



## INTRODUCTION

Joan Mankin was an actor and a clown in the Bay Area from the early 1970s until 2014. After receiving an MA degree in theatre arts from San Francisco State, she began her professional career with the San Francisco Mime Troupe's production of *An Independent Female*. Joan went on to perform at many Bay Area theatre companies, including American Conservatory Theatre, Berkeley Rep, Aurora Theatre Company, and San Francisco Playhouse. She was also Artistic Director of the feminist Lilith Theatre for two years in the 1980's. Besides performing, she also taught theatre arts and clowning at San Francisco Clown Conservatory and at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre. In this interview, conducted in 2011, she delves into her early career and influences, her yoga and martial arts practices in relation to her work, and playing the devil.

# PART I: BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

## CHILDHOOD THROUGH COLLEGE

**JM:** I was actually a kind of a semi-actor even from the time I was 3 or 4, and I remember doing little pieces with my brother and sister out in our backyard. And we were called, our parents gave us the names of “Booie, Bonkie, and Primie” and we would do little pieces together, just make them up. And then in high school I had a really interesting drama teacher that really inspired me. I went to College at the University of Chicago and there was no theater department; they didn’t have any kinds of classes or anything. They did have some shows that I was in and I was actually in a production there of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* that was really inspiring to me. But when I graduated from college, I was actually thinking of going on to graduate school and maybe teaching theater or finding some other way...I wasn’t really committed to an acting career.

## TRAINING

**JM:** When I was 21, my parents moved to the West Coast to California the year that I graduated from college. We were living on Long Island before that. And they asked me to drive one of their cars across the country, and I drove it into Berkeley where my brother was staying. I said I want to see a production of the mime troop. I think it was a *Congress of Whitewashers* at that time. And... it just... I mean, I saw it, and then that was it. I knew that was what I had to do. I... I really... the way that the actors related to the audience, the style of the piece, the openness of it, and you know it wasn't really wasn't trying so hard to be artistic, it was just trying to relate to an audience and bring out ideas and do it in a very physical way. And after I saw them, I said this is what I am going to do and I'm going to get into the mime troop, and I just stayed on the West Coast, and I auditioned for them twice and I finally got in, and I worked with them nonstop for the next five years.

**JW:** So, in some ways that's the most formative part of your experience and training as a young actor, huh?

**JM:** Yeah, absolutely.

**JW:** Can you talk a little bit about what the daily process was like—how you trained, what you did, the technique or the process of the group was?

**JM:** What I really liked was that it was so all encompassing because everyone in the troop had to work all the different aspects of theater. It wasn't like there was this long division between actors and technicians and writers. Everyone got to participate in everything, so I mean I've always had to unload the truck, load them up, set up the stage, you know, I mean all of us had to do that. And then creating the piece, there was always feedback from the actors. I mean there was a writer, Joan Holden, who was the writer at the time and she would come in with, you know, a written version, but as we worked on it, it changed all the time and it was the same with the directors. They would always allow feedback from the people in the show. I mean it's not like...I was an actress, I wasn't hired as a technician, but I also got the experience in the whole, the bigger "you" of what it was to produce a play. I think that was very helpful for me. Also, a lot of our shows we did outside, and I liked that a lot too because it made you focus a lot on keeping the audience's attention because there was always a lot going on. You know, dogs walking back and forth and people getting up and leaving and people talking in the audience, and you really had to try to, you know, garner the attention of the audience to what you were doing and it wasn't a given, you had to work at it.

**JW:** Hmm. So there's a certain authenticity in that. They are paying attention because they want to or not.

**JM:** Yeah, exactly [laugh]. Exactly.

**JW:** They are not trapped into doing something sort of polite or they haven't paid us. It's funny when people pay \$50 or whatever to come see a show they have a certain investment in making sure they enjoy it. You know, they are very committed to having a good time whereas when you are doing that kind of street work you really have to catch their attention. It has to be what you are doing and what you are saying that catches them.

**JM:** Absolutely. I think a lot of them were there to eat a picnic. That was 1970-1975.

**JW:** 1970-1975. You know, I talked to Peter Coyote recently. He was in the mime troop. Did you ever work with him?

**JM:** No, he was there in the 60s.

**JW:** He was there in the 60s, okay.

**JM:** Of course, I knew he was part of it.

**JW:** He described most of his ecstatic performance experiences different from you because you continued to work in the theater so much, but he said physically, you know, the kind of sweat pouring down your face, the level of physical precision, there was something ecstatic about that kind of performance that he doesn't get from film or tv or audio books or whatever, you know?

**JM:** Yeah.



Joan Mankin, right, in "Independent Female" in 1970

## BAY AREA AFTER 1975

**JW:** Moving forward... I know you stayed in the Bay area and you were working in the Bay area. Did you continue to train anywhere else? Did you go do other kinds of trainings? Even on your own I know you did a lot of movement trainings of various kinds and that sort of informed your performance work. Did you ever say to yourself, "here is a person I want to study with or a technique that interests me" after your time with the Mime Troupe, or were you always working on your own as an artist. As if you said, "hey I have my own tools and I know how to do this" and just did it?

**JM:** No, I took various workshops, but I never went to a year-long training program or anything like that. I'm trying to remember the name of this man who...a really well known playwright in New York, Joseph something, I wish I could remember his name. I took a workshop with him that was really helped me... it was a three week process and was in the Bay area. He was really well known in New York and Chicago. I was also always studying martial arts and yoga. Those two things really encouraged my approach, a martial arts approach...

## LONGTERM TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE:

### MARTIAL ARTS & YOGA

**JW:** It sounded like you were going to talk a little about that. I was just going to say, what has been your journey with martial arts and yoga, and how has that started to integrate or meld into the way you see or approach performance?

**JM:** The discipline, especially of martial arts, the discipline of it...I would fight [laugh]. There would be fights in class and I would have to figure out how to protect myself and how to take one step back and one step forward. Also, the whole thing about martial arts is your body just accepts what is coming at you. It doesn't train you to really be belligerent. Martial arts trains you to accept the intensity of the physicality and take it in and be able to send it back in your own way. That was extremely helpful in terms of acting. I trained in many different forms. There were mainly these Chinese forms, mainly Kung Fu forms but I trained many different styles for 40 years. I've always found it extremely helpful just in that sense of the way your body performs and how you take in what's coming at you and then how you take it in. You don't guard yourself from it. You take it in and send it back.

**JW:** Hmm. That must have liberated you in some way, not just in terms of the ensemble work but the rehearsal process and working with people, but also a

willingness to go after... I don't know if you ever work with objectives... but a willingness to kind of really go for it on stage as well...

**JM:** Absolutely.

**JW:** Rather than resist what they are sending you or be shy about attacking I guess...

**JM:** Yeah, it's kind of funny but I never studied Method acting. I feel like studying martial arts gave me an approach to acting that was very different from Method acting. It's a very physical approach but it absolutely gave me a way to use my inner body and my inner core in my performances.

**JW:** Did you find over the years the ability to, as you said, connect with the inner core artistically? I imagine that kind of skillfulness allows accepting of energy, working with what is coming at you...

**JM:** Yeah.

**JW:** It allows for more personal integrity, doesn't it? You eventually get to a place where you know how to take care of yourself and whatever your artistic voice is as an

actor you know how to assert it one way or another, you know how to take care of it, to protect it, put it forward, no matter what the circumstances.

**JM:** Absolutely. I continued to study it. I never stopped. I was always learning from that. I was always applying it to what I was doing, what I loved, which was acting, a lot because I was always doing very physical acting.

## **PART 2: STORIES**

SUGGESTIVE OF

**SUPERNORMAL CAPACITIES**

IN PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

AN ECSTATIC PERFORMANCE:

CONGRESS OF THE WHITEWASHERS

**JW:** I was wondering, was there, in those five years at the Mime Troupe while you were performing in that athletic way, was there a moment or production that was, I don't want to say transcendent, but was there something really highly charged energetically? Something where you were performing at a peak level or something extraordinary was

happening in the production amongst a special group of people that was really surprising or...was there something that sticks out in those five years?

**JM:** Well, the thing that sticks out most for me was the first real production I was in was called *The Independent Female* and it was right at the beginning of the Woman's Rights Movement, and I played the character who was caught between whether I was going to marry my fiancé, or there was this other character in the play who was encouraging me to go forward with my own life and not subjugate myself to a man. That was just a tremendously inspiring concept. People who watched the show would sometimes get mad and stand up and start screaming. Sometimes people would walk out and couples would start arguing while they were watching it because of what they were seeing. It was very physical. There were moments where I was hitting my husband to be and fighting with the woman who was trying to change my mind. I really feel like the idea behind that, of course the way it was staged, it was extremely physically staged. Just those two aspects of it, the physicality and the concept of women's rights came together in this amazing way because as you know women weren't supposed to know how to fight or anything [laugh] and it was men who did the fighting and the physicality, and women weren't encouraged to do that. These two things came together where I was being a woman and fighting for my life.

**JW:** So there was personal convergence for you, what kind of woman you were becoming in your life...

**JM:** Yes.

**JW:** But there was also this larger cultural thread present as well. It was a highly charged issue for the people you were playing for.

**JM:** Absolutely.

**JW:** At that time, I don't know the exact year, but was there something generically historically... Do you know what was going on around that stuff? Did you say something about women not being able to fight?

**JM:** No, not that there were not able to fight. It's just something that was brought up as men fighting physically. It was a glorious time where a lot of these women were much older, in their 40s and 50s, and they were saying, now is the time for women to come forward and to change how we were viewed, and how we view ourselves. We worked on the play the whole time we did it. We met with people, we met with different groups, different women's groups who came and gave us ideas about where

to go with it and everything like that. It was just really... it opened up something inside of me that I don't think would have opened up otherwise.

**JW:** Yeah. Could you say that that thing that opened up was a feeling of a certain kind of empowerment as a woman, right?

**JM:** Yes, exactly.

### TOTAL ACCEPTANCE, UNION, FEARLESS RESPONSE

**JW:** Did you tend to get cast in roles or plays that were highly physical? Does that still happen for you, or has that made you the kind of actor where you can do any kind of work?

**JM:** That's happening more now... Also, because I was a clown for many years, I also tended to mainly get cast in comedy roles. As my career has progressed, I find that I'm getting cast in more roles that aren't necessarily comedic and allow me to bring out different parts of myself than just trying to be really funny. That's really rewarding.

**JW:** That's happening a lot in the last few years for you?

**JM:** Yeah. Yeah. I would say in the last 5-8 years, that has been coming up, although I still have been getting comedic roles. Last summer I was in *A Comedy of Errors* at Shakespeare Santa Cruz. It was a production that I had done ten years before with Danny Shay directing it. I played two different men. Part of what the audience liked is seeing me play two different men [laugh]. It's not like I didn't stay true to the characters. I did.

**JW:** That was part of the entertainment value for them. I would love to see you play two different men. That would be fun.

**JM:** And then right after that I did *Taming of the Shrew* and again I played two different men. It was fun... In the final scene where they all come together... Kate, Petruchio, Bianca, it's all a scene where they are all together. I played the widow. So I played a woman for the last scene. I got dressed up, I had a long wig, I had a short skirt, and heels and everything. I came out and I got introduced as Hortensio's wife. Every time I got introduced as Hortensio's wife, there would be people in the audience who would crack up because I had been playing all these men throughout the course of the play.

**JW:** [laugh]

**JM:** I think some of them didn't know whether I was really a woman or I was a man playing a woman. I don't know what it is. There would be all these snotty laughs that would come up [imitates laughs]. I got to this point when they did that, I would look out at the audience and I would pretend to be really miffed that they didn't realize I was a woman. I would raise my hand and say c'mon... I didn't really say this but this was what I was trying to communicate- c'mon, I'm a woman... don't give me a hard time. Then the entire audience would crack up.

**JW:** [laugh]

**JM:** It was such an interesting...it had nothing to do with the play. It was an interesting confirmation of what I had done in the rest of the play and here I was being me and they thought that was funny for me to be me. [laugh] I just loved that moment and everyone else in the scene loved it because they said it changed the nature of the scene. The one day I didn't do that, everyone else in the scene came up to me and said "Why didn't you do that?! It makes the whole scene go better when they laugh like that at the beginning." So I put it back in.

**JW:** That's so fascinating. I think one of the things we develop over time, especially with your training with the mine troop, like you were saying, is a kind of communication. It wasn't about making art but communicating with people. So in some ways to not respond if they had communicated here in terms of the show you were putting on and this event we are calling a theater and all that stuff, to not respond to that would be like somebody asking you a question and ignoring it in a conversation, you know.

**JM:** Yeah. That's what I loved about it. It was the audience accepting themselves as they were watching a piece... Yeah. [laugh].

**JW:** It's almost silly not to. It's like, forgive me if I'm wrong, but it feels like a minor ripple of fear to not respond. I experience it sometimes like uptightness on stage; like I have to maintain something. I feel somewhat split from the audience. Like I'm up here and I have to impress there. There's a little bit of that. It's really nice when you can really relax and rib them and joke with them, and know you are playing together. You know what I mean...?

**JM:** Absolutely. It's like I'm up here you are down there watching me. I'm performing for you. It's a total acceptance of that. It's not like it demeans it. I think in some ways it

takes it to a better level. It's like we're watching this and we see what's going on. We will always remember that moment as something that allowed the audience to come in.

**JW:** And to relax and lean in because if you didn't say something... it's a big elephant in the room. That's the kind of sensitivity that comes only with time and experience, and also confidence. One of the most interesting things to be able to do the gesture or whatever you did... One of the things Michael Murphy, who I'm doing this research with, one of the things he talked about was these supernormal capacities that people develop... He describes them as a result of long-term practice. These capacities that we have that seem almost like storybook extraordinary, some of the ones he is dealing with; he deals with things like ESP...In some ways you were dealing with feeling and reading what they were thinking and needing.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JW:** They never said it but you got what was happening in there. You could sense it.

**JM:** Exactly.

**JW:** He's saying these capacities only develop in long-term concerted transformative practice. He's comparing sport practice and I'm comparing artistic practice to what he calls transformative practice or spiritual practice.



Joan Mankin, left, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in 2009

## USING MISTAKES: PRACTICING PERFECTION

**JM:** There's another thing that I feel really strongly about that I've learned about acting is how to use mistakes.

**JW:** Hmm.

**JM:** If you make a mistake on stage, you start to blame yourself and go oh fuck, how do I get out of this, then you're screwed. But if you took the mistake and go with it, sometimes it takes you to a place that is so much better and so different. I've learned so much from this sense of embracing mistakes. Or, oh well, I've left that line out, keep going and see where does this take me. I feel like that is a very important lesson to learn about your own life as well. If you make mistakes, you don't blame yourself for them but you try to figure out where they came from and where you can take them.

**JW:** Yeah.

**JM:** That comes from making a lot of mistakes on stage.

**JW:** Do you have any little examples of either big mistakes you've made that you've worked with or little ones you made that turned out well?

**JM:** Well... in the show that I was just in that was called *Counter Attack* and it was about waitresses in a diner. There was a thing where the manager of the diner was supposed to come in and interrupt my conversation with the other waitress. He just

forgot to come in. We just went on with the scene and at the end of the scene, he came in, after I had gone out. I felt like it actually worked better that he hadn't come in in the middle of our scene, that he came in at the end and allowed us to explore our conversation without being interrupted. Then I left, then he came in. He was having this affair with the other waitress. There was something about it I really loved.

**JW:** Hmm. In that case, nobody really batted an eyelash?

**JM:** Well, the actor who didn't come in, he was really upset, and when I exited, I had to say, 'John, get on, go ahead, get out there now! It's your time to get on.' He was kind of standing there holding his head in his hands and he was really upset he had missed. It didn't really matter. It didn't. That was really fascinating to me, and me and the other waitress just went on. It gave the scene a whole different feeling. That's just an example, a recent example of something where I felt you learn so much from mistakes.

**JW:** Yeah, that's one of the ones that keeps coming up for me as well. Even in rehearsals or auditions to absolutely... an absolute sense of acceptance, you know?

**JM:** Yes.

**JW:** Because as soon as I... like the head in the hands... my body... this is where things like Alexander Technique or meditation becomes useful or even therapy for me. As soon as I start freaking out, my body contracts and I go 'Uh!', I tighten up, my breath goes away.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JW:** You know, my resources are gone. If I actually breathe it in, like totally...that's actually a profound practice if it starts to permeate, you know, my life of not spinning out in my head of what does that mean, but just moment to moment. Total acceptance of what is happening and making use of it.

**JM:** And not saying what did I do wrong.

**JW:** Right!

**JM:** And saying what's next?

**JW:** There's a great Rumi poem, something about... 'There's a field beyond right and wrong. I'll meet you there.' Something to that effect.

**JM:** That was great! That was great.

IYENGAR YOGA, VIPASANNA, AND BOOM:

**JW:** It does relate and for me to what I am doing in mediation. Were there spiritual dimensions to your martial arts? Some martial arts you can't practice without the spiritual dimension and the teacher, or it's built into the philosophy of the way the movements are built.

**JM:** My teacher for the last 10 years definitely brought a spiritual dimension. I think I got a lot of spiritual dimension from Yoga because that was more meditative. You always do a meditation at the beginning and at the end. You hold poses for a long amount of time and you think the time that you are standing there- why is my body in this position and what does it mean to me, what are the thoughts that come into my head. So I feel like that meditation comes as much as from Yoga as from the martial arts.

**JW:** Is that Iyengar Yoga that you did a lot of?

**JM:** Yes, I did. Yeah.

**JW:** That's a very particular style like you said. A lot of stillness, holding things for a very long time.

**JM:** Absolutely. It's not like Bikram Yoga.

**JW:** So was the focus putting the body into posture, then the contemplation then the meditation on what's happening in terms of my interior.

**JM:** Exactly.

**JW:** Did they give you a way to work with that? Was there an intention or an objective... not a result, not quite sure that is it either... Was there a way of working or was there something that they were saying...? Were they just building awareness or giving you techniques for what you notice?

**JM:** Not so much. I think it's just techniques for noticing... taking in. It's not like Zen Buddhism. It just gives you a space to really take into account your mind and your body.

**JW:** Huh... so just witnessing... just observation?

**JM:** And being... just being.

**JW:** I feel like there's a shift with me on stage with being, You can feel actors who go on stage that have a high... One of the things that some people develop is extraordinary stage presence and sometimes I think it gets developed over doing some sort of practice of presence. Sometimes it's just a gift that they have. Can you talk about what started to bleed over in terms of your yoga? How it started to affect you as a performer?

**JM:** I think it's just what I was talking about... to be on stage. To fully acknowledge where your body is in relationship to the other people there and what the thoughts are that are going on in your mind. To not try to push that away, even if you're not thinking things your character would think. Sometimes I play characters where what I was thinking would change with each performance. The mood the character would be in and what I was thinking about myself as the character would change. That was really interesting for me. I still had to stay in the confines of the character.

**JW:** Right. Just noticing what the character's mood was everyday, perceiving some large differences and being somewhat surprised by that. Not trying to manipulate it or stop it.

**JM:** Exactly. I did this play *Boom* at the Marin Theater Company...

**JW:** I saw you in that one. I enjoyed it.

**JM:** In that one when I was waiting to come on stage at nights, I felt really different at night in the way that I would come out. I always had to be affected by the knowledge they were going to start at closedown. I remember standing off the stage and thinking of the things I had gone through that day and feeling right then. It was really important for me to take that in before I went out. It made it much realer for me.

**JW:** It's funny, I've heard this a number of times from other actors and acting teachers. There's this great Buddhist woman who wrote *Start Where You Are*. If I understand what you're saying is that there's an experience of just total acceptance of where you were that day, that moment as an actress, and an emerging and allowing of that to be present as you began to go on the stage so you weren't trying to get yourself into the

appropriate state for the beginning of the show. You were just using what was already there. Is that accurate?

**JM:** Exactly. I still had to have that sense of urgency because of the situation I was in. I was taking in different things every night, noticed the particular entrance of that particular character. I was there for a long time. There were always these people who would come up and introduce the play and then there would be this music. I was always there by myself waiting to go on, taking in everything going on with me. It gave me some time.

**JW:** Interesting. It was this set-up where you had to pre-plant and wait in silence for an extended amount of time, you were in this forced meditation before beginning.

**JM:** Yeah, exactly. That was helpful.

**JW:** It's funny I've tried to go out of my way to create circumstances like that for myself and sometimes it's very difficult, and it's helpful to have that space before a performance. I'll just share a little personal thing here. It seems like sharing things back and forth has been good in our conversation. I've been doing this Grotowski based paratheatre work for almost 5 years now. I'm leading a group down here in LA now.

One of the techniques we use... it was actually a period of time when Grotowski was interested in the ritual aspects of theater. Paratheatre is kind of a ritual form but without the need for performance, no audience present. So the actors are working in this ritualized way. One of the things we do is this standing kind of Zen mediation before and after each process. We do an emptiness meditation. We stand there and clear out, and be and do nothing. I find that that creates an incredible amount of receptivity to what I am about to do: more freshness and presence and that kind of thing.

**JM:** Yes.

## PLAYING THE DEVIL: AUTONOMOUS ARCHETYPES

**JW:** So let's talk about the Devil character for a moment. I'm just curious what that experience was like for you, was it fun or different from other experiences? We talked briefly about that kind of energy. It does seem to have darkness and a life of its own. I think it can be challenging as actors to play a role like that or a Richard the III and there you are, it's leaking into your personal life or affecting your personality or your relationships or whatever. I'm trying to formulate my question.

**JM:** [laugh]

**JW:** Did you feel like this thing had a life of its own and you were just a channel in this case? Was it telling you how to play it more than just a normal character?

**JM:** It was kind of interesting. It's hard to really figure out what a devil is... where it is a Devil as someone who is really bad or who approaches life in a different way. I know some of the things I made the other puppet, the solider in the play go through wasn't the best things for him. On the other hand, it led him to really good places in his life in other ways. So it was hard for me to think of myself as evil. I also don't think it would have helped me to think of myself as evil. Sometimes I made this connection with the puppet like I cared about him. The idea was that I was trying to bring him into my life or bring him around me for a long time. That was why I brought him through the gates of Hell at the end. So it came from this sense of, I really liked him and had formed a connection with him. That's not really a devilish thing to do in some ways. I don't know whether I ever connected with the evil sense of the Devil. Whether I connected with that as much an idea of what I wanted to do and carrying out no matter what the other people wanted to do. There are characters who do that that are not devils. [laugh] So that was a really interesting thing for me to figure out what it really meant to be the Devil.

**JW:** And were some things revealed to you during that process as to what it means to be a Devil?

**JM:** Yeah [laugh]. What it means to be a devil. I think so. I mean I just remember spending a lot of time watching him. Then I would watch him far away, from up above to see what was happening in his life. Then I would come in in different disguises and try to be a part of it and influence it in the way that I wanted to influence it. The important thing is what the Devil wants. That's definitely true. It was hard for me to distinguish the Devil as someone really evil.

**JW:** Yeah. It sounds like you are in a different place in it than when I talked to you midway through.

**JM:** What did I say midway through?

**JW:** I don't think there was as much peace with it. At the time, what I recall was that it was quite taxing on you or perhaps there was some dealing with the residue or the ripples of that working so deeply with that energy or performance. I think you said it

was a thought or an attitude of things that would ripple out into other parts of your life.

Yeah, I sensed there was more struggle with it at the time.

**JM:** That's interesting because the more I did it, the more I had to bring myself to it and not feel like this was a character who was very different from me. I could find ways in which I could actually relate to the character. It's not like I've never been bad so...

[laugh]

**JW:** Right [laugh].

**JM:** It's not like I mind being bad at all. It's a question of, it's really interesting, what is a Devil? How do you define a Devil? And sometimes your Devil is really different from what you think the Devil is. Part of it is it was directed by Muriel, and she's a dancer and a lot of it was staged in choreography. I had to bring the emotional level myself.

**JW:** There was a lot of external imposition of choreography.

**JM:** I really enjoyed playing that part a lot and I really think it was interesting for a lot of people that it was played by a woman. I don't think it had been done by a female. That

was a really interesting thing to see, the responses of the audience, how they changed from the beginning to the end of the play.

**JW:** Yeah, that's really interesting, from our early story of you performing that part of women's empowerment and here you are playing a female Devil.

**JM:** [laugh] A woman as a Devil. Which is empowerment to be a Devil.

**JW:** There is a sort of honesty in that too. It's funny, this is just a cultural side note. It feels like the men, as a white Protestant man, in my lifetime I often felt like the bad guy. The person who had been the perpetrator and yet we all do have those, the capacity of the devilishness in us.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JW:** What I think is interesting too is more and more I am relating to the opportunity to play certain roles. They perform a ritual function in my own life. For example, I did this part in San Jose where I had this relationship with a pseudo father in the play. I play a young scientist whose father is absent. A number of things mirrored my own life. Playing this play 30 or 40 times, I could feel that I was working something out within

me. Some fundamental change in the relationship dynamics between some part of me was growing up as the character grew up every night.

**JM:** Yeah. I know exactly what you mean.

**JW:** What an incredible thing to confront, to play that kind of a role, to confront one's own Devil. The reason I was interested in that because I had psychologically in my shadow life become very aware of what I was up to. Kind of my ability to watch people from a distance and put on a mask and manipulate them to get the things I wanted. I didn't, at that time, when I first found out about the revelation that I was up to that was sort of in an underhanded way shocking. But over time...what I love about what you're saying, having compassion for that part of myself, that has been the key to having some peace with it and understanding it. My guess is that the Devil is desperately lonely.

**JM:** [laugh] I know. I also think that the audience's attitude toward the Devil changed from the beginning to the end. At the beginning, they were just viewing the Devil as some kind of stereotype figure. By the end, the audience actually related to the Devil more than they thought they would.

**JW:** Yeah, that's great. You mean in terms of the beginning of the two hours to the end of the two hours or the beginning of the two months to the end of the two months?

**JM:** To the beginning of the two hours to the end of the two hours. Also, the two months in terms of me in terms of my recognizing, you know, the Devil inside of me. Certain parts of the Devil... especially as we performed it more, the audience started to relate to the Devil more by the end of the play and I felt like they were relating to certain parts of themselves. That really interested me.

**JW:** You know, in my book, that falls under extraordinary turns of events or extraordinary capacities, which is what this research is all about. Developing that level or cultivating that level of compassion, self-compassion, and the ability to see that in others, having compassion for the darker parts of others. I think any spiritual or transformative practice would have a hard time arguing with that as a high goal. And then to be able to infuse that into a work of art or performance and transmit that to some degree where the audience receives some of what you've learned about humanizing or relating to that energy. That's a pretty extraordinary sequence of events in my mind.

**JM:** It makes you look and place into question about what's good and bad. Sometimes it's hard to tell.

## REST IN PEACE

MAY 16, 1948 – SEPTEMBER 26, 2015



Joan Mankin passed away in September of 2015 after being diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease the previous year. She was deeply loved in the Bay Area theatre community by audiences and artists alike, and is sorely missed.