing "Happy Birthday" if we have Rufus Wainwright here? My goodness!

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: A few reasons. **(laughter)** She's dead. That would be interesting No, I first wanted to say though that I feel wholly unworthy of sitting on this stage with—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Me too.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: —these amazing artists, and I'm happy to be the cake boy.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But Rufus, in earnest, I mean, I will remember this moment forever. I will also remember. You notice we didn't have a candle. You can't—

LOU REED: Have a candle in the Library.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You can't—**(laughter)** because—and the problem is—

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: You're acting like you have one in your back pocket.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The problem is that someone who works for me asked for permission. You know, that's the end of it. I always say I never ask for permission, only for forgiveness. The minute you asked for permission, they didn't grant it. But anyway I'm glad you blew out the candle. Happy birthday.

LOU REED: That's another one.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Another one?

LOU REED: Another thing I should take a note on. The minute someone asks for permission, it's denied.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You like that.

LOU REED: Never ask for permission, just walk in.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That's a variation on it.

LOU REED: That's the rock and roll way.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I'm trying, I'm learning so—

LOU REED: You talking to me?

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I know. Rufus, you have collaborated with Bob, and tell us something about that collaboration, which is quite extraordinary. Shakespeare sonnets—

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: I had the opportunity of working with Bob and with Shakespeare.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: In that order.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: Yes, I personally, so I—what was amazing was that I had been commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera to write an opera and I thought, "Before I do this, maybe I should do something else, one other thing, before I kind of tackle this big work," and so I kind of put my feelers out was wondering what was happening, and then the next thing you know, the Berliner Ensemble, where Bob has done a lot of work, which is an amazing opera where *The Threepenny Opera* was premiered, where Brecht worked for years, they wanted to do the Shakespeare sonnets with Robert Wilson and I thought, "Oh, I'll just toss that off before I do the opera," you know. Because I had never done a theatrical piece, I mean, I was a big fan of Bob's and of Shakespeare's, and I thought, "well, I'll just do this and then I'll do the opera," you know. Silly me. And needless to say, it was as titanic, in a good way, not in a sinking, destructive way, **(laughter)** and it's still on and it's still playing and was, you know, such a worthwhile but also as difficult, as challenging, as riveting as the opera was right afterwards, so it was kind of like two big hitters one after the other.

And what I wanted to say all night and which most impressed me with Bob and working with him and especially with that project is that my mother at the time, the great Kate McGarrigle, was very, very ill, she later died, but she did get to see the piece, which was fantastic. But she was very ill. I was in Berlin, she was in Canada, in the hospital. And it was you know really really hard period in my life, probably the hardest, and we were

working, you know, on this piece, and maybe partially due to the, you know, abstract nature of the idea, of just taking a bunch of Shakespeare sonnets and constructing something with no set story or philosophy or anything and just going through that and what I experienced, which was just so incredible. And I really only saw this later on, after my mother passed away, and I went to see the production a year later and was dumbstruck by—is that everything that was going on in my life at that point was in the play and it has nothing—you know, and that is what impressed me the most about him, is that he's not limited to let's say the text or the music has to go here, or this actor, this is happening here, everything that was on the planet that was happening at that point was in the work, I could see it, and it was, you know. And all of these kind of little elements that at—that at the time I was like, "Why the hell do you want to do that? I don't get it, I don't understand it," and I was like, let the director do what he wants to do. He was filtering the universe at that time, I felt, anyways.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you think it has something to do with appetite, voracious qualities—

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: I just don't know that he draws distinctions between, you know, the theater and the world, or what your agent needs, or whatever, and it all kind of comes out as this kind of time capsule of that period of life. I mean you know, Shakespeare had a little bit to do with it, too. I mean, he's pretty malleable, you know, you can do a lot with his stuff. But it was still, that was just so fascinating, and I very much consider the work we did on that piece as not really a play or a theater piece. It's

really like a monument to a time in my life. Which I imagine—I kind of think *Einstein* would be sort of similar in that respect. I haven't seen it yet. I'm very excited to.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's listen to it.

(excerpt from Shakespeare sonnets plays)

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: I didn't write that or sing that obviously, but that was an amazing—that's Inge Keller, who's an incredible—you talk about her.

ROBERT WILSON: Inge Keller is an older actress in Germany, really a great, great enormous star and hadn't performed for a number of years. She is crippled, can't walk, and—but has this great technique of speaking and it's amazing to hear her voice. It was a very big thing for her to reappear onstage after not having been onstage for a number of years. She played Shakespeare—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We've got a couple of things wrong in our technical—

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: That was a mistake.

(crosstalk)

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: You know what, stop it actually, I can actually sing it.

(applause) It'll be better.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you! Thank you! I should always have you on hand, because this can happen sometimes.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: It's quite—I can sing it. I've never done this a cappella, but it's not that long so don't worry. But when I wrote it—this is my favorite sonnet, and we would go, I hadn't written any of the music beforehand, I would just showed up and then I would rework and workshop stuff and then I would go up to my freezing little Berlin apartment, but this is what I wrote:

(Rufus Wainwright sings Sonnet 20:

A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all 'hues' in his controlling,
Much steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created;
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,

By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.

But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,

Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.**)**

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This is a typical case where I love mentioning a saying that I learned when living in Mexico, "*No hay mal que por bien no venga*," "there's no bad from which some good doesn't ensue," so I'm delighted that the technology didn't work. Thank you very much for that.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: It's show business.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's show business. I think what you were saying earlier is quite exciting to me, which is namely that Bob, it would seem that your life is really about bumping into things and bumping into people.

ROBERT WILSON: Yes, I think I said if I had gone to Yale to study drama or theater I would not be making the kind of theater I'm making. It was my accident that I met this thirteen-year-old African American boy who was deaf on the street.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You think it's an accident?

ROBERT WILSON: Yes, it's by chance and then my life went in a different direction. I think that—that's my living life has been my resource.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It seemed from what Rufus was saying that whatever you encounter in some way, whatever the chance experience, whatever the serendipity, whatever might occur to you, that's why I was talking about bumping into you, has a way of finding itself put into the work. Nothing remains external. Is that true?

ROBERT WILSON: I think so.

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT: I think one thing that's interesting. And I was thinking how perhaps Bob relates more to dance in terms of you know, he's more of a ballet fan, let's say than an opera and kind of has a passion for that art form, but what I also find is that Bob shares—and why Bob works a lot with musicians and especially songwriters is that the process of writing lyrics is very much like Bob's process of directing, where you have to be kind of this open template that's receiving just information without really judging it or anything or without compartmentalizing it right away. It has to—It's messages from on high or down low, or whatever, in your heart, but I think that's why he works so well with songwriters, as well, because it's a similar process to lyric writing.

ROBERT WILSON: The reason that we work is to say "what is?" something and if we know what it is then we shouldn't be doing it. The reason to work is to say what is it. You can start with a blank book and you can fill in the pages, and that's what's interesting to

me, you start. I used to, years ago, be afraid if I wasn't prepared in going into a rehearsal I wouldn't know what to do, so then I would study and make preparations, then I would go into a rehearsal and then try to create what I'd been thinking about doing. And I realized as I got older that often that was a waste of time. Instead of walking into the room and seeing Rufus there or seeing Lucinda there and they talk to me and they tell me what to do instead of me trying to say in advance what it should be. So just to trust that situation. You know, it's always so difficult to start a work, you're thinking, "I don't know what to do," and you don't know how to do it but you do something and that tells you to do something else and then you do something again and that tells you to do something again else. So—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You have said that every work is the passport to the next work.

ROBERT WILSON: Right. Right. I mean, I try to also like going from Lou Reed to Luigi Nono, to go from William Burroughs to Heiner Müller, to go to Chekhov to go to Shakespeare to go to Virginia Woolf, I did that all in one season: Virginia Woolf, Burroughs, Chekhov, Shakespeare, and Heiner Müller in Germany. So it was totally different worlds, writers, sounds, imagery. So my work was very different because of the collaboration.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What is it that you still want to do that you haven't done?

ROBERT WILSON: Well, I would like now to work in parts of the world that I haven't. I would be interested in working in Africa. I would be interested—there's now talk about doing a project in Brazil, a big project, and I'm very excited about that and working with the different cultures that are in Brazil. I was just there last week and it's amazing how rich the country is and in São Paulo being on the twenty-seventh floor of a hotel and looking out the window and there's nothing old. New York looks like Europe by comparison. The influx of people from Africa, from Italy, from Japan, how rich the country is in these different cultures, so I'm thinking about making a very big work to celebrate Brazil and its diversity.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We celebrate you, Bob. Thank you very much.

(applause)