

# CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

ONE OF THE FOUR CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF PITTSBURGH

## Sally Dixon and Bill Judson WQED Conversation

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Sally Dixon: [00:00:54] As some of you may know, I've resigned from my job with the Film Section at the Museum of Art, and have been succeeded by Bill Judson. Bill and his wife Bay and their children Tasha and Benjamin came to Pittsburgh about two and one-half years ago, where both Bill and Bay have been actively engaged in the arts in Pittsburgh.

Bay is an artist herself, and Bill has been an instructor at the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Pittsburgh, where he's been responsible for establishing film as a serious area of academic study, by instituting and developing courses in film history and theory. He's also served as first director of the film studies program at the University of Pittsburgh.

Before coming to Pittsburgh, Bill received a Fulbright-Hays research fellowship to work in France on his doctoral dissertation for Yale University. And at present, he's active as the president and founding member of the Regional Film Council of Pittsburgh. The council is designed to coordinate non-commercial film activities in the area, and will ultimately include a repository of films for use by students and the public, but we're not going to talk about that today.

I want to get into some of the ideas for the development of the Film Section from this point on. Good morning, Bill.

Bill Judson: Good morning, Sally. I should begin certainly by thanking you for what's been an extraordinary job that you've done with the film section during the past five and a half years. Beginning with a very modest program, you've developed it into one that is known across this country for a variety of programs that you've established, and it has clearly a national reputation. It's known for its quality in film centers across the United States, and I think you deserve a very strong commendation for the job that you've done. The program will miss you. It will be exciting to—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: It will be thrilling.

Bill Judson: To pick up where you've left off, but many people have expressed their sorrow that you're leaving, and we'll miss you.

Sally Dixon: Well, I have loved the job. I have loved every minute of it, for the most part. There's been a lot of hard work, but it's—some of the richest years of my life were in this job, and I trust it will be the same for you. I can't see how it cannot be. There's such variety, and just your ideas for development are exciting to me. It won't lure me back, but I'm going to watch with great care and great interest.

Bill Judson: Well, I'm looking forward to it. The program as it will take place this fall will not be certainly perceptibly different, I don't think, from what it's been. The changes will be a kind of gradual evolution. I have a number of ideas already in mind. The history of the Sunday evening History of Film Series, which of course has already begun; I've begun this incidentally without piano accompaniment this time. And I was—I had a marvelous time, the first evening, with the early, short, primitive films from before the First World War, listening to the audience reaction. There was a large audience, and one of the things that impressed me was that the comments clearly indicated that many of the audience were familiar with these films, had seen them before.

Sally Dixon: Yes. [both talking at once]

Bill Judson: And they were talking to their friends and saying, "And Now, come and watch this," this sort of thing.

Sally Dixon: That's never ceased to amaze me and delight me, is the ongoing interest, that you can see these again and again, and continue to see new things as well as anticipating the joys of what's to come. [both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Exactly, and people bring their friends, and the whole thing grows. It's marvelous that it would be at that state. The Sunday series will continue through the fall, with a wide variety of films from the United States and various places in Europe. Then the directors' series, of course, which is also something which you initiated a few years back, which this fall will be with Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian filmmaker, beginning in 1925 with *Strike*, his first film. And that series, which is on Thursday evenings at 8 o'clock, begins on September 25 with *Strike* and runs through eight successive Thursdays. [00:05:03]

And during this program, probably in late October, Annette Michelson, who's a very highly respected scholar on Russian film in general, and on Dziga Vertov and on Sergei Eisenstein in particular, will be here to talk on the films. And the program notes for each program will be written by Annette Michelson.

And in fact, one of the things that we want to do with this program is to use the program notes and the extraordinary lectures, that these outside lecturers give on the Director's Series, as the basis for a series of ongoing publications that would be neat, concise treatments of the work of a particular filmmaker—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: That will issue forth from the museum, as a series.

Bill Judson: That will come from the museum.

Sally Dixon: That's something—I'm just thrilled with that idea.

Bill Judson: It will be the basis for—Not only for people who are involved in short courses on a particular filmmaker in a college, or showing a film series on a particular director, or simply those people who want some short, concise, intelligent treatment of an individual. And so frequently, those things are—simply don't exist. They're either sort of—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Exactly; good, short, concise—

Bill Judson: Exactly; they're either lavishly illustrated but very bland—

Sally Dixon: Coffee table, yeah.

Bill Judson: Coffee table publications, or they're—

Sally Dixon: So scholarly that it's—you don't pick it up to—

Bill Judson: One has to have substantial background, before you can wade through the things.

Sally Dixon: Well, I think to start with, Annette will be thrilling in that she's, in these last two years, has made three trips, I believe it is now, to the Soviet Union, at their invitation, to investigate and talk with people there about the work of Eisenstein and Vertov and other Soviet directors from that heroic area, and she's brought back with her a lot of material that's never been seen, or never been out of—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Of the Soviet Union.

Sally Dixon: The Soviet Union before. And we'll have access to, of course, that wealth of material via her brilliant mind. It should be a fascinating, fascinating discussion when she comes, as well as an awfully good set of program notes, and worthy of beginning this series—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Well, I'm really looking forward to it.

Sally Dixon: Publications.

Bill Judson: Jay Light, of course, has done a great deal to—in terms of publishing information that he's garnered in the Eisenstein archives and so forth. Yelizaveta Svilova [or Elizaveta Svilova], who was Dziga Vertov's wife, and his editor for many of his films, is sitting apparently on boxes and boxes of material that Annette Michelson has had access to. All of this material is now gradually—or the rest of this material, is now gradually

becoming more and more available to us. I'm looking forward to it very much.

Sally Dixon: Yes, I, too. I think it's a marvelous direction, and badly needed now. There's so little good writing, either in depth or concise, intelligent survey type material.

Bill Judson: As then we go on, of course, the Director's Series will continue in the winter with Bresson [Robert Bresson], and then on twice a year after that. And this whole series—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: So two books a year, two retrospectives a year—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Yeah, it's a very—

Sally Dixon: Hopefully, building up a good thing.

Bill Judson: It's a very exciting prospect, yes.

Sally Dixon: Well I think the rest of the country, and other interested countries, will be delighted to have access to such a series, and I know that you'll keep the quality consistent, that being your interest.

Bill Judson: Oh, yeah, it is. It's a major concern—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Well that's one of the delights of having you succeed me. Here, I feel some—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: There's also, of course, in terms of publication, there's also an extraordinary possibility really that you, in what you've done here has been established, the independent filmmakers that have come have all been taped, some of them with audio tape, some of them with—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Video, um-hm.

Bill Judson: Video as well. And that's a marvelous mine of information. Of course, we've already had Anthony McCall in the first of these series, on September 9. And upcoming is Peter Goodall and the West Coast filmmaker, woman filmmaker Freude [Freude Bartlett?], and they are, of course, listed in the museum's schedule. But their—the continuing presence of these visiting independent filmmakers is a very, very rich source for—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Scholars.

Bill Judson: Periodical publication, too, right. That, too, is an exciting prospect.  
[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Well this was our hope, and not only we at the museum, but other places. I'm thinking of media studies in Buffalo, too, have been taping and—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Um-hm. And Millennium in New York, yeah.

Sally Dixon: It is such a new direction, and so many people have been taping now for the last several years, maybe the last five—four or five—three, four or five years, that gradually, about now, there's an accumulation of material that's great enough to do some really good research and some good writing, on these people as individuals and the whole thrust by the independents. I think it'll be fascinating to see what comes out in the next five or ten years. I think the work is just beginning, now that the materials have been assembled and are available. [00:10:18]

Bill Judson: To not do something with it, I can't help think of—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: A betrayal.

Bill Judson: The analogy; it would be like burning a box of Monet letters or something.

Sally Dixon: Yeah, all the correspondence, too, we mustn't forget—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: That, too, would be—

Sally Dixon: Audio, video tapes and incredible correspondence with some of them.

Bill Judson: These are obviously serious artists who are using film as opposed to painting or some form of sculpture, metal or whatever. It's a different material, but the intent, the kind of access to the human intellect and the human psyche, is very much the same—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Precisely.

Bill Judson: It's unfettered by commercial restraints, which is not to say that they don't have financial difficulties, but there isn't that imposition of—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Just to say they—they do.

Bill Judson: There isn't that imposition of outside taste. They're individual and independent people, working on their own.

Sally Dixon: Well I trust that you are going to make these materials available. I know you will, and probably—I hope above all—that you’re going to have time to do something with them yourself, when you finish your dissertation.

Bill Judson: I want to, yes.

Sally Dixon: Hopefully, that might be published here, too. I’d like to see it.

Bill Judson: Well of course, that’s slowed down a little bit with this change.

Sally Dixon: Yes, and it probably will take a little time.

Bill Judson: One thing, those people who are familiar with the Film Section’s program will recognize that on it again this fall is the Sunday afternoon once a month audience request program. And that’s something I’ve been thinking about. I think I may can that program, at least under that title, and instead make it a series of children’s films.

I’ve seen various programs of this sort. The French do it. The French, of course, the school children have Thursdays off—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: That’s a good idea.

Bill Judson: Cinematheque France has screens from their magnificent archives, films simply which they feel would be appropriate to children. And it’s marvelous. Of course it’s at this point really children of all ages. One would—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Yeah, I was going to say—

Bill Judson: I would begin with Sennett and Chaplin and Keaton and that sort of thing.

Sally Dixon: They serve whole families.

Bill Judson: There are marvelous films, that would be both—certainly be appropriate for a children’s series, but which in fact are very significant films that almost never get filmed. I’m thinking of films like Fritz Lang’s *Moonfleet* or David Lean’s *Oliver Twist*, or Orson Welles’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which is a film that—

Sally Dixon: Oh, there are a lot of them.

Bill Judson: Yeah, right.

Sally Dixon: Oh, what fun it will be to—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: I think I'd like to give it that—[both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: Edge it over into the focus of children, or appealing and being suitable for children. I think there are innumerable families in the area who would be eternally grateful at such a move.

Bill Judson: This is a—it's already a present issue, because frequently a parent will call and say, "This program looks as if my kids might enjoy it, but is there—" [both talking at once]

Sally Dixon: You give them a rundown.

Bill Judson: Yes, "But is there anything on it that perhaps they shouldn't see, for whatever reason?" This way, if it were specifically a children's program, which obviously other people would be going to.

Sally Dixon: They would know they could trust it to be so—[both talking at once]

Bill Judson: Exactly.

Sally Dixon: I think it's an excellent idea, absolutely.

Bill Judson: Yet, they'd be major and important films.

Sally Dixon: Um-hm, exactly; chosen with keen selection, selective eye.

Bill Judson: In any case, there's so many things, of course, that given the basis that's been established in the Film Section, places where one can go. I'd like to see small little small pockets of screening places, more publicly, too.

Sally Dixon: For instance?

Bill Judson: For instance, someplace, some small-scale rear projection set-up that could be seen in the street somewhere, for ten or fifteen minutes.

Sally Dixon: Storefront type.

Bill Judson: Storefront type, where after lunch, instead of a second cup of coffee, one can stand and watch a few films.

Sally Dixon: Maybe Kaufmann's could give us a window.

Bill Judson: Maybe.

Sally Dixon: Horne's, Gimbel's, Sak's, the banks.



Bill Judson: I won't argue there, absolutely.

Sally Dixon: Well think of the other art that is displayed. This is an entirely feasible, logical—

Bill Judson: The whole notion of public art; large sculpture for plazas and mural painting and that kind of thing. There's every reason to do this, and in fact it has, in other countries and other cities; not in this country, but in Europe. It's been done very successfully, with tremendous responses.

Sally Dixon: To me, it's a thrilling idea, and I think would make this kind of film available to a much wider audience and I think that they would find themselves delighted by it. Many of these films, you can move in and out of in a few minutes. There are a number of them that are short and suitable, and it sounds exciting to me. [00:15:02]

Bill, you've got thrilling plans, and I can't tell you how good I feel that you're in this spot. I feel I can leave it safely and sanely, hopefully, and come back and enjoy it as a member of the audience. And I wish you as much pleasure, as I said before, in it, as I have had.

Bill Judson: Thank you, Sally. We'll look forward to seeing you at these films.

Sally Dixon: Right, you will. [end of recording 00:15:24]

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