

There Was No Question (2011)

a series of interviews with John W. Moore

There Was No Question is an experiment in live performance of documentary material, and the subject of my Masters Thesis. The piece is a series of interviews with my father, John W. Moore, which I condensed and orchestrated for live performance.

The concept of this piece is indebted to the documentary musical works of Steve Reich such as *Different Trains* and *The Cave*. However, this piece attempts to add an element of live theatrics by having the documentary audio clips triggered and manipulated in real time by laptop performers. Instead of using a keyboard or mouse, the performers control their laptops using Wii remotes, giving the audience a visual connection between players' gestures and the sounds produced.

Below is the text of the piece.

1. Winston Salem, 1930s

(no text)

2. Chickens

At the fair time
for the Forsyth County County Fair,
my father
wanted to show his
beautiful white wyandotte
chickens
and wanted them
sparkling white and clean.
My mother was in charge of the washing—
Dad somehow arranged to be at school during the whole process.

We assembled
three or four very large galvanized
pails something like three feet across each about a foot deep.

With soap in the first one,
a rinse in the second,
a bluing water in the third, um...
and I guess a final wash/final rinse off in the last one.

Problem:
birds do not like

to
be washed.

On occasion,
the person holding the chicken
was unable to
hold it.

And chicken escaped!

And there was much flapping on the part of both the chicken and the people trying to do
the wash.

The thing was: Dad.

It was his show.

He was the one that got the
ribbons,

which he accumulated and kept in his den.

But our names were not on them,
just his.

3. Davidson

I loved the farming part, the growing of vegetables and
Biology sort of thing.

But,

since I had not had any physics in high school I signed up to do that at Davidson.

The first class of physics,

professor walked in and said:

“Only two weeks ago did I find out that I was teaching this class.

I have two weeks lead on you, but we’ll be learning this together.”

And this was actually a lovely challenge and worked out extremely well.

He was learning and seeing the same problems that we were.

To me, an eye-opening, thrilling way—

I really wanted to learn.

In the dormitories, there was much discussion about...

4. The Coming War

Hitler was

invading Poland and

it was clear that

Great Britain was going to war.

“Boy, we’re going to be over there soon.”

Most of them were
ROTCs,
and they knew they would absolutely be going to Europe.

I had
great concerns about
being a conscientious objector.
And I raised this issue with my mother and father,
very strong deep Christians.
And they were horrified that I would do that.

It was so
universal
in the United States of America
that this was something
that we had to do.
Everybody
was in it everybody was making sacrifices.
There was no question.

However,
because I had
a club foot,
I could not
qualify to be drafted.

5. Starting Grad School

September
1941
fresh out of college
a graduate student
with no understanding
of big physics at all.

I was
assigned
helping one
senior graduate student
had developed a
tiny
spinning ball
ultracentrifuge.

6. Pearl Harbor

On December the 7th,
a few days after my 21st birthday,
I was out
walking in
nice part of town where there were trees, and
very quickly
people let me know.
They would say come, come listen.
And I'm telling you, that was really scary.

7. Kobe, Japan

The next morning I went in
to the lab and found barbed wire
surrounding the building.

Ahhh...

So we knew that this was
maybe secret work.
There were armed guards
and secretaries, with typewriters
to take down information for security clearance.

She asked,
"where were you born, when, so forth?"
And I was born in the USA, North Carolina, that's all right.
"OK now, your father's name, uh, date of birth—"
I gave that.
"place of birth?"
Kobe, Japan.

"Ahh!" she said, "you can't go through!"

I said, well he was the son of a missionary.
"Oh, maybe that's all right."

So we filled out some more about Dad, and then Mother.

"Name?"
Marjorie McAlpine.

“Date of birth?”

I gave that.

“Place of birth?”

Kobe, Japan.

“Uhh!!” she said!

The secretary grabbed the sheet of paper, ripped it out, and said, “You’ll never make it!”
Ripped it out of the typewriter and said “you’ll never make it.”

But

I finally got through.

8. Manhattan Project

It wasn’t until after

December 7

that it was revealed

to us

over a period of time

that the lab

was part

{ of } the Manhattan Project

Szilard had been looking at Uranium.

As he started across the street in London, it hit him

that because the Uranium was sending out

that if it hit other Uraniums, that you could have a chain reaction.

Very quickly, that word circulated around the top physicists.

Einstein wrote a letter to FDR, this is a real, very very important thing.

And concern about the Germans being ahead of us.

It was amazing

the amount of secrecy

could be maintained

with such a vast number of people involved.

We did know that at Oak Ridge Tennessee, a little, a little city was built up
and they were trying diffusion.

There was the Uranium 235 and 238,

and the 235 is the one that is much more radioactive,

and was desired, was desired to make the Bomb.

I might have said that we were working on a war project.

But that’s as far as I would have gone,

and I'm quite sure they wouldn't have understood anything about it.

There were rumors
that they were having success
in making test bombs...

9. Afterwards

I felt shame
I don't know how many others did
it was, had to be mixed

we were happy
to have the war ending
but
the method was
horrid

Pearl Harbor generated
anger and hate
Hiroshima
and Nagasaki
generated a real sense of
oh my God what have we done

10. Now

I keep talking to
mostly ministers about
what I would call corporate sin.
The whole body of the country
was
very very tightly bound in an effort
to win the war.

War is clearly
against the Christian teaching
and therefore I felt very sinful.
And yet,
everybody participated.