

VOICE OVER #1

MISHA: The sixties:  
The world shakes, rattles and rolls.  
Elvis rules and the Beatles reign.  
Russia puts the first man in space.  
Trisha Brown walks on walls.  
Steve Paxton cooks up contact improvisation.  
Kruschev and Castro cook up a crisis in Cuba.  
Kennedy says "no" to Russian missiles.  
Yvonne Rainer says "no" to American dance conventions.  
Marilyn dies, Eichmann hangs and Mandela goes to prison.  
David Gordon marries Valda Setterfield and they have a son.  
Lucinda Childs performs monologues with objects.  
Twiggy performs for the camera in mini skirts.  
Someone invents pantyhose.  
"Pop Art" pops and "Happenings" happen.  
Deborah Hay practices Tai Chi Chuan.  
Simone Forti practices "non theatrical time."  
Jackie Kennedy meets the Queen of England  
and looks like the Queen of America.  
Audiocassettes and touchtone phones reshape our lives.  
And non dairy creamer reshapes our coffee.

In Russia, in the sixties, I'm a teenager.  
I know about Levis and Wranglers  
and Buster Keaton and Fred Astaire and Martha Graham  
but like most Russians  
and most Americans  
I don't know anything about the Judson Church.

VOICE OVER # 2

MISHA: At the corner of fourteenth street  
and Avenue of the Americas  
(which New Yorkers still call Sixth Ave)  
there's a building once shared by The Living Theater  
and the Merce Cunningham Dance Studios.  
That's where Judy and Bob Dunn teach composition in 1962.  
She is a Cunningham dancer  
and he is a musician who plays the piano for classes.  
The cost of the workshop is fifteen dollars.  
One dollar a week for fifteen weeks.  
Free if you can't afford it.

The dancers come from all over.  
With baggage.  
Ballet or toe tap or acrobatics or gymnastics.  
Or Graham or Limon or Nikolais.  
Or Jimmy Waring or Anna Halperin.  
And the movies.  
And don't forget television. It's 1962.  
They think maybe they want to make dances.

There's a kind of philosophical earthquake  
that can happen when, all by chance,  
the right bunch of people are in the right place  
at the right time  
telling each other what they think  
and showing each other what they do.  
Like the best kind of family gathering.  
The string beans and the corn are not overcooked and  
your father tells stories you never heard before.

In 1962 I study at the Riga Dance School  
and then I tour with the company  
and then in Leningrad  
I meet my teacher Alexander Pushkin  
at the Vagonova school.  
And he tells stories I never heard before.  
"Listen everybody," Bob Dunn calls out,  
"the first assignment is to make a three minute dance,  
and don't work on it too much..."

That must be a very American thing to say.

VOICE OVER #3

MISHA: So the Dunn class is making lots of dances and some of them get the idea to show what they're doing. To perform.

One of the places where dance performances happen, in those days, is the 92nd Street Y. On Lexington Avenue. Uptown. They have auditions.

Everyone in the Dunn class (who wants to) goes to the audition. One by one they're called in. They show their stuff. The judges say "you call that dance?" Everyone is turned down.

Okay. Maybe the judges only say "no thanks." But everyone is turned down. Everyone goes back downtown. Steve and Yvonne look for a new place. Not necessarily a proscenium theater.

How about an "alternative space?" they ask? Okay. Maybe they didn't say "alternative space." But that's what it turned out to be.

By the grace of God or at least with the help of one of his ministers, the Reverend Al Carmines, they are accepted at The Judson Memorial Church. Fifty five Washington Square. New York City.

The first concert begins at 8:30 on Friday July 6, 1962 In the sanctuary of the Judson sixteen artists present twenty some odd new works and a film. The house is packed. Over three hundred people. Over ninety degrees outside. Hotter inside. No air conditioning. Three hours later the performance is over.

It won't be that long tonight.

VOICE OVER #4

MISHA: Dances are passed on  
by the dancers who once danced them.  
Second generation.  
Third generation.  
I learned ----- from -----  
He told me -----

Meanwhile, I come to live in America.  
I become an American citizen.  
I become a citizen of the American dance world.

There's no video of the early work of these American artists  
There's no video tape of the first Judson performances.  
Video didn't happen yet.  
There are some still photos and some notes  
and the memories of dancers.

In the Spring of 1999  
my friend Sue Weil and I go to a benefit at the Judson  
and there is Yvonne Rainer's TRIO A  
and David Gordon's CHAIR  
danced by next generations.  
Maybe White Oak should do this work.  
Sue says "good idea."

(STARS AND STRIPES MUSIC STARTS SOFTLY)

I already know Trisha and I call her.  
I call Yvonne.  
Trisha and Yvonne say call Steve.  
I find Steve in Vermont.  
Nobody is exactly saying yes but nobody is saying no.  
I call Simone in L.A. and Lucinda in Paris.  
I call Deborah in Austin, Texas.  
I call David in Pasadena and ask if he'll direct.  
He says no.  
I already know David. He always says no first.  
Once I asked David to make a ballet for ABT.  
First he said no. Then he used metal folding chairs.  
He likes chairs.

(PHOTO OR VIDEO OF DAVID & VALDA DOING CHAIR)  
(TITLE: VALDA SETTERFIELD, DAVID GORDON - CHAIR 1975  
PAULA COOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY)

Valda was in a car hit by a Long Island Railroad Train.  
Falling off a chair is David's idea of physical therapy  
"Think of the chair as a dancing partner," he says.  
"Think of the sounds the chair makes as music."  
Twenty five years later, I say, "Teach us to do CHAIR  
"Better get some knee pads," Valda says.