The Bloustein School
Audio Khan

Listokin: First, let me thank you. We so appreciate your time. And the stars aligned and you could give us some time. This is an effort that started, I guess, what, three years ago. I hate to…

Khan: I should turn this off. Probably, right?

Listokin: Um, sure. It's probably a good idea. It's an effort that started about four years ago where we felt there's been such extensive change in Redevelopment in New Brunswick. And that the principals involved are getting older. It's important for the historical record and also for our understanding and insights to have discussions. So we've had these good discussions and interviews with about twenty-five or so, you know, we call them "the usual suspects." In a good way.

Khan: Absolutely.

Listokn: So one objective was that this thing needs to be memorialized…we can have these discussions. More broadly is to try to understand what happened and what's the takeaway. And, in fact, is this a good model or not, what could have been done differently with 20/20 hindsight. And we've gone from just having the discussions and memorializing it into wrapping this into a study that looks at, almost in a split screen, of the Redevelopment in New Brunswick against the context of how cities have been redeveloped in the United States in the post-war period. It's hard to recreate history, and, of course, history is depending whom you're talking to. So one of the…and there's so many parts to this story. You know, what's going on at Rutgers, the hospital, but very important component, you know, is the Arts.

So I'd like to share with you…and can look at another time…this is our write-up of the New Brunswick Cultural Center. And it's based on we had a very extensive interview with Krebs, okay. So in part the writing is reflecting where we had more access of Tony Marchetta. Actually, Tony was a famous student of mine. We just recently had the pleasure of talking to Jackie Rubel. So I will leave this with you.

Khan: Alright, thank you.

Listokin: I will send you an electronic copy as well, but I highlighted in yellow there was just where we had some discussions on Crossroads, and, frankly, there isn't enough there. It's sort of because we haven't had the ability to have a good discussion with someone like yourself.

Khan: I see, yeah. Okay.

Listokin: So with that, maybe…part of this is how things happen. Maybe if you can talk a little about just yourself, you know, your interests, how you came to theater, and then how you came to New Brunswick. This is free-flowing; it's not like it's a Q&A by any means, if you would.

Khan: My mother is from Philadelphia and she went to Howard University to study in Washington, D.C. My father is from Trinidad and he, on a ship through a storm, actually came to the United States to study, and he also studied at Howard. So they met there. And that's in Washington, D.C. is where I was born at Freedmen's Hospital. And then after that of course, we moved around. And I remember being in Camden…we lived there most of my growing up.

Listokin: Camden, New Jersey?

Khan: Camden, New Jersey. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Originally, we were in Norristown, Pennsylvania on a farm, and I sometimes thought, "My God, I grew up on a farm." But in reality it was just about one or two years while my father was doing a residency there, and it just had that kind of impact though. Interesting.

Berkhout: He became a physician?

Khan: Yeah, yeah, he became a physician and my mother was a nurse. And, um, but when we finally settled in Camden, New Jersey…

Listokin: This is roughly about when?

Khan: This was '60, somewhere around there. In fact, my father remained committed to Camden, although Camden's had its ups and downs. I remember the ups because Campbell Soup was there.

Listokin: Yes.

Khan: And RCA was there.

Berkhout: Yes, right.

Khan: So there was a lot happening, but I was also a kid. And to kids, you know, everything is good, right. On our block there must have been hundreds of kids 'cause we were all…it was inner city and we were all in row houses. It was quite wonderful because we got to know everybody, and the community was actually in the street.

Well there was also a group that my parents put us in called the "Jack and Jill." And the goal of the Jack and Jill, which is a national organization with many chapters, has been to, um, provide a kind of cultural experience for African

American youths that, um, they may not necessarily get otherwise, especially those who were in the middle class. And the importance of us remembering our heritage, remembering our roots. But also playing a role in the American society. So one month we may go skiing just because skiing should be an experience we have. One month it was to get on a bus and go to Broadway. And when we did…we were piled in this bus, we got to New York, it was like wow, and then Broadway. And the play was "Hello Dolly," and, of course, there no sense of why are we going to go to "Hello Dolly" of all things until we realized that it was an all-black cast. And it starred Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway. And the big record hit at the time was Louis Armstrong's "Hello Dolly." David Merrick was the producer; he was the big time producer of Broadway at the time. And, of course, "Hello Dolly" was a big hit because of Carol Channing and all of that. And then to do an all-black cast, and this is 1969, I'm thinking, "Wow, he must be crazy or amazing. One or the other; maybe both." But he had to realize what…maybe he didn't…what it would mean to a kid to come to Broadway from a city like Camden, New Jersey and look out there and on the other side of the lights see people who looked like me for the first time. That is probably the thing that had the most impact for me, um, you know, when it came to wanting to get into theater, a certain theater.

So from the get-go, for me, theater was about being able to present the images of people, not just black but all people, so that they can see that they can be that hero too. They can be that villain too if they want. They can be the person who is simply in love or part of a couple…they wash their cars in the driveway on the weekends as well. These were not images that were out there for black people when I was going through college eventually. And Rutgers was my college. The images that were images out there…the images were negative. They were, you know, about just negativity. And if you saw black people on TV, most of the time it was on the news, you know, crimes and this sort of thing. You never saw the other side. But I remember what David Merrick did for me in "Hello Dolly" years and years before that. And I also remember leaving the theater and getting back on that bus to go back to Camden . . . and we're kids. And low and behold a couple of the cast members came out after the show and came onto our bus to say thank you. And they said, "Thank you." And that always stuck with me because I realized then that in doing your work there must always be a give and a give back. And as my mother and her colleagues used to say, "Each one reach one. Each one teach one." And so these, um, ideas that were planted in me from very, very young eventually lead to my wanting very much to start my own company and do it in a way that…

Listokin: So you are now in Rutgers in what program?

Khan: Well when I was at Rutgers I was an undergrad in Psychology actually because I love psychology.

Listokin: In New Brunswick?

Khan: Yes.

Berkhout: Not in Camden?

Khan: No, this was on College Avenue. And I went to…it was 1969 when I was a freshman. Now understand, in my first year, my freshman year, um, they had just done Woodstock. That freshman year the US invaded Cambodia. Then there was Kent State. That year was the year that a man landed on the moon. That was the year the Mets won a World Series (laughter). So many…Love Story was on TV for the first time which meant that all of the other, you know, if you were lucky enough to be with somebody you loved or somebody you were trying to woo on that night when it was on TV, chances are somebody was going to be on your arm crying. And this wasn't a bad thing.

Khan: I watched that when I was married to the theme song from Love Story.

Khan: Ah, yes.

Berkhout: And you never had to say you were sorry.

Listokin: Now it's all sugary.

(Laughing)

Khan: I know, but it was making people cry.

Listokin: Yes.

Khan: You know, there were other things that had happened in recent years before Rutgers like the loss of Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy. But the years at Rutgers…I knew I wanted to do something. I didn't know that I was going to be committed to theater, so I studied architecture. And I even was considering transferring because I loved architecture and I loved theater, and I wanted to decide where to go to school based on that. So Rutgers was really…to be there for one year and then transfer. So if it was architecture maybe I'd go to like Syracuse or Carnegie Melon or someplace like that where they had art. Or if it was theater, then maybe somewhere, but the fact that it was right there in New York excited me that I could just hop on a bus and come to New York. And I think that's why I ultimately stayed at Rutgers even though my undergraduate went from architecture to pre law, and then finally majoring in psychology. I figured okay I have a pretty full background including the theater. Psychology by the way at that time had the most electives, a lot of electives. So all of my electives were theater.

Listokin: I should know this, but at the time did Rutgers have any theater program?

Khan: They did. They had a very small…they had a very small Drama Department.

Berkhout: That must have been…I mean 'cause Eric Krebs was asked to teach at Rutgers, early Livingston College I thought.

Khan: Yeah, I didn't know Eric. That's not true; I did. I was…when I went to Rutgers I was…yes, I was doing props for the shows, I was acting in the shows. I was actually doing a lot. But it was an undergraduate program and I think there were four majors at the time. And it was located in the Little Theater on Nichol Avenue. And that was an all-wood structure…pretty incredible. But reminded you of those old days, and we did a lot of plays back then.

Berkhout: That building is still there.

Khan: Is it really? Oh, I loved that place; I loved the smell of it. But at that time I also learned about Brecht West in New Brunswick.

Listokin: So that was when it was on Easton Ave.? I guess it was in on Easton, then it was on Albany Street, then it was in the Acme Supermarket.

Khan: I remember when it was on Albany Street.

Listokin: Albany, right. Okay.

Khan: Just before it moved.

Listokin: So you would attend some of the performances?

Khan: Uh hum, I did.

Listokin: And were you part of some of those performances?

Khan: No, I was not.

Listokin: So you were there just taking it in.

Khan: I was taking it in. Anything I could do to take in theater whether it was in New Brunswick or in New York, I wanted to do. I didn't know that much about theater elsewhere in New Jersey, but I did know New Brunswick.

Berkhout: Did you see the performance with Al Pacino?

Khan: No.

Berkhout: Wasn't that Toby…we had Al Pacino in an early performance.

Khan: Did you really.

Listokin: He was paid fifty dollars in car fare.

Khan: Is that right.

(Laughing)

Khan: That one I didn't see.

Berkhout: I think that was one that was where the pharmacy building was, and that theater sat about sixty people.

Khan: It's amazing how time…

Listokin: So that was Krebs recollection.

Khan: Yeah, yeah. You know, I remember…I know we're skipping…but at Crossroads I remember Denzel Washington being there. And Denzel and I were standing outside at Crossroads in the old building, just standing out talking, waiting for some of the people in the show to come out, and then we were going to go out to eat. In fact, we went up to Panico's to eat. And Frank Panico was still alive and we were coming up. But just to give you an idea…we then walked up the street. No one bothered us. That tells you how long ago it was because otherwise Denzel…

Listokin: Well we remember New Brunswick at that time, the city.

Khan: Going back to college, yes. You know, to be honest with you, I remember the campus busses…very old.

Berkhout: They're still with us.

Khan: Yeah. But no, those are very new now.

Berkhout: Oh, the newer ones, yes.

Khan: These were very old; these are very old busses like the round ones, you know.

Berkhout: Yeah, I know.

Khan: I remember being told if you're going to go across to Douglas don't go in town, don't stop in town. They called the people who lived there "townies." And, um, I do remember going a couple of times, but…and I didn't see a problem. I just

spent most of my time on the campus. It was also the first year of Livingston College.

Listokin: Which was true with basically Rutgers. It was in but really almost not of New Brunswick.

Khan: I guess so.

Listokin: I remember I was there not much…I was there in 1970.

Khan: So that was an interesting time. I remember, you know, there were a couple x-rated movie theaters. I remember a restaurant that my folks loved, Lido Gardens. What would be now up on top of…you know where LaFontana was? I don't know what's there now.

Berkhout: Yes.

Khan: But like up in that area.

Berkhout: Shaka Burrito.

Khan: Shaka Burrito?

Berkhout: It's a combination Hawaiian-Mexican.

Khan: Oh wow.

Berkhout: There are surfboards on the ceiling.

Khan: I remember the Singer sewing store. I remember that. Close to the corner of Albany and George Street. These are things I do remember. There wasn't a built-up Easton Avenue or anything like that at the time. But Rutgers was all men. I think later on we tried very hard to petition to get women there. And while that was going on we were, you know, we were doing things like going across town…Douglass and pulling the fire alarms, so eventually they would have to come. If they're going to get a good night's sleep, they're going to have to come to Rutgers. Those were the kinds of things I remember.

Listokin: So you were in college and then you're taking in the theater that's there.

Khan: I'm taking in the theater that's there. I was…understand that from the time I saw "Hello Dolly" I just loved…I breathed in theater. You know, it was in me because that was a very volatile time politically in the country. It was also a very, um, interestingly divisive time. If you were…radio, there were the white stations and then there was the black station. You know, if you went into record stores…similar…they didn't call it R&B, it was soul. You know, it was always

that. Vietnam War was going on. The, um, Feminist Movement was going on. The Black Panthers had come into play. There was Dr. King on one side, and Malcolm X on the other. And even after Dr. King was assassinated, and Malcolm was assassinated there was still a sense of which do you choose…you must choose. And even going back to LBJ and, you know, there was the whole silent majority, it was considered to be the negative thing. So stand up for what you believe in. Tell us what you believe in. Don't sit on the fence. That was all what was going on at the time; that was all what was going on at the time. So you had to choose. And, um, if it was not Vietnam and you were drafted, then it was Canada. Everything was causing you to choose. When the National Anthem was played at a baseball game, if you stood up you were making a statement. If you sat down, you were making a statement. If you're running through a street, you're making a statement. If you were walking, you're making a statement. So everything was like that, and theater seemed to be this thing that calmed our waters for me. I could close myself in and do plays that have really very little to do with my own life. It was just a fantasy world; that's what was happening. The first show I did when I was at Rutgers was in that Little Theater was "The Hostage." Um, an Irish play. Once we did "Hello Dolly"…the years before, that same group, Jack and Jill, they said, "Let's do a play." Well what do you think it was, it was "Hello Dolly." And then after that it "My Fair Lady." And after that it was "Sweet Charity" and "Oliver." And the point is that all of these are plays being done in the inner city, in Camden, by mainly black people...kids. This was all, for me, I guess a way to be creatively not a part of all the madness that I saw down there. Years later I would start to see . . . Wait a minute. There's a power in theater beyond just escapism. There's a power to the image. There's a power to the word. And there's a power when you bring people of many different backgrounds together instead of turning a blind eye to color, instead seeing it as something quite beautiful. And then I became proactive about wanting to do theater to create a community of people that never exists normally, that comes from all different backgrounds racially, economically, age-wise. And they come, they see a play, together they may have different reactions, but they see it all together. And then they leave. If we did our job right, they leave just a little different than they were when they came in.

Berkhout: And were you always interested in directing as opposed to acting or did you start with acting and then move into directing?

Khan: No, I always loved directing, and I loved acting. And I acted for a good long while. And my degree at Mason Gross…MFA was in…it was a double. It was in acting and directing. So it took me…I had to do double the work.

Listokin: And that was at Rutgers?

Khan: That was a Mason Gross. I was in Mason Gross's first year.

Berkhout: When Jack Bettenbender here was dean?

Khan: He was my dean. He was my mentor. He was everything. He was a great visionary.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Khan: And he never saw things in a small way. It was always THAT, and that's what I loved. That's what I was excited about. I remember… Skipping into when Crossroads was first being looked at when the relocations were going on, there was a building called The Sisser Brothers Building on Livingston Avenue.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Khan: And the thought was…it was a warehouse…the thought was that they would put Crossroads in the back of that. And I remember Jack standing up and saying, "No, Crossroads is not going to be in the back of anything."

Berkhout: (Laughing).

Khan: And I think that had a lot to do with why Crossroads now is in the new building on Livingston Avenue. But anyway, my point is that years later is when I realized the power of theater in a different way. It would illuminate instead of, you know, allow people to escape.

Listokin: In this period when you're putting on acting some, directing some, in the Little Theater, there was some other colleagues or others that…

Khan: Yes, there were. And I'm sorry, I realize your question was about the acting and directing.

Listokin: Yeah.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Khan: And the thing about the acting was that I loved acting, but I didn't want to be beholding to other people for me to do my work. I loved directing because it connected me more organically to the visions that I want to put forth. And it was…the producing was because I never really had the experience of working for somebody else. When I was a little kid my father was working for himself. My mother's father was a barber and he had his own barber shop. My father's parents owned businesses in Trinidad. And it didn't matter how big or small it was, it was that I grew up on just the whole notion, "If you want to do it, do it yourself" that kind of thing. So the people at Mason Gross School of the Arts at the time…there was Lee Richardson. There was Sheryl Lee Ralph. There was Bill Mastrosimone Lee Cuthbert, Avery Brooks, Marilyn Rockefeller, and all of these folks were there to be a part of the forming of Mason Gross School of the Arts

with Jack Bettenbender as the dean. I will say that there were rumblings at the time. We wanted more structure in the program, but the program was very loose. It was trying to find its own way while we were paying tuition to be there. So we would always cause trouble all the time, but it was because we were itching to do something beyond what was happening at the moment. And so there were incredible achievers, over-achievers I guess you would say, in that program at the time. And there was also one way of doing things, and I wanted to explore other ways so I remember Carol Rosenthal was the…Rosenfeld, I'm sorry…Carol Rosenfeld was teaching acting at the time, and she was teaching one particular method. But I also wanted to learn other methods as well that were more organic to my own culture and to African ritual and that sort of thing. And they allowed me to also take classes at New Federal Theater in New York under Woody King, Jr. He's the producer there. They allowed me to study in the Black Theater Workshop there and for credit.

One amazing thing that Mason Gross did was allow you to kind of mold it into what your own needs are. The other really great thing about Mason Gross at the time was that it was causing us frustration. We were itching to do something. It kind of prepared us for the real world. And we did our own work. There was a student organization called "The Paul Robeson Black Arts Ensemble." And they actually started when I was an undergraduate…I got involved with them then. And it was essentially actors from Rutgers, Livingston and Douglas and Cook. But the thing about it was that we had to do that kind of work on our time. So we would be in classes all day, and then maybe during dinner we'd grab somebody who was our scene partner for one of the classes, rehearse that scene, and then at seven we'd go and start rehearsals for "Romeo and Juliet" or whatever the main stage was doing at the Little Theater or at Levin Theater at the time. And then rehearsal was done by eleven, and that's when we would start our rehearsal for the "Paul Robeson and Black Arts Ensemble" in the basement of Jameson. All of that just makes me tired thinking about that. But at that time it's all we wanted to do.

Listokin: We were all younger too.

Khan: Yeah, and it's what we wanted to do. It was really…you talk about seize the moment. That, I think, is what Mason Gross School of the Arts was about at that time.

Berkhout: So did you lead that group?

Khan: No. Um, let me think. When I was an undergraduate a guy named Charlie Manning led that group. There was a time when Paris Qualles who's now a film writer, and he also was inducted in the Distinguished Alumni…Hall of Distinguished Alumni. He was running it. I don't remember who was running it after that; I just knew that we were all involved, we were all part of it.

Berkhout: So you acted in it?

Khan: Oh, acting. Did the lighting sometimes. I did the sound sometimes. I never directed. I did those things, but I was directing elsewhere. Then when I was in…and David Marguiles was also…he was the directing teacher at the time. Now he's a big time actor in New York. But David was teaching/directing. Joe Hart also was a directing teacher.

Listokin: Is it about this time when you approached Krebs about starting Crossroads?

Khan: No, it was after graduating.

Listokin: So you finished the MFA.

Khan: Finished the MFA. Went out and started auditioning. And I think that was when I realized, "My God, all these roles were for pimps and prostitutes. Aren't there any substantial roles?" I wasn't thinking as much about the image being portrayed; I was thinking that I went through four and a half years of post-graduate training and this is what I'm being asked to do. That was an eye-opener. But also I had heard about a program called "Comprehensive Employment and Training Act", CETA. And I heard about that and it was Jaqui Rubel who was running the program for the Middlesex County Arts Council. And at that time Estelle Hasenberg was running a similar program for the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. It was interesting…they were both CETA Programs and both very similarly were hiring about ten artists of different disciplines to just make themselves available to the community throughout Middlesex County. And because the two had similar designs, and everything back then was political too, I guess just like it is now, they divided up the territory, so we knew who we needed to go to in the county and who we couldn't. We did everything. We did shows all over…playgrounds and churches and synagogues and schools. And the two actors in the program…well there were three, but Lee Richardson and I were two. We got into this. I heard about it. I told Lee. I said, "Lee, let's go and interview." And we got the job. It was a whole year's salary. It was amazing to be an actor coming out of school and you get this. That's what it was. And we were in this program and we started doing plays all over the place. And then towards the end of it we started doing this play called, "Sizwe Banzi is Dead" from South Africa, and Apartheid was still going on at the time, so there were a lot of protests. And this particular play was a protest play written by Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona and John Kani, all from South Africa. We loved doing that play. We loved it. We took it everywhere. I had the set in my trunk out of my car. Actually, come to think of it, we had done that play, Lee and I, in graduate school at the time. So this was about putting it back out there, and doing it. And throughout the year we really loved the idea of doing this and being part of the struggle. But then the program came to an end and that's when we approached Eric Krebs to say, "Look, you have George Street Playhouse. But this is happening right now."

Listokin: Roughly about when, when you approached Krebs?

Khan: This is in ’76, ’77…’77, yeah.

Listokin: We had the pleasure of attending in Crossroads when you had, I guess it was earlier this year.

Berkhout: The Founder’s Day.

Khan: Oh, the Founder’s Day, yes, yes, yes.

Berkhout: It was another woman, yeah.

Listokin: I’m having a senior moment. There was a woman who was involved.

Khan: Louise?

Listokin: Louise.

Khan: Yeah, Louise… The great thing about…let me back up a second. When we approached Eric it was Lee and I and we had an idea. And it was simply as actors, let’s do, “Sizwe Banzi is Dead.” Eric said he would love to but there’s no audience out there for it. And so that was amazing to us…how could there not be an audience? So the thought was, well then why not create the audience, but he was not ready to do that at the time.

There was an undergraduate fellow student of mine who…I’m having a senior moment now…I’m trying to remember his name…I’ll remember it. (Gene Armstrong). But he by that time was in CETA, working for CETA. And he said, “Well Rick, you know, there’s this program. It’s the same program like the one that you were in in Middlesex County, but if you apply, you can get money to start this company you want to start, but you have to be a 501c3.” And we weren’t. So I went back to Eric and said, “Look, can you, you know, you don’t think that there’s an audience out there. Let me prove to you that there is. And we don’t want a dime of your money. We could bring it all ourselves.” And he said, “Okay.” They did up the application. Lee and I were at lunch one day at Sir John’s. Remember Sir John’s which is now something else.

Berkhout: Lago.

Khan: Lago, yes, yes. And we sat down and on a napkin I wrote out the mission. We said okay, what is our mission? We figured it out right there at the table, and on that napkin was the mission. So we took the mission, we took the program design, we built it into an application, and we got the funds. And at that point we were able to hire, I think, well a total of twelve people. Half of them were actors,

would be for actors. We figured one would be a house manager, one would be a stage manager, one would be publicity, one would be administration.

Listokin: And that's roughly the '76, '77.

Khan: Now we're in '77. I'm sorry, no. Now we're in '78.

Listokin: '78, right.

Khan: When we got the money that's when we then brought in Louise Gorham, Kenny Johnson . . .

Berkhout: She was administrative?

Khan: Louise was, I think she was… You know, it was one of those things where everybody had to have a slot, but then once you got in there you did everything.

Listokin: You did everything, yeah.

Khan: Louise was an actor.

Berkhout: Louise Carr?

Khan: Louise Gorham, yes. G-o-r-h-a-m, Louise Gorham. There was Kenny Johnson. He came in as a stage manager. Gary "Bingo" Johnson, he came in as maybe the house manager or something. There were just a bunch of… And it was Maureen Heffernan who came in as the administrator.

Berkhout: Why is her name familiar?

Khan: Yeah, she's in Middlesex County.

Listokin: Was that when Memorial Parkway…?

Khan: Yes, that's when we started. Well actually we didn't…what happened was we knew we were…this grant was gonna come through. We knew it, let's see, maybe September that okay it's approved. Now it's official. And we had told other people this is going to happen. You got to be around. You want to do this. So probably around that time when we were gathering people we were also trying to figure out where this thing was going to be. And we went around; we went all around and then finally we found 320 Memorial Parkway. We went to the…we went to…we looked at a place on Church Street called "Roselle's." It was a shoe store I think it was.

Berkhout: Oh, okay.

Khan: So we were looking and were wandering in and out. I thought it was a perfect location. But there were limits and we didn't know the landlord that way. We also looked at a bunch of other places. And I was in…

Listokin: All in New Brunswick?

Khan: All in New Brunswick, absolutely. Oh yeah, New Brunswick was where we wanted to do it. And I remember I was acting in a play up in Springfield, Massachusettes, "A Raisin in the Sun." Harold Scott was the director. And it was my first real gig coming out of school as an actor. And I was up there in Springfield when Lee calls and says, "Rick, I found the perfect place. I found the perfect place." That was at 320 Memorial Parkway. And when I saw it I saw why he said that. For one thing the ceilings were very high; it was an old sewing factory.

Berkhout: And was this a loft?

Khan: It was a loft.

Berkhout: Or a whole floor?

Khan: You know, it was setup as a loft on all three floors. One the first floor…

Listokin: Was Tony Nelessen…?

Khan: Tony Nelessen was on the third floor.

Listokin: 'Cause I remember…I knew Tony.

Khan: Yeah, you knew Tony. Tony Nelessen and his family were on the third floor with the exception of the very back. The back was Rob Schneider.

Berkhout: Oh, who owned J. August Café.

Khan: Who owned J. August.

Listokin: That's right.

Berkhout: And was a student in MCRP.

Listokin: He was a student in my…

Khan: Is that right, okay.

Listokin: Yes, yes, yes.

Khan: On the second floor was the one that was vacant except for the very back and that was where Jim Black lived from the Frog and the Peach. And on the first floor was the Rask Auto Parts Store. And, um, adjacent to our building was John's Bargains.

Listokin: I remember John's. What floor?

Khan: The second.

Listokin: The second floor.

Khan: Yeah, the one that was available was most of the second floor.

Berkhout: So you had the theater, Jim Black remained living there in the back.

Khan: They all lived there. Jim Black was our landlord.

Berkhout: I see.

Khan: You see. And he was the official landlord.

Berkhout: So he owned the building?

Khan: He owned the building.

Berkhout: I see.

Khan: And so it was wonderful because not only did they let us do our thing, but they loved the thing we were doing. And so it was like one family is how I looked at it, just one big family. When we would do shows… I remember one time we did a play called "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf." And we opened that night, and I remember in the middle of it. Tony Nelessen saying to me, "Where's the reception going to be?" I said, "Well it's right here", in this little space about the size of this room. He said, "No, no, no. We could do it upstairs. Let's have everybody come upstairs." And there was a fire escape that took you upstairs in the back. So we said, "Okay." By the time that show finished he and his wife had a whole spread set up for us. It was really amazing. And so those were the kinds of things that would happen. And then the next day, came into work and thought…there was a garage door next to our entrance painted. Tony had painted it "For Colored Girls." He just wanted everybody to know. The street was painted.

Berkhout: Wow.

Khan: It was that kind of exuberance that kept us going. Even though there were low points too, those were great.

Listokin: Do you recall the first production you put on in Memorial Parkway?

Khan: The first one, yes. When we…Dan Irving, by the way, Dan Irving was also one of the original people from Rutgers. We were all from Rutgers. And so one of the good things was that we all shared a common language in terms of the craft. And Dan was . . . we didn't have a name. It was called . . . we had to call it "The Ethnic Theater Project."

Berkhout: Oh.

Khan: Right, because we couldn't use anything other than that cause it was a CETA Program. But we didn't have a name and we were thinking about the name. What name, what name? And prior to even opening that first show, we wanted…based on our mission, we wanted to make sure that we could break barriers down between the traditional theater audience which is white, and us as the non-traditional theater and the non-traditional theater-going audience which is primarily black and Latino, and Theater. So in order to do those things, before we even started our first show we all conducted workshops. We took it out into the streets just like we had learned to do the year before. We went to churches and senior citizens homes and synagogues and the schools just to say, "This is who we are, but also to help them. So we taught Tai Chi and we taught acting and we taught how to build a model, a set model, music, all sorts of stuff and trumpet. And one day, Dan Irving is on a ladder scraping a wall. He's looking out the window and he sees all these streets coming together and being built, and it just him, "Crossroads." And all of a sudden it just made total sense because on so many levels that was our mission. That's where our name came from. So by the time we got to our first play we'd already done about two months of workshops, this and that, all over the place. It was called, "First Breeze of Summer" by Leslie Lee. And we did not charge; we didn't charge anything for the plays back then. All you had to do was just sign up.

The second play we did was…

Berkhout: Did you just have folding chairs in there?

Khan: No, no, we didn't. Eric Krebs…that first year they weren't folding chairs, but they were pretty dilapidated. We found them wherever we could. Rutgers Surplus, that's where we found them.

Berkhout: Oh yes, Material Services.

Khan: Yeah, that's where we got our first chairs. And we had sixty seats…sixty in there. And we moved them around depending on the show. It wasn't any one area.

Listokin: This is '78, '79?

Khan: ’78, ’79, it was our first CETA project. It lasted a year. Um, it was also pretty evident, and, again, this was going back to me not ever wanting to work for anybody. I wanted to do it ourselves. It was evident to me that we had potential here. And rather than being a project, I wanted it to be a real thing. Rather than it being under George Street Playhouse, I wanted it to be ours. And so around the middle of that first year I contacted Roy Epps. And I remember Lee and I went to Roy’s office, and Roy said, “Well if you’re really serious about this, what you need is a Board.” I said, “Okay.” And then he said, “I’ll pull it together for you, just a group of people who can meet as a committee.” And that group came together. Penelope Lattimer was there. At that time she was the Assistant Superintendent of Schools in New Brunswick. There was Cheryl Wall. Dr. Wall was an English professor. There was a businessman, Jim Jones, from South Brunswick. There was…oh boy…from Johnson & Johnson…I can’t remember his name, but he was…

Berkhout: Bob Campbell?

Khan: Bob Andrews. Bob Andrews was the…he was in PR there. And Bob Andrews was…they were all great. They I went to Ronnie Wright, Ronald Wright, the attorney. He’s a judge now in New Brunswick. I said, “Ronnie, we need to incorporate.” And he said, “Well if you’re going to incorporate, I’ll incorporate you, and I’ll do it for free. But you need a good accountant.” And right below him in that building was Joseph Spak. And Joe Spak became our first accountant and taught me how to do the one-write system of checks where everything was by hand, but it was like a carbon underneath. So when you wrote it out not only did the amount and name come on, but also the category. So it was really great and I learned accounting that way. Um, and our books…the first books that I kept for the first five years are still in our storage archives. Anyway, that was kind of how things started to come about, so by the time the CETA Program was ending we were ready to do our own thing. But what we did was we went ahead and did a second year. So the first year began in November and ended around November. The second project from CETA started in January of ’80.

Listokin: 1980.

Khan: Yeah, of 1980. And that went…I think we did that for fifteen months or something like…we just wanted to get going. But during that year the goal was really to start to get people in the habit of paying to come. It also gave us the opportunity to start to cultivate interest from foundations, corporations. Because keep in mind, we didn’t need the money. We had CETA money. But my goal was by the time CETA finished and we were gone from CETA and George Street Playhouse, we would have our own everything. And that’s basically how it happened.

Berkhout: Now during this time J&J had already made plans to stay and build their headquarters.

Khan: J&J had already decided, yes.

Berkhout: And the Hyatt must have been built.

Khan: No, no, no.

Berkhout: Not yet?

Khan: No, nothing.

Berkhout: It was ’82 maybe or something.

Khan: Yeah, I do remember very early on hearing plans, and those plans included the demolishing our building. Now that means that New Brunswick Tomorrow…they were the ones in charge of the plans…had already been established which means that J&J had made the decision to stay probably a few years before that.

Berkhout: So were you at the meeting when Tony Nelessen proposed an alternative to Dick Sellars to keep the older buildings on Hiram?

Khan: I wasn’t there, but I heard about that. And I don’t know all that happened after that, but you see I knew that something was going to eventually happen in that area. And I wanted them, everybody…

Listokin: Because the area was slated to be redeveloped.

Khan: Yes, and we didn’t know quite what that meant. But what I did know, I know the power of image. So I wanted to renovate the theater, make it look really good, thinking that if it looks really good, that’s what they got to give us if they move us. We also started a petition. I started a petition for signatures to know, keep Crossroads, keep Crossroads. By the time we got to 1982…now we’re about four years old, maybe 1981, three years old, by that time enough steam was building for Crossroads that they had to do something. They couldn’t just… And this was role model for CETA; this was a success story. When there were so many government programs that weren’t successes at all, this was a huge success. And now we’re out on our own. I remember incorporating a second company called Crossroads Productions. Because I knew that CETA would not…they didn’t want to buy anything; they wanted to rent everything cause it’s temporary. So I thought, okay, if I could get another company to buy the lighting equipment and sound equipment and all of that and chairs and rent it to the Crossroads, you know, to the project for the same amount, we would end up with the equipment we need. And that’s what we did.

Listokin: So with some of the players, J&J in this period…so you had the J&J executive on your Board. Anything more than that as far as…?

Khan: Sure. Well when we renovated, by that time somebody had moved out of the back so we were able to takeover. Where did Jim Black go? He went somewhere. I don't know, we ended up taking over the whole second floor.

Berkhout: Did he live above the restaurant?

Khan: There was no restaurant at that time.

Berkhout: Okay.

Khan: Jim Black.

Berkhout: Yeah.

Khan: No, there was no restaurant at that time. And Hubbard was not J. August at the time; it was Catalyst on Church Street. And when…so what happened was we rented out the whole second floor. By this time Johnson and Johnson . . .

Listokin: Owned the real estate.

Khan: That's right.

Listokin: Did they contribute monies to help you expand?

Khan: Yes, they did. No, not expand in terms of in there, but program money they did.

Listokin: And that allowed you to go from how many seats to how many seats?

Khan: Sixty to one-twenty. Um, and at that time…now getting back to the Dick Sellars meeting. Let me think. From what I understand when Tony Nelessen proposed an alternate plan, it was in order to keep the building standing, so we were all for that of course. But Dick Sellars I know had his own thoughts, and it was clear that it was going to be knocked down. That's why Tony then said, "Okay, we're going to have it declared a "landmark." So it was declared a landmark, so they couldn't knock it down. So then it was like, "Well if we're not going to knock it down, we're going to force you to sell it." "Well you can't force us to sell it." "Well yeah, we condemn it." So it was all of that going on, you know, that we were hearing about. And the upshot of all of that was that there were settlements, and the result of the settlement with Jim Black was the Frog and the Peach or led to I should say the Frog and the Peach. The settlement after Hubbard left, it was J. August Café. And Tony Nelessen…they had relocated out to…

Listokin: To…I think it was out in Somerset.

Khan: That's right. A beautiful place.

Berkhout: On a farm, right?

Khan: Yeah. And in fact when I went out there it was the first time I ever saw a black pool, a swimming pool. That was pretty cool and he had fish and everything. It was great.

Listokin: I remember telling Tony it really changed. You went from the loft which was urban to this colonial farm house.

Khan: He did to a colonial house.

Berkhout: So I'm just trying to think geographically. So were those two restaurants on the backside of where Crossroads was?

Khan: No. If Crossroads was here facing Memorial Parkway, you went this way and you had John's store…Bargain.

Berkhout: Yes.

Khan: Then if you turned at John's you had Manny's Den. Then if you turned again you had the Frog and the Peach and then J. August's.

Berkhout: Okay, so it took about two blocks in of buildings.

Khan: Yeah, absolutely. And it was a pretty great neighborhood when you think about it. There was so much diversity there. Yes, there was glass on the sidewalks. But by that time Bob Andrews had to leave J&J, and the reason he left was because he was the one sent out. I remember I had a meeting with him in his office on morning, set up at Johnson & Johnson. And on my way his secretary calls and says, "It's cancelled. He has to go out of town." And I watched the helicopter leave and took him because he was the one they sent to Chicago to handle the Tylenol crisis. And he was brilliant. And then, of course, as a result of that they promoted him and then we lost him. But the person who came in after him was Gary Gorran. Gary Gorran became our treasurer, but he worked…

Listokin: Also with J&J?

Khan: Also with J&J, and worked very closely under John Heldrich. So that's how John Heldrich started to know more and more about Crossroads through Gary. And just the support for what we were doing…I'm not talking just financial…just kept on increasing because of it.

Listokin: From J&J?

Khan: From J&J. And as a result of the…right after the renovations, um, once again, Roy Epps comes in the picture. And I said, "Roy, I want to get more business people involved." He said, "Then let's have a business night." And he convinced John Heldrich to do a night at Crossroads with a reception at the Hyatt next door that was, um, because by that time they'd built the Hyatt, and they were also supportive of Crossroads. It's interesting cause the play was Athol Fugard…it was about Apartheid, anti Apartheid.

Berkhout: Oh wow.

Khan: Yeah, yeah. But the point is that they…

Listokin: It was just coincidental that was the play.

Khan: It was just coincidental. And it was interesting because here Johnson & Johnson was just committed to keeping their funds in South Africa. And every time they had an annual meeting there were protests. And I remember that.

Berkhout: That was when Ed Bloustein was arrested.

Khan: And Ed Bloustein…that's right. And Bloustein gave our first benefit for Crossroads at his house.

Berkhout: Oh, really.

Khan: Yes. We had just done Paul Robeson. Avery Brooks was in it and Ernie Scott. And he had the benefit and I guess that was somewhere around…that was the early eighties also. And so Ernie and Avery came. They did a little number from the show and all of this. It was very nice. But Ed Bloustein and his wife were such incredible hosts, and told us the story about when Paul Robeson was there. A lot of great support in those days coming from all over.

Listokin: Any other Rutgers connections or support?

Khan: No.

Listokin: Was Mason Gross at all…in the program at all?

Khan: No, not at all. Not except for Jack Bettenbender.

Berkhout: Did you know Kenneth Wheeler? He was the provost and he supported arts.

Khan: I don't think I ever met him.

Listokin: So there was some of this mainly through Bloustein, some, you know, support?

Khan: Yeah. I mean certainly Jack Bettenbender was a lightning rod for that and he made the… But yeah, Ed Bloustein and his wife became Opening Night subscribers, and they would come to all the shows. They did this benefit. The second benefit we did the following year. We decided to do "Robeson" and they gave us Nicholas Music Center. Nicholas or Nichols Music Center.

Berkhout: Nicholas.

Khan: Nichols Music Center.

Berkhout: Nicholas Music Center.

Khan: Ah. And so we did "Robeson" there, and then for the reception walked over the Eagleton and did the reception there. So there was always a great deal of support from Rutgers.

Listokin: And the city, John Lynch and the city, were they not there?

Khan: Here's the thing with the city. The city was always there for us. And mid eighties we were having a pretty severe problem with parking. Because what was happening was there was a lot and it was documented in the papers a lot. There was a lot there. By this time John's (Bargain Store) was closed down, but there was a very small lot across from John's, across that little street. And when people would come, our patrons, they'd have to find parking on the street wherever they could; there was not a Crossroads lot or anything. But then there was this little lot and no one was ever there at night. So they would park in that lot. There was a little sign about this big saying, "Don't park." That's big. They were getting towed; people were getting towed every night. And we couldn't figure out what was going on until what happened they had found out was that a guy who was a cousin or somebody of a policeman who would call the guy and say, "Look. There are this number of cars there." He would then tow and charge something like sixty dollars for the tow. And I mean that was back then. I was incredible, and it got to be a really big thing. So every now and then I would have a meeting with John Lynch in his office. John says, "How can I help you?" And I said, "We got a problem with towing. People are towed and I don't know what to do." He said, "Seriously." I said, "Yeah." He picks up his phone and he calls somebody. He says, "When are we planning to demolish John's? Okay, let's do it now."

Berkhout: (Laughing).

Khan: They demolished John's, paved the lot, and put up a really beautiful fence around it.

Berkhout: Wow.

Khan: Yeah, New Brunswick…

Listokin: Did John Lynch ever attend any of your performances?

Khan: Yes, oh yes.

Listokin: He did.

Khan: Absolutely. He was there; he was there. He also started a Commission, a New Brunswick Arts Commission. And the goal of that was to try to figure out, you have all these Arts organizations, what are you going to do with them? And the Commission was made up of…Eric Krebs was put on the Commission. I was put on the Commission. Um, Jack Bettenbender was put on the Commission. Bill Wright, head of Planning, right, at Rutgers, was put on the Commission. There were a few others as well. And the result of our study at the end of that year was that we should bring everybody together into a Cultural Center. And he then started…Bill started developing the plans for it. And that's how it started to happen. After that, then they incorporated the New Brunswick Cultural Center. But even when they were looking for their first president, they contacted us, the Commission. We were able to interview the people that they liked. You know, so it was a really nice relationship.

Berkhout: And who was the first Cultural Center president? Was it Bill Wright?

Khan: It might have been Bill Wright in the beginning.

Berkhout: Or Ginny Record maybe.

Khan: I can't remember the first one. I remember we interviewed people. I think that there was a first person and then it was Bill Wright who came in under…I honestly don't know.

Berkhout: Was that the guy, David what's-his-name who was in the State Theater?

Khan: No. He was later; he was much later; he was much, much later. I honestly can't remember the first one.

Berkhout: But you were still down…

Khan: Maybe it was Bill Wright until they found a permanent president.

Berkhout: You were still on Memorial Parkway?

Khan: Absolutely.

Berkhout: So when Lynch called and said, "When are we taking down John's?", how much longer did take before your building was then demolished?

Khan: Before it was demolished.

Berkhout: Or before you moved?

Khan: We were in our new building…we moved into the building in the Fall of 1991.

Listokin: Where your current building is?

Khan: Yes, the current building.

Listokin: I mean any thoughts on…well the building wouldn't just happen.

Khan: Well, you know, they were very good to us in that…around that time. Keep in mind when the question was what to do about Crossroads? We've got to move them. What do we do about it? The first thought was the back of the Sisser Brothers Building. Roy Epps then had taken me to another place that was on Carrol Street, and we also looked at the Foodtown there. You know, we'd look at a bunch of different places. At that time there was a little lot, little, very narrow, where Crossroads is now. There was something there and it was taken down. So now it was this little narrow area. And I looked at it and said, "Wow, there's that lot there." And the optometrist was right next to it and they were going to knock that down. My thought was if they're going to do that there's going to be a space there. And Roy says to me, "Okay, well look. Be quiet about it. Let's talk about this." Because for the city to build a new building for Crossroads and not do that for George Street who was by that time in the "Y" there may be political things to it. So let's keep it quiet, but let's look at other ways to do it. And we looked at the grade of the street and realized that as the grade goes the grade changes. It's not straight between that lot and George Street Playhouse. So what I had proposed was the George Street and Crossroads share or somebody had proposed that that we share the same lobby. Roy was saying they're going to find out later on they can't because the grade. And it then became a lot easier for them to just build a whole new building, and that's essentially…

Listokin: I think that's Egyptian Revival, the style of the building.

Khan: Kind of. You know, I have an affinity to Pyramids.

Listokin: I think this is clearly…

Khan: The columns. The architect, Vincent Myers, was the architect, a firm from Princeton. And we also wanted to make sure, you know, we interviewed many,

many architects. We wanted to make sure that architects of color had a chance in there, and he happened to win. It was an African American firm, Myers and his…

(Interruption for a phone call)

Berkhout: So just a little aside, we also interviewed David Harris as part of the series of…

Khan: Oh David Harris, yes, yes.

Berkhout: And he said his story about the Sellars…confrontation that Tony presented a plan for preserving higher up district area. And that Dick Sellars said something to the effect of, "I have money to do a plan, and the only plan I can pay for is my plan."

Khan: (Laughter).

Berkhout: So that was it.

Khan: Oh, boy.

Berkhout: He said he felt so sorry for Tony cause he was so enthusiastic about…

Khan: Well one thing I knew about Dick Sellars was that he knew what he wanted and it was going to be that way. John Heldrich, um, who was really the person to push so much of the Redevelopment, actually became a good friend of Crossroads. And, in fact, there were times when he's come up and offered to help me and mentor me with the business end and stuff. They were always concerned about the business end of Crossroads because I'm an artist, I'm an artistic director, and we never, you know, I found a way to keep the place surviving for twenty years just like Eric Krebs does. But, you know, you don't necessarily do it the way people want you to do it.

Listokin: So you went from, I guess, the hundred and twenty-seat on Memorial Parkway to now you're…

Khan: Three, three-twenty. And we, um, so Vincent Myers was the architect, but then they brought in another architectural firm from New York to do the interior design because it was clearly too big a project for Vincent to handle at that time, so they helped with the interior. There was also another group that helped us learn, you know, and be able to articulate what it was we wanted and needed in the building. And with that group I learned about what makes Crossroads tick and how that translates into physicality. So one of the things…so what's very similar between the old space and the new is that the way we worked in proximity to the art and the rehearsal hall and all that is basically the same. In the old building you come in, you go up steps, there's the theater. And you go up to the upper level and there are the offices. There's a common room up there. And then if you go all the way to the back, the third floor, is the rehearsal hall. And if you

do down from there you get to the dressing rooms and then the backstage exactly the same way. Um, all of that was exactly the same just bigger.

Listokin: Actually, with your new venue were you changing artistically? You now have a much bigger house.

Khan: We have a bigger house. Our audience, they were so committed. They said, "Please don't get rid of the intimacy; don't get rid of the intimacy." And one of the things I did was I went just to colleagues to try to find out what creates intimacy. We had been going to many different theaters…what creates intimacy? And one of the things I found, I was actually at Lincoln Center and a friend of mine, Gregory Mosher, was at Lincoln Center Theater at the time. And he sat with me in the Mitzi Newhouse Theater and we just looked and felt it, you know, and thought about what it was about. And it wasn't just that the audience wrapped around, it was that the audience was always aware of the audience, you know, and that is what creates intimacy. The audience's awareness with itself, seeing other people respond to what's in the middle there. So that had a lot to do with it artistically.

The other is, um, and I want to get back to the whole Egyptian thing. I always believed that there should be one way in and one way out, and that there should be a bit of a journey to whatever that space is. Um, and that it be, in some way, circular. So when you come into the new building, now, you know, you have to go up the stairs. Originally, they were curved going up to the…they were changed to angular which is cool and then goes up. But then you come into this space that's the lobby and then there's one entrance, one entrance in, and that has a lot to do with just trying to, you know, include that concept in the experience that the audience would have.

Listokin: We're now in the new house and, you know, you're playing to larger audiences, just take us…

Khan: Yeah, the, um, well it also took a long time. The groundbreaking of that space…I have to check it, but…I'm trying to remember when that was. I could figure it out, but it was quite a long time before we actually moved in.

Berkhout: '88 maybe or '89.

Khan: It was in there somewhere, yes. Yeah, I think it was actually. It was. And the groundbreaking happened, everybody was happy, and then nothing happened. And then Penny Lattimer who was the president at the time said, "Well can you at least put a sign up there." So they got a sign up there, you know, saying, "Future home of…" But there was a long time that nothing was said.

Berkhout: So the city paid for it or the county?

Khan: Well I think it was mainly the county.

Berkhout: Okay.

Khan: I think it was mainly the county. There were also funds raised, um, with Crossroads name on it. But those funds, I think, went to other places because I believe it was primarily the county funds that paid for it. And the…finally, they started to build. And when they would build…I used to have pictures. Finally, they started to build…they were mainly building what looked like an outdoor Greek amphitheater.

Berkhout: (Laughing).

Khan: So we would, the staff, we would sneak up there in the middle of the night sometimes after our show and go out there and just look. And the way the moon hit the cement was incredible. The stage, the seating risers are all cement, so they were all laid in that foundation. They didn't excavate. It was just right there. So it really looked like a nice amphitheater. We were out there a lot…had good times with candles, you know, wine. But it took a long time.

It was in the Spring of '91 that whoever was answering the phone sent this message to me, "Rick, Bill Cosby wants to talk to you." And I'm thinking, "Right, yeah, sure." And so I picked up the phone thinking, "Okay, who is this giving a joke on me?" And it was a guy, he says, "Are you Ricardo Khan?" I said, "Yeah." "Mr. Cosby would like to talk to you." And then I started realizing this may be serious. And he said, "Okay, this is the number. He's in Las Vegas. He's expecting your call." So I called him, and of course, (mimicking Bill Cosby's voice).

(Laughing)

Khan: And all the years prior to that we had tried to get Bill Cosby or somebody to do our benefits. We never could, never could. Um, but we were lucky with Bill Wright. You know what, he must have been the first president of the Cultural Center.

Berkhout: I think so.

Khan: Because he called me one day and he said, "For your benefit, Rick listen, we can negotiate Ray Charles to come in and do your benefit. Do you want to do it? You just pay the expenses; keep the money." I said, "Yeah." So we did Ray Charles. After that we did Smokey Robinson. After that we did Wynton Marsalis. We did a number of things with Bill Wright there; it was really great. Dionne Warwick. But we could never get Cosby and then here he is calling me. Um, he said, "What can I do for you?" Now I thought maybe he could give us his name to a letter, a fundraising letter or something like that. He said, "No, I want

to do a show for you cause I heard about this building." And he had also heard that we were not ones to complain. We didn't focus on what we didn't have; we focused on what we did have, and he liked that. And he said to the press many times that that's why he came cause that's how he looked at it. And so I said, "Well, you know, the theater's going to be built. We're expecting it to be open in the fall, but I don't know when cause they were supposed to open in this last fall." He said, "Well, I want to do a bet I think." Andre Robinson at the time was my managing director, general manager. So Cosby and I were finished talking, Cosby's manager started talking to Andre. Somehow it turned out we ended up with Cosby doing five shows, not one.

Berkhout: (Laughing).

Khan: So the very first show was the first show at the new theater. And once everybody knew that Cosby was coming, near that place you could not get a parking lot space because everything was taken up, like carpenters, electricians and plumbers. Everybody said, "We got to get this ready." And the "we" was, of course, the city and the Cultural Center. People wanted this ready. Cosby had never performed in New Jersey before outside of Atlantic City. And his show was the number one hit show at the time on TV. So everybody was scrambling to get this going. So much so that by the time we did the ribbon cutting that night the lobby was ready, the entrance was ready, the stairway I spoke of leading us all up, that was ready except, "Please don't touch the railings", you know, that long cause they were sticky. Um, that was it. Nothing else was there. So Cosby's in his dressing room which amounted to like this little, you know, it was just nothing back then. And then we did the ribbon cutting, then the audience came in. I think they were laying down carpet in the theater while the audience was in the reception. So finally we were able to open the doors. They came in. Lights come up. And after Penelope Lattimer and I do our thing and welcome everybody here comes Cosby. And he comes out. We're so proud because, you know, everybody…it looked so beautiful. The first thing that Cosby said was, "Man, it looks like Las Vegas out here, but it looks like Alabama back there."

(Laughing)

Khan: But, you know, when we moved to the other theater by that time, um, I was also becoming more involved nationally with the American Theater. And I think, yeah, by that time I might have been President of Theater Communications Group which is the national service organization of theaters. And we were the first black theater to move to something like this, not in the city, in the country. It also meant that we were moving to a different union status. We were going to become a LORT theater, up to that point we were a developing theater.

Listokin: So you have to pay a union scale when you…

Khan: We did before as well, but they would cut us breaks. Now we were industry standard, so now we had to pay everybody union. They didn't cut us as many breaks as they used to and it was more expensive. The space was bigger which meant that the sets needed to be bigger and all of this. And by this time Andre Robinson had just burned out, just the idea of getting this theater rolling.

Listokin: It was such a big operation.

Khan: Yes. So we started the search and we did a national search for a managing director. And, um, you know, over those years it was very important again that we try our best to get as many candidates who were people of color. Um, but it was through those years that we not only refined ourselves as an organization, but also artistically in terms of work. It was more expensive and we were in a bigger space, but does that mean it (the art) needs to be bigger? Those were a lot of the questions that we had to ask ourselves along the way.

Listokin: So what you would put on would be different just by the nature of the change in space?

Khan: Well remember the post in the middle of the stage?

Berkhout: Yeah.

Khan: In the old theater. It was a Y beam, so it wasn't just something…

Berkhout: So you did something artistically with that.

Khan: With every play, you're right. Absolutely, with every play. And it was a Y-beam so it reached out, it caused you to find another way. And so I believe that was part of our imagination and creativity at that time was finding the other way, finding a way to make it make (the obstacle) make sense. Well now here we are in the theater where there is no Y beam; there is no obstacle. And it was a very, very interesting set of lessons we learned to try to figure out how to do our work in a space that has no obstacles. It's all yours. You know, it's almost like…well the rehearsal hall. In the old theater we were in our offices, writing, trying to get our work done. But at the same time rehearsal's going on and every now and then we'd hear, (screaming), you know, a scream. And first you'd say, "Oh, what happened?" But then you realize it was just a rehearsal. And that was just the norm; it was just a normal thing. In the new space we had doors. We had this, we had hallways, we had an airlock, sound lock. So, you know, you kind of learn what you fill. How do you fill that space that was once filled by the funk of it all, you know. There's a funkiness to the old space. Um, gradually, we, in the new space, the interior designers were really into hard stuff, you know, industrial, that sort of thing. So there was a lot of industrial stuff in the theater at one time. Just metal here, metal there. And I remember one day just saying, "You know, I can't deal with this." So I remember starting to rip it down, you know, and replace it

with wood. Went out to Pier I and bought all this pottery and put it up, you know. We then started to…you know, Doug Hosney by this time was our production manager who now runs one of the theaters in the Jazz at Lincoln Center for Wynton Marsalis. But he said okay cause I wanted to create a marketplace. I never saw theater as something that just sits alone. I want it framed with a certain experience in the lobby, a certain type of music, visual arts, paintings, um, bookstore, food. And that's what we had in the old theater too, to try to compensate artwork in a gallery, and a bookstore.

Listokin: Sort of personalizing the space.

Khan: But also personalizing from a cultural point of view. So we would have our food rather than in, you know, only at a table, we were going around with baskets, you know, African baskets. And that and the pottery and the music and the artwork and all of that and literature make a point.

Listokin: Recollections on the Tony Award?

Khan: What's that?

Listokin: On the Tony Award.

Khan: Yes.

Listokin: You know, just some recollections of that.

Khan: Oh, um, I would say that I never thought that we would get something like that. I think that if our goal from the beginning was to create an important theater we never would have gotten there because the best you can do is your best work on stage. And that's what we focused on, not trying to look at us as anything bigger than this. And that was okay; this is what we were. Recognition came, you know, in many forms as we went along. But for some reason I didn't think about the Tony until we were doing an August Wilson play, "Jitney." The year before that August Wilson spoke at the annual TCG Conference in Princeton, and I was the President of the Board at the time. So he gave the keynote address. It was on the McCarter Theatre stage and I'm there sitting while he gives the speech, and it was an incredible landmark speech he gave. And I thought back to our first, maybe the second or third year of Crossroads when we first heard about TCG at this annual conference. I don't think there's anything we wanted more than to be a part of the national community or the theater community wherever it was. And it happened that that year the conference was at McCarter at Princeton. So I think that was around 1982. And we didn't have the money. Lee and I wanted to go but we didn't have the funds to pay for the tuition. We called them, "Can we get a break. We're right here." They said, "No, we can't." So we couldn't afford to go. That was in 1982; now we're talking 1997, you know, fifteen years later and I'm on the stage of the same conference as the president and this is August

Wilson. That speech then led to a conversation August and I had where he said, "Look Rick, what do you think about doing "Jitney" at Crossroads. Cause it had not come into New York. Everybody was doing August Wilson plays after it hit Broadway and all of this. I always to do an August Wilson play before it went to New York. And so when he said that it was just, oh man, that did it for me. That was a huge moment for me. And the speech he gave was also one that was quite controversial and it led to a lot of discussions, conversations after that mainly because he was trying to say that the ground is not…the playing field is not equal, and Black theater is alive and well in America because it is in many places, but it's just not funded. So that upset the funders, you know, he had issues about non traditional casting and color blind casting, and that upset the regional theaters. So now we're doing "Jitney" at Crossroads; August was there. He was living in Colony House for a month while we developed this play. I remember him saying, "I like New Brunswick, but I don't understand this cab thing. You get a cab and then they put other people in it too."

(Laughing)

Khan: That was one thing you remembered? That was one thing that he remembered. The one thing Bill Cosby remembered most about New Brunswick was how good the hamburger was at Tumulty's, and so they would order from there. So now we're doing "Jitney" and, um, the National Critics Association decides that they were going to have…they meet regularly I guess, and they wanted to know can they meet at the matinee of "Jitney." I said, "Yeah." And then they did and then after the matinee they had boxed lunches, and just found places to sit in our lobby. And shortly after that we found out they were considering us for the Tony Award, and that was the first time I ever thought about it. But we didn't get it; we were on the short list. They said, "Do you realize how close you came?" I said, "No, not at all."

And then at the end of that year in the summer we hold our staff retreats and I would pull the staff together for three or four days at a time. And I decided to give them a really big idea. And I said, "You know what, let's get the Tony next year. Let's get it. Let's get it." And from that point on I charged my staff with laying out a plan to get there. Now, of course, it's not about lobbying and I wasn't speaking about that or publicity. I was speaking about, "You know, all of this time it's always been about doing our best work on stage. If we're going to really do it and get an award like that, that award is not just about our art, it's about the whole organization. So let's figure out a plan for how to do our best work in every office, every office." And so we went through exercises called Model of Excellence, like how do we model that? How do we make excellence our goal, not only on stage but in every other space? And if we do that we're going to get this Tony. And we got the call and we did. Um, I guess that the thing that I come out of that with is that everything is possible, and too often there are too many children like me growing up in Philadelphia, in Camden, being told nothing that you want to do is possible, you know. Going through guidance

counselors who steer you away from what, you know, you could really be. This happens today. Teachers, you know, parents even saying, "Yes, you're nothing. You're not going to amount to nothing." And the child looks around and nine times out of ten that's what they see.

Um, the Tony Award for me is not an award that comes when you don't do your work; it's the award that comes when you do do your work and you believe that if you do your work good things will happen regardless of the color of your skin, regardless of your gender, regardless of your height, nationality, religion. You know, do the work, do the work. It's all about excellence.

Roscoe Brown, an original Tuskegee Airmen who was our main consultant on "Fly," said, "You know, in the forties you had to face racism in the South." These guys were at the tops of their class in college to get in to this program, to learn how to fly a plane, and then go overseas 20,000 feet in the air and you are up there, it's just you." And because they were so good and they had such a success record at protecting the bomber pilots, the bomber pilots would come back to the United States and say, "They're the ones why we're alive today." But those same black pilots that came back, they would tell the story about how they were on an aircraft carrier that came back into New York or wherever they came in, and you come to the plank, you're with all your buddies, you've earned the right to be brothers, black and white. And there's a sign that says, "Whites that way. Coloreds that way." I would hear the stories about all the stuff that would happen after that as well for years and years and years. And I asked Roscoe, "If this country is going to do this against you after you've done this for them, why did you do it? Why would anybody do it?" And he said, "Because as bad as racism was, fascism was worse." That's how they looked at it. So they had a global sense of things and a belief in their country and therefore wanting to be part of that fight on behalf of their country, and on behalf of victims all over the world. They wanted to be a part of this. As for adversity that he dealt with, he said and he says today, "Excellence, the pursuit of excellence, is what conquers all adversity." And that to me is what I believe the Tony Award says about Crossroads. It's not a reflection that I have that, yes, it makes me feel really good and really proud. I'm also very glad that it makes so many other people including my parents and family and everybody very proud in New Jersey, New Brunswick. But what it really should say to people is that you must throw a blind eye to those who say no you can't, and go forward with the pursuit of excellence being your number one goal. If you do that then you can get this.

Listokin: Your thoughts on what you were and were not able to accomplish with the Crossroads vision in both expanding to minority communities as well as opening a dialogue to the majority that may not have been exposed to apartheid and other…I mean just some thoughts there and the difficulty of them.

Khan: Yeah. I mean I definitely love the fact that we were able to create the type of American theater audience that no other theater has, and in the very beginning

that was our goal. It's not like we wanted to do theater and then it was an afterthought to be diverse. No, it was an important part of the mission. We wanted people of all colors to see who we were. And as the years went on, my personal thing became more international, global, so that it was not just pursuit to do the stories about here, but all of the world. And not just black and white, but brown and tan and everything in-between. I feel very good about that and the fact that we were able to create an audience that supports that. That's a beautiful thing. It's a kind of community that just doesn't exist anywhere else, and yet it only exists for the night and then it goes away 'til the next time.

Listokin: With 20/20 hindsight, anything you would have done differently?

Khan: So much.

Listokin: Of course we do things differently with one another. Just some…

Khan: You know, I think of course we tried very hard along the way to do the business end right. And I think sometimes we did get it right, and I think sometimes we didn't. And I think that what we were facing was harder for Crossroads in many ways than other theaters. In the early days in the new building everything was growing. New Jersey was growing. Black theater was growing. Theater, in general, was growing. Governor Kean said, "I want to be second to none." And so the goal was through the Arts Council…let's make sure that the Arts is that way throughout New Jersey. And so we were really building along with everybody else. There was an enthusiasm, and along with that enthusiasm came money. We got to the point where our annual, you know, grant from the State Arts Council was three hundred thousand dollars, but we got an additional three hundred dollars a year because we were a major impact organization and they were funding the extraordinary, like what do you want to do that's extraordinary? And so we said, "Look, we want to make sure that we're creating new works, but we also want to make sure that we're partners and producers in the future of that work in New York." You know, we did the Color Museum on TV, and it was the State Arts Council that was backing that and NJN and all of this stuff was happening at the time. We learned how to grow. Then came adversity that everybody experienced. The economy started getting crazy. Um, we had been very successful in a fundraising campaign at Crossroads so that we would be able to…I think we had something like fifty thousand dollars debt; we wanted to wipe that out. We wanted to expand our staff to include business people. General manager, fundraising people and we did that with that campaign. Four foundations supported that in a great way. And then we wanted to have a cash reserve because we didn't know what we were going to expect going into the building. No one could tell us what the rent was going to be. No one could tell us what the expenses were going to be. People just didn't know. They were all good-minded people, but they just didn't know. And when we ended up raising that money we had about four hundred thousand dollars in the bank in case something went wrong or whatever just in case. It probably could have

eventually built to an endowment which would be great. But that year was the first major cut of the Arts Council, and everybody was cut in half.

Berkhout: When would that have been?

Khan: In ’90. In 1990 everybody was cut in half. So that the ’90-’91 season at Crossroads was our last season in the old space, but we had three hundred thousand dollars less to have to work with, and that ate into that reserve a lot.

When we moved into the new theater we didn’t have a reserve. We didn’t have a long range plan. We didn’t have a lot of stuff. And it was what somebody called the Perfect Storm. You know, we moved into a building that was far more expensive, and we had to pay for all of it. At the same time we were losing three hundred thousand dollars a year from the Arts Council. And the economy was starting to go down. So all this stuff was happening and Crossroads did not know, we didn’t know how to change in the way we really should have. In hindsight I remember Christine Vincent from the Ford Foundation saying, “Rick…” By this time we didn’t have a debt, but by the time we got the end of the second year in the new theater, we were in debt by about…we had lost six hundred thousand dollars in just that one year. And the reason that we didn’t lose as much in the first year was because of Cosby. Because when Cosby came, if it was just about the benefit that’d be one thing, but he said, “No, I’ll do four performances at the State Theater also.” And the State was very supportive of that. And those shows allowed me to get all of our subscribers in, so it took the place of a production.

So it was in the second year that we really started to feel the effects. And we didn’t know what to do. We tried our best. Christine said, “I wish you could just get down to two million dollars”, cause we were at about three million dollars right there. We had thirty-three hundred members, subscribers, we were doing really well, but we weren’t making ends meet because the building was all electric, and because we had to pay… George Street Playhouse, Eric will tell you, was given a reprieve for the first five years I think where they didn’t have to pay any of that stuff or first ten years. But I think part of that was also because they had owned the building before that was part of the deal. We didn’t have anything. Once we hit the ground, we had to pay rent even though the building was paid for by the county largely through the efforts of its Executive Director, Anna Aschkenes and the County Freeholders. It was paid for. But we still had to pay rent. We had to pay all utilities. We had to pay all our cleaning. We had to pay all of these things and taxes. And I remember the first year Emily Mann who is a friend of mine and at that time was coming into McCarter Theatre. She called me one day. She said, “Rick, you’re not going to believe this. I have a gardener.”

(Laughter)

Khan: The thing about McCarter and American Repertoire Theater and Yale Rep and places that are important in this country they have their angels. They’re protected

by university there who handles everything. Um, those who have endowments are protected. Those who have, um, live in very wealthy areas like Millburn are protected. Crossroads had no protection. And in hindsight I wish we had created an endowment very early on. Crossroads also, as we developed our funding and I told you as everything was growing, the pattern we were growing into was such that we were getting a lot of contributed income. In the mainstream in the American Theater, most of the contributed income comes from individuals for a mainstream theater. Under that the next is corporations, then foundations, and then at the very lowest is government. Crossroads, by the time we moved into the new theater, developed a pattern that was the exact opposite. For us, individuals was very low. Government was the highest. Then foundations and then corporations. And it was all because they were rewarding us for what we did. But what we weren't doing at the same time was developing the type of individual support that could have made us stronger, enough to sustain problems that we would have, when Governments or when foundations would change their, you know what they wanted to do, their agenda. We also did not have a kind of Board. We didn't have CEO's on our Board; we had maybe the second in command or the third or fourths in command. So when we came to a Board Meeting and said, "Look, here's the issue; here's the problem", they couldn't solve it there at the table. They would have to say, "Okay, I'll have to go back." So the culture we created was always, not always, but, you know, once we got into the new theater it was not…we could not solve the problems. And in hindsight I would have figured out a way to cut that budget of expenses so drastically because the one thing that we do have, um, control over is what you spend. But then I have my heart, and the problem with my heart was that all of those staff members who were part of making it possible for us to get there I would have to cut half of them. How would I do that?

Berkhout: We're going to run out here a minute. I would be interested a little bit more in your decision to stay in New Brunswick and how you felt the theater contributed to or didn't to the Redevelopment in New Brunswick. Because the time you decided…

Khan: Staying in New Brunswick…

Berkhout: Yeah. You decided after college; MFA you wanted to study.

Khan: It was natural. I mean coming out of school…I was four years at Rutgers and then four years at Mason Gross. All my friends were there. There was a theater there, professional theater. There was the State Theater where I saw, um, I saw the Alvin Ailey Company. You know, there were so many things happening. I think at that time New Brunswick clearly was on the way up.

Berkhout: Yes.

Khan: Because J&J had decided to stay, that was a big message sent to us. There was New Brunswick Tomorrow there, and there were people like Roy Epps who were trying to start things, and Penelope Lattimer trying to start things. John Heldrich trying to make things happen. There were visionaries and there was Eric Kreps and John Bettenbender and I was there, and we just felt like we could do this. So there was never a decision to stay in New Brunswick. It just was a natural thing.

Listokin: And your thoughts about the Redevelopment of New Brunswick experience clearly a lot of what was there was gone.

Khan: There was I think…with all redevelopment there's dislocation. And I saw that neighborhood I was describing earlier. I saw that go away. The neighborhood was made up of blacks and whites and Dominicans and straight and gay and you could walk in a two-block distance and in that walk you would pass at least five different types of music. I loved that. Um, it was not the nicest neighborhood to look at. So with the revitalization I'm very, very, you know, grateful for the fact that they saw the Arts as an important part of that. When restaurants came along of course it also caused rents to go up. Not just in New Brunswick but in other cities where theaters were, and then the rents went up because the restaurant moved in because of theater. This didn't happen so much in New Brunswick to us because we were part of the Cultural Center. But if you weren't part of the Cultural Center, I think it made it harder to become an Arts organization. You know, I also have always felt that the Cultural Center should not just be about this thing and this thing and this thing and this thing and this thing, but if there are four Arts groups that are part of the Cultural Center then there are four missions, but that there should be a fifth. The fifth should be about what all of us mean to each other, and as of today, I don't think we've gotten there.

Listokin: So actually wearing my Professor of Urban Planning hat, you really don't see in the United States where the redevelopment has occurred without the displacement.

Khan: Yeah, right.

Listokin: Lincoln Center. I mean it's almost…maybe one or two examples…what was the national policy and what were planners doing with this. There wasn't participation of the indigenous communities. They were displaced. Very little with no safety net, etc.

Khan: Which is why I say dislocated because you're not whole after that. You move but you're not whole. The community wasn't there, it was spread out. You know, when we spread out the projects, the homes, the projects, you know, they're all dislocated. But at the same time I think that cement is a big, big, problem anyway. So I'm glad those aren't there, and I'm glad that what was replacing them were two-story homes and three-story…places where people could actually

have a garden. There's so many things that I think have been very positive about the things that happened in New Brunswick and in the Arts.

Listokin: Thank you so much. This has been moving and informative.

Khan: I could probably talk forever I guess.

Berkhout: We went for two hours. This is probably our longest.

Khan: Oh, really.

Listokin: We are in your debt.

Khan: And we just scratched the surface.

Berkhout: I know.

Listokin: And you'll see in our write-up how little there was in Crossroads. You can't talk about what happened in New Brunswick with sort of getting it third hand or second hand. So thank you.

Khan: You're welcome. It is my pleasure, it was an honor to do it. A couple of our really important friends, Ruby Dee and Ozzie Davis, huge supporters of Crossroads. You know, you just watch…there's certain people like that and like my parents. You look at them. You see how they go through life and what means so much to them. From them I get this. This is not me doing a favor, this is part of my responsibility, and I'm grateful for that.

Berkhout: That's great.

Listokin: One of my first research projects at Rutgers was in Camden. We were looking at…in North Camden there was a major effort. It was Camden Housing Improvement Project. They rehabilitated like five hundred homes, etc. Camden challenges what you do.

Khan: I know. My brother is down there . . . my brother ran for mayor.

Berkhout: Oh, is that right?

Khan: And he's going to run again. Yeah, yeah, he's causing a lot of stir because, you know, because you got Norcross and the machine he is up against, and you just got all that stuff happening, you know.

Listokin: There are powers that be in South Jersey.

Berkhout: And the history of Abscam. Did you see the movie?

Khan: Abscam, yes.

Berkhout: About the former mayor of Camden.

Khan: Yeah. Errichetti was it…Errichetti.

Berkhout: I can't remember. What was his name, the mayor? But that was what the movie was about.

Khan: Do you remember Nelson in New Brunswick, Mary Nelson and ? Oh God, he was an attorney; he was the city attorney.

Listokin: Busch?

Khan: No. No, Nelson was his last name. I can't remember, but he went away because he was involved with the land thing.

Berkhout: Abscam?

Khan: No, land thing, but it was a New Brunswick thing. It was not all him. He was the one who took the fall, but Lynch was involved and all those folks were involved.

Listokin: We interviewed John Lynch by the way.

Khan: Oh, you did.

Berkhout: Yes.

Listokin: As a matter of fact, it was very poignant. It was when he was released like in a halfway house type of situation. So I knew the mayor when he was the mayor and having the Senate to him, big power broker. And then we're interviewing him in some non descript engineering firm after he was…not freed, but, you know, some halfway release.

Berkhout: It's a halfway house, yeah.

Listokin: I said, "Boy, this is a Greek tragedy."

Khan: It really is. What John Lynch did I think was huge. It was major for everybody.

Listokin: It was huge? I mean it would not have happened.

Khan: Is he still married to that…?

Listokin: I don't remember.

Berkhout: The woman who owned LaFontana, yes. They moved to Princeton.

Khan: Who was the one who was in the mob?

Berkhout: Yeah, I think that was his…

Listokin: What was . . .

Berkhout: I think he's still married to her. They moved to a great big house in Princeton, but they sold that, and I don't know where they are now.

Khan: I got it. Oh, that was LaFontana?

Berkhout: Yeah, she owned that.

Khan: Oh, I didn't know that. You know who I miss, is Frank Panico.

Berkhout: Oh, yeah. I don't think that restaurant has been doing as well.

Khan: No, no.

Listokin: Actually, one of the things we're trying to figure out in our minds is how replicable…should we be doing one in Brunswick? So that's part of redevelopment and change. Then there is how replicable is what happened in New Brunswick. Part of it was and part of it is not. And then were interesting factors you would not have thought about. One, the size of the city was a positive. You're a smaller community, so if you have a J&J deciding to stay and you can revitalize the core, it has more impact than it would be in Detroit.

Khan: Yeah, that's right.

Listokin: People moved away but still had a connection.

Khan: Yeah, yeah.

Listokin: They went to church. They moved to Highland Park, so it wasn't like New Brunswick was totally off their consciousness.

Khan: It's interesting how close so many cities are. I mean cities. Towns. There's Highland Park.

Listokin: And, again, so we will share these thoughts. Thank you so much.

Berkhout: We're going to have this transcribed, and then if you wouldn't mind looking it over for any errors.

Khan: God help whoever is doing that.

Berkhout: And if you wouldn't mind…

Khan: Oh, the name…

Berkhout: Signing this. That just says that you give us permission to use this. We're not going to sell it.

Khan: No, of course. I just wanted to…it was in here. I just wanted to make sure you knew it was K-h-a-n.

Berkhout: Yes. It wasn't correct in there?

[End of Audio – 2:01:48 minutes]