

San Francisco Film Society
Oral History Project

Interview with Barnaby Conrad
Conducted by Margarita Landazuri
San Francisco, CA
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MARGARITA LANDAZURI: This is Tuesday, February 27, 2007. This is Margarita Landazuri in San Francisco, telephone interview with Barnaby Conrad in Carpenteria.

BARNABY CONRAD: I'm looking at your questionnaire. I don't know if I got it in the right order.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: It doesn't matter.

BARNABY CONRAD: How did I get involved in the Film Festival?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Yes, how did you get involved in the Film Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: I haven't the faintest idea. Bud Levin approached me at one point. Bud was very much a one-man operation. Unlike Claude, he did it all, and we just kind of stood around and went to the parties, and gave parties, and that sort of thing. Went to the Opening Night. Bud did it all.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: How did you know him?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. I'm not sure. Maybe my saloon, El Matador, was open and he probably came in. He was a very nice fellow. But he really didn't run the Festival the way it should have been run like Claude did.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK, well, we'll get to that in a little bit. Because I do want to know more about Bud Levin. There aren't many people around who remember him.

BARNABY CONRAD: All I can say is he was a very nice fella. I didn't see him except at Film Festival time. We weren't pals or anything, but I certainly admired him.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What do you think it was about you that made him say, "Get involved." Did you know a lot about film? Had you worked in the film industry?

BARNABY CONRAD: My book **Matador** was taken by John Huston and Jose Ferrer. I did a little film work, nothing memorable. I did write a **Playhouse 90**. John Frankenheimer directed and Jack Palance was in it. But I'm just not sure. There weren't that many people in those days that cared that much about film, but I've always cared about it.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Now, this specifically was an international film festival to bring in foreign films. What was it like here as far as, in the '50s, about knowledge about foreign film? Was there much of it?

BARNABY CONRAD: No. And that's one thing that Bud did. He brought in foreign films. He owned the theaters. I've forgotten, was it the Castro Theatre?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: The Metro. The Balboa. There were about—

BARNABY CONRAD: The Balboa. The Balboa, yes. That's just about it. And Herb Caen—a foreign film would come in, and it would be the only foreign film in town, probably, and Herb Caen was so powerful that if he said, "You gotta go see this French movie," or Italian movie, or whatever, at the Balboa, it would get an extra couple months' run. Herb was big on film, especially films that the ordinary public wouldn't see if he didn't tout them.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Did you get involved from the very beginning? The first year was '57.

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. But probably. I don't know quite why. But I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything for Bud Levin, except, as I say, go to the parties!

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: And the parties were a big thing in those days, weren't they?

BARNABY CONRAD: Yeah, the parties were it. Yeah. A lot of dreary Polish films and things like that, and the films were secondary to the parties. People would walk out. I didn't go to half the films. They were not always good. If they were good, they'd come back. So you didn't have to see them at the Film Festival. And the parties were endless. You couldn't go to the parties *and* the films and last the week.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Who were some of the other people involved in those early days? Who were some of the partygoers?

BARNABY CONRAD: You know, I can't remember. I can't remember. It wasn't that important. It only became important when Claude took it over.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Let's transition into that a little bit, because you say that Bud Levin was a one-man operation and he didn't run it that well. What do you mean by that?

BARNABY CONRAD: He ran it as well as he could, but it really took off with Claude. One thing which I think I contributed—you'd have to ask Claude, but I think I contributed it with Claude—I said, "Why don't we have retrospectives celebrating so-and-so." The way all Film Festivals did in those days, they'd celebrate a dead director and dead star and have a parade of their films. I said, "Let's get live directors." The very first one that I remember that we got was William Wellman, who directed **Wings**, a historic film. He worked right up to the end. I can't remember what his last film was—I'd have to look it up, but I don't have that book handy, but if you look up William Wellman, he directed **The Silence**. Right up to the end he'd be directing. We got him first.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That first year, in 1965, there was like ten American directors' tributes.

BARNABY CONRAD: Really? That was the first year of Claude's reign?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Yes. There was Wellman. There was—

BARNABY CONRAD: Clint Eastwood.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: No, that was something else.

BARNABY CONRAD: Later?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: He was honored as a new director in 1971. So, you had been a juror for the Festival before you joined the board? They had the Golden Gate Awards, which at that time were Best Film—you know, the usual awards: Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress, which later changed. And had you been on the jury before Claude took over?

BARNABY CONRAD: Maybe.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: All right. Now, the Edward Dmytryk story that I read, which was in a Paine Knickerbocker article, said that Edward Dmytryk served on the Golden Gate Awards jury and Alvah Bessie was a publicist for the Festival. Do you remember that confrontation?

BARNABY CONRAD: Not really, no.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: So after Bud Levin resigned in '65, Claude Jarman took over, and did your involvement change at that point?

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, yes. Because Claude and I were friends. I think I got a call—I think he called me Mr. Conrad—asking me to help take over the Festival. He kind of eased Bud out. I don't know quite how the politics worked, but he was determined to make a really good film festival. He asked if I would participate with him, and I said, "Sure." To make it a better festival for San Francisco, for the people of San Francisco who go to films.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Do you remember how Albert Johnson got involved?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. I did not know Albert until he came on. He was known as Mr. Film. He really was very knowledgeable and very opinionated and a pain in the ass. You can quote me!

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: [LAUGHS] I will! This is on tape.

BARNABY CONRAD: But he was brilliant. He really knew his stuff, and Claude realized that. That he knew more about films than any of us.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Those were his strengths. What about Claude? What were his strengths?

BARNABY CONRAD: Claude could charm the birds out of the trees. And he got whatever he wanted. He was low-key but in a gentle manner, he could convince people of anything. He could get all these people to come out from Hollywood. Speaking of that, I was doing a portrait of the Bing Crosby family and Bing said, “How’s the Festival going?” I said, “Well, we’d love to have Walt Disney, but nobody can get Walt Disney.” And he said, “What do you want Walt to do?” I said, “We’d love to honor him. We’ve called, and even Claude can’t get him. He just said he doesn’t do that sort of thing.” So Bing said, “Wait a minute, Barney. I’ve got his telephone number here. He owes me a favor. I did the Headless Horseman narration and I didn’t charge him a cent. He owes me a big one.” So he dials up the telephone and says, “Honey, let me talk to Walt. It’s Bing Crosby. Walt, listen. I got a friend here and he wants you to come to the San Francisco Film Festival.” Well, to make a long story much longer, I picked Disney up at the airport and we honored him. That’s the only time he’d ever been to a film festival. That was a big coup.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What year was that? I wrote that down somewhere. They showed **Snow White**. It was 1965.

BARNABY CONRAD: He was gracious. Went right back to Hollywood afterwards.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: You do a great Bing Crosby imitation, by the way!

BARNABY CONRAD: [LAUGHS] I spent a lot of time with Bing. I did portraits of his whole family. This has nothing to do with the Film Festival, but once—the funny thing is, you think Bing Crosby is a friend of everybody. Everybody thought that he and Bob Hope were great friends. He said, “Well, Bob’s a nice fellow, but all he can do is talk about show biz. There are other things in life.” He loved prize fighting. He loved any sporting event. He’d call up. One time he called up, Mary called out to me, “Barney, pick up the phone, Bing wants to talk to you. He wants to go to the fight tomorrow.”

So my little six-year-old daughter said, “You’re gonna talk to Bing Crosby?” And I said, “Yeah.” And she said, “Can I listen on the other phone?” And I said, “No, you little rat, you can’t.” I said, “You don’t even know who Bing Crosby is.” And she said, “Yes, I do.” And I said, “All right, who is Bing Crosby?” She said, “He is the President of the United States of America!” I told Bing, and I thought he was going to laugh himself silly. Actually, just before he died, he sent a photograph of himself to our now grownup daughter signed, “From the President of the United States.”

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That’s sweet. Now, I understand—I think Claude told me that he tried and tried to get Bing Crosby to do a tribute and he wouldn’t do it.

BARNABY CONRAD: That’s possible. He didn’t like—he had a separate life. He had an entertainment life in Hollywood or wherever, and he also had a very, very private life.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: But he would come to the Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: Yeah. He said, “As long as I don’t have to wear the rug.” He hated to put on that toupée. He’d say, “I’ll come if I don’t have to wear the rug.”

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: You know, I saw him once at one of the Festivals, early, mid-seventies maybe, and I recognized him and I saw him there without the toupée, just kind of wandering around, you know, not being obvious or anything.

BARNABY CONRAD: He’s so much smaller than one expects.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: So, it appears in those early days with Claude Jarman in charge, the board was more hands-on, helping choose the films, helping plan the retrospectives.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, yeah. The board really worked. The only problem—as you well know—was the Shirley Temple episode.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Yes. Tell me about that.

BARNABY CONRAD: **Night Games** was the movie. A Swedish film.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Directed by Mai Zetterling.

BARNABY CONRAD: I can't even remember what the film was about, but I think there was a sex scene. Whatever. But it was a very powerful film. But Shirley was very prudish. She's a very intelligent woman, but she really took umbrage. She said, "If this film shows, I quit." And Claude said, "Goodbye." In his quiet way, he wasn't about to be told who was the boss. Reluctantly—because she is an intelligent woman and she is Shirley Temple—and she was gone. Claude tried to be diplomatic and said, "I hope you don't feel that way. Let's think about it," or something, and she said, "No. If you accept this film and show this film, I quit." It wasn't that good a film, but we didn't want to be told what to think.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Now, tell me, I hear from Claude that Nancy Pelosi was involved in planning Festival parties.

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no memory of Nancy Pelosi whatsoever.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: But anyway, what were some of the more memorable parties? I read newspaper accounts and they just sound fantastic.

BARNABY CONRAD: Well, I don't know. A party's a party. I don't remember any particular parties. My wife and I tried to avoid them.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: There was one, I think, that was on an airplane. There was one that was out on a boat out on the water.

BARNABY CONRAD: I can believe it. I do remember one out on the water with Herb Caen, but I don't remember anything memorable.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK. Now, one of the things that happened, and one of the reasons that Claude Jarman became the head of the Festival, is that the Chamber of Commerce got involved. What was the relationship of the Chamber of Commerce to the Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: You said you were good friends with Claude. You were talking about his strengths as a leader. How did the Festival change? What did he do to put the Festival on a different track?

BARNABY CONRAD: First of all, he brought Hollywood alive to San Francisco, which Bud never did. Bud did his best, but it just changed overnight. It just changed overnight. Claude brought in all kinds of people in San Francisco. Running it. Caring about it. Giving parties for it. And then he attracted these people from Hollywood. He did have credentials in Hollywood. You know, Claude made 14 films. Everybody remembers only **The Yearling**, but he went on to make—

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: **Intruder in the Dust** is the one I remember. That's fabulous.

BARNABY CONRAD: Yes. That's his last. But he knew everybody, and everybody liked him. That made a big difference.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: How long did you remain involved with the Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: Until I moved away. I moved to Santa Barbara and got a job teaching art at the Cate School. My parents lived here in Santa Barbara and I moved down here and then I got married. Forty years ago. So I have no idea.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Do you remember anything about the Golden Gate Awards and the competition?

BARNABY CONRAD: No.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: So in 1965 and '66, the board as you say was more involved and it seems that each board member had an assignment and worked in certain areas. Like, a couple

of years you worked in retrospectives and tributes. Other years you worked in choosing films. Could you talk a little about those roles?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. You know, I can't even remember who was on the board. Can you remind me of who was on the board?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I don't have the list right here, so I'm not sure. Stanley Mosk, I think, was on.

BARNABY CONRAD: Yeah, Judge Mosk. But I don't think he did much on the board. I mean, he was a busy working judge. He was the general chairman. Did you hear my story about Olivia de Havilland?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Oh, tell me. Yes, please. I want to hear about that one.

BARNABY CONRAD: Claude said, "We've got Olivia de Havilland coming." I said, "Great!" He said, "Would you mind picking her up at the train tomorrow?" I said, "Train?" He said, "Yeah, she's going to be on the train from Los Angeles." So I went down all eager to meet Olivia de Havilland, and all I could think of was **Robin Hood**, how gorgeous she was in **Robin Hood**. So I stood there in the station—the train came in and I stood by the first class coach and all these people got off. There was no Olivia de Havilland. I went up to the conductor and said, "I'm looking for Olivia de Havilland. Did you happen to see her?" He said, "Oh, yes. She went that way." I ran out, and there she was hailing a cab, and this little dumpy gray-haired woman was not the woman I was looking for! I was looking for the one that Errol Flynn was looking for as Robin Hood. I said, "Oh, Miss de Havilland, I'm so sorry. I got here late." I didn't want to say that I wasn't looking for a dumpy little gray-haired woman. She couldn't have been more charming. So I got to take her to the hotel.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That's great.

BARNABY CONRAD: I think I told you about Bette Davis. That was in the Masonic.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That was in '68, I believe.

BARNABY CONRAD: You know so much more about it than I do.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, I've got notes I've studied.

BARNABY CONRAD: I've never thought back on this.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: So, yes, tell the Bette Davis story.

BARNABY CONRAD: For some reason, I was booked to shepherd her around and she was kind of snippy. Not very charming person with underlings, and I was an underling. Everybody was an underling to Bette Davis. But we were standing in the wings and she was so nervous, she kept pacing. She said, "Kid, get me a drink. Get me a drink, kid." I was a kid of 43. "Get me a drink." I said, "Miss Davis, there's no drinks. This is a Masonic temple, Masonic Hall." She said, "Run out and get me one." I said, "You're on in five minutes." There she was, smoking. Arm waving in circles, blowing out smoke, and then she was on and she was wonderful. She walked out and just looked out over the whole audience scathingly and didn't say a word, and then she said, "What a dump!" And the whole place erupted. The whole place erupted.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Let's talk about some of those fabulous director tributes, because 1965 was the first year for that. Ten American directors, including, as you said, William Wellman, King Vidor, Busby Berkeley, Mervyn Leroy, Gene Kelly. Do you remember any of those? Were you involved in, you know—

BARNABY CONRAD: I was there, but I was not involved in getting any of them. But I certainly approved them. Claude and I and the others would say, "Who do we want?" And we'd say, "Everybody that's famous." And no other film festival has ever gotten them. Not even Cannes. Cannes never had retrospectives like ours. And I don't think any—Santa Barbara's come along. The Santa Barbara Film Festival's come along pretty well. I'm not involved in any way, but they had a pretty darned good year this year. They had pretty great people. Nearly all the Oscar winners. But, of course, they're an hour and a half away. We had to bring them in from a long way away.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What about any memorable films? Anything that stands out in your mind?

BARNABY CONRAD: No, I can't think of any.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK, that's all right. There was this David O. Selznick Award, which is actually what Olivia de Havilland came to present in 1966, I believe. This was, I guess, for a career achievement kind of thing. It was given to people like Toshiro Mifune, Luis Buñuel, Pasolini, Godard. Do you remember anything about that?

BARNABY CONRAD: No. Were they all there?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I don't think so, no. But some of them were. One of the things, talking about the parties and everything, there's some fabulous photos. There's a great photo from 1966 on the Web site also, which shows Carroll Baker arriving with Jack Warner in a very revealing dress, and evidently Jayne Mansfield wore a very revealing dress.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, boy! I remember that.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Tell me about it.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, yeah, I remember going into the Fairmont—for some reason, I was with her, and part of her really fell out of the dress as she got out of the cab; she tucked it back in using both hands. You talk about Anna Nicole Smith! I remember, I think it was the same year, unless I'm wrong, I went by a table at the Fairmont dining room, and there was Rita Hayworth all by herself. I sat down and said, "Can I do anything for you, Miss Hayworth?" She was just starting to get Alzheimer's and she was very sweet, but just out of it. Not drunk. It was very sad.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What about Opening Nights? What kind of considerations went into choosing an Opening Night film?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. Claude would know.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: He does, yeah. I just thought if you had any take on it.

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Again, 1966 was a great year for tributes. George Cukor, Jack Warner, Fred Astaire. Do you remember that one?

BARNABY CONRAD: You know, I would have loved to have met Fred Astaire, but I don't remember him coming and I don't remember meeting him.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, Jack Warner was there, and I guess he was kind of salty.

BARNABY CONRAD: I don't remember meeting Jack Warner.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK, 1967 was the Chamber of Commerce's last year of getting involved. Do you remember if the Festival's budget suffered at all?

BARNABY CONRAD: No.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK. This year, also, you were involved in the film selection committee. How did you go about choosing films? Did you travel to festivals?

BARNABY CONRAD: No. Claude would set up the showings and they would come to us. We didn't go anywhere. Maybe Claude did, but I certainly didn't travel.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: And what was the criteria for choosing films? Did everybody on the committee have to agree?

BARNABY CONRAD: I think we basically all did. We were looking for great films. Sometimes we would take a mediocre film because that country had never made a film, or whatever. We tried to be as international as possible, but still try to eliminate the dogs. There were a lot of dogs, let me tell you. Dreary, dreary films from Poland.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: [LAUGHS] You don't like those Eastern European films, huh?

BARNABY CONRAD: No! No! They were pretty bad. Very dark and badly lit.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: This era, the late sixties, was, of course, the hippie era. And there was a newspaper article in 1967 that had a picture of a hippie pinning a peace button on a socialite. Did the festival reach out to younger audiences, and was any of the programming aimed at them?

BARNABY CONRAD: I don't think on purpose. We wouldn't pick a film just because it would hit the younger audience. We wanted good films. We didn't care what they hit.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: A couple of Hollywood greats were honored that year: Henry Fonda and William Holden.

BARNABY CONRAD: I didn't meet either of them.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: How about some of the directors? Robert Aldrich, Agnès Varda, Jacques Demy.

BARNABY CONRAD: I think I met Varda, because her brother, the artist, lived on a houseboat in Sausalito—Varda, the artist. But that's the only one that rings a bell. I met Claude Rains.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Claude Rains? Really?

BARNABY CONRAD: Yeah.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Wow!

BARNABY CONRAD: I remember him. I was very impressed to meet him.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I didn't see him as getting a tribute. Did he come for somebody else?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. Wait a minute. No, no. I'm terribly sorry. It was Mason. James Mason. It was not Claude Rains—It was Mason. James Mason.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Oh, another sinister character.

BARNABY CONRAD: Another sinister character, yeah. We must've given him a tribute, because why would he have been here?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I think he was here for a film, too. I can't remember what it is. Oh, '68 was the year that Rita Hayworth was here. She attended Opening Night.

BARNABY CONRAD: She was really a zombie.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I think she came with the Crosbys. They were the hosts of Opening Night.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, how odd. That doesn't sound like Crosby.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, that's what it says in the newspapers. By this time, Alioto was mayor. How was he for the Festival? What did he do for the Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: He was great. He loved people and had great charm. Everybody liked him. That's how I remember him.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Did he make sure that the Festival got funding?

BARNABY CONRAD: You'd have to ask Claude. I never had anything to do with it.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: In '68, John Huston was here.

BARNABY CONRAD: He came very frequently to San Francisco. He loved San Francisco. Billy Pearson. One night, I had a play opening in Broadway, and at that point I didn't have a

whole lot of money, and the funny thing was I wasn't sure whether I could afford to go to work on the play. Franchot Tone was starring in it, but I had to work on the script, and I wasn't sure that I could really afford to bring my wife, Mary. We had a poker game at my house one night. Billy Pearson, Enrico Banducci, Herb Caen, and John Huston—and Mary took them for \$1,500. The poker game lasted until seven in the morning, and two days later we were off to New York! But the guys couldn't believe it. Mary's a very good card player. Bridge mostly, but she plays any card game. And she took 'em! They couldn't believe it. John said, "She's just a woman! She's just a woman!"

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That sounds like him.

BARNABY CONRAD: Yeah. Mary hated John Huston, but she loved Billy Pearson. Everybody loved Billy Pearson.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I think a lot of women disliked John Huston.

BARNABY CONRAD: He'd walk all over them, you know, and cast them away like Kleenex.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: According to the newspaper accounts of his tribute, he was also quite grumpy. He attacked American film critics. I can't remember what film that would have been, 1968. Just looking in my notes. But he was here. He had a—would it be **Fat City**, maybe? I'm not sure.

BARNABY CONRAD: That sounds right.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Lillian Gish was also honored that year. Do you remember meeting her?

BARNABY CONRAD: No, I would have liked to.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: William Wyler, another great director.

BARNABY CONRAD: I knew William Wyler, but not in San Francisco. For the **New York Times Magazine** I wrote an article on Barbra Streisand and Wyler was directing **Funny Girl**. I spent ten days on the set there. Somebody went up to Billy Wilder and said, “Oh, Mr. Wyler.” And he says, “Wilder.” But he said, “What’s the difference? Manet. Monet.”

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: That’s funny. Let me see, who else? Edward G. Robinson.

BARNABY CONRAD: Albert was interviewing him. Albert asked him if he took questions from the audience. Edward G. Robinson looked down at somebody and said, “Yes, what would you like, Miss?” And Albert said, “Mr. Robinson, that’s not a Miss; that’s a man.” And he said, “Look at the long hair. How am I supposed to know?” “Mr. Robinson, he has a beard.” He said, “Oh, shit. How am I supposed to know these days?” He was in gangster mode.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What about Kirk Douglas?

BARNABY CONRAD: I don’t remember. Kirk tried to buy my book, **Matador**, so I know him. But I don’t remember him at all, there.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, of course, ’68 was also the year that your friend Bud Boetticher was here with **Aruzza**.

BARNABY CONRAD: I’ve known him forever. Bud is my best friend. But I’ve forgotten. I mean, I saw the picture, but I don’t remember him being up there.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: I thought that maybe you had something to do with bringing him.

BARNABY CONRAD: Maybe I did. I probably did. I’ve known Bud forever. He only died about two years ago.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Yeah. So you don’t remember that?

BARNABY CONRAD: No.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: OK. You were talking about Albert, Albert Johnson. What was his style like, his interviewing style? How did he relate to the audiences and to the people who were being interviewed?

BARNABY CONRAD: Well, he sort of had a wonderful arrogance about him. Elegance and arrogance. He dazzled the people he interviewed because he knew more about them than they knew about themselves. So he got immediate respect from the interviewee, and of course the audience loved him. He had flair. He had real flair.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: One of the things that happened in '68, I believe, was when he was interviewing Michelangelo Antonioni, he said to the audience, "Show your respect and ask intelligent questions." So he would lecture the audience.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, yeah. He scolded. And he wasn't afraid of these people he was interviewing, these great people. He'd say, "Well, you're terribly wrong. You did NOT make that movie in '63; you made it in '48." And the people would be kind of cowered by his knowledge.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: How did the audiences respond to his manner?

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, they knew they were in the presence of greatness, because he told them so! [LAUGHS] "You are very lucky to be listening to me," was sort of his attitude.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: 1969. Opening Night. The pie fight. Do you remember that?

BARNABY CONRAD: The what?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: The pie fight. Opening Night, where a bunch of filmmaker activists came and started throwing pies as people were entering the theatre.

BARNABY CONRAD: Maybe I wasn't there.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Maybe you weren't. What year did you leave?

BARNABY CONRAD: I have no idea. Mary and I were traveling. What year was this?

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: '69.

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, I don't think I was there at that time.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: This was the year Bette Davis was at the Festival, so you had to be there. Maybe you didn't go to Opening Night. There was a Fellini-themed party that year. Maybe you don't remember?

BARNABY CONRAD: No, I don't.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: One of the things I wanted to ask you about the Bette Davis event, some press accounts say that the event began at 10:30 am and went on into the early evening. How is that possible?

BARNABY CONRAD: I don't know. Perhaps they showed film after film.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: How about Mike Nichols, do you remember that?

BARNABY CONRAD: No, but I knew Mike Nichols.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: You knew everybody!

BARNABY CONRAD: Well, I knew Mike Nichols. Mike lived with Pat Scott, his wife of a few months, very few months. They lived up above my studio on Telegraph Hill, and I would see them all the time. And then I went every single night to the Hungry I for Nichols and May. They were there 27 days, and I went every single night to hear them at the improv. I've never seen such brilliance in my life. They had a few set things that they would do, but then they would just improvise.

They would call out, “OK, give me an author.” And somebody would say, “Dostoyevsky” or “John Steinbeck,” and they said, “OK. Dostoyevsky. Give me an opening sentence.” And somebody would say, “Honesty is the best policy.” “OK, that’ll do. Give me a closing sentence.” And somebody would say, “Death to the traitor!” And they would—without speaking to each other—Elaine and Mike would sit there on their stools for about one minute and then she would say, [HEAVY ACCENT] “Honesty ees the best policy.” And then he would pick it up and they would create a scene, a story, and it would have to end with “Put the toothpaste back,” or whatever it was.

This is being vainglorious, but one night somebody said, “Conrad.” “What style do you want?” “Conrad.” And Mike Nichols said, “Joseph Conrad?” And the person said, “No. Barnaby Conrad.” And I was there. I almost died. They did a **Matador** thing. I would give anything to have a recording of that. It was hilarious. They got a first line and a last line. [HEAVY ACCENT] “Oh, the buzzard is on the cactus. That ees a very bad sign when you are going to the boollfight.” [LAUGHS]

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, that was already when he was a serious director. So you’re not sure what year. How much longer were you on the board?

BARNABY CONRAD: No. Mary and I were traveling to Spain and so forth. I have no idea. But Mary was involved, too. She was involved with the parties and so forth, she and her friends. She was very much involved, but not on the board. On the party-throwing side.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: What’s your best memory about being involved with the Festival?

BARNABY CONRAD: That the whole city seemed to be involved in a great art. I’m not sure that the San Francisco Film Festival didn’t have a great deal of other effect on other festivals. One of the obvious reasons was we honored live people—people who were making movies, still, and that had created history. Like William Wellman. And they were still alive, and we honored them while they were still alive. Instead of showing a bunch of dead people and dead movies and old movies in tributes. That was picked up, for example, Santa Barbara.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: New York does, too.

BARNABY CONRAD: I don't think they did it before then. I like to think it was my idea. It might have been Albert's idea. As a matter of fact, I think it was my idea because I think Albert fought it. I think Albert said, "No, we want to give a tribute to Charlie Chaplin," or somebody like that. I said, "He's dead. Come on!" I think maybe it was my idea, but you'd have to ask Claude.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, it's certainly generally attributed to the San Francisco Festival that it invented the form.

BARNABY CONRAD: Yes, it's all owing to Claude.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: You think that he made the difference in the way the Festival developed?

BARNABY CONRAD: Oh, totally. Totally. It just lay there, before. Nobody gave a damn. I hate to say it. He gave a damn. I mean, I love Bud, but he had a vested interest: He owned the theatres. His family owned the theatres, the Metro and so forth. So he was doing it more—I hate to say it—he loved films, but he was doing it also because he was making money. Claude did it because he loved film. That's the big difference.

MARGARITA LANDAZURI: Well, great. This has been terrific. Thank you very much.

BARNABY CONRAD: Listen, I'll try to forget you're a Basque. [LAUGHS]