



# Library podcast

## 'Space Needle: A Hidden History'

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. To learn more about our events, programs and services visit [www.spl.org](http://www.spl.org). Library podcasts are brought to you by the Seattle Public Library Foundation to find out how you can support The Seattle Public Library visit [supportspl.org](http://supportspl.org).

[00:01:00] Well, thank you so much. Gretchen Yanover over. Please give her a big hand.

[00:01:08] That was some gorgeous music. It really set the tone for tonight's program. And actually you're going to hear more of Gretchen's music because it is the soundtrack for the film *Space Needle: A Hidden History*. Let me tell you a little bit about Gretchen before we begin. Her music has been featured in settings ranging from film to dance to podcasts, soundtracks. Her music is also suited, as you can tell, to meditative and healing environments. She plays classical music as a member of Northwest's symphony. So let's thank Gretchen again. And now I want to welcome you. I want to welcome you to the Seattle Public Library and *Space Needle: a hidden history*. I acknowledge the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish people, and acknowledge that we are on indigenous land, the traditional territories of the coast, Salish people. This program is held in conjunction with the exhibit, *The Space Needle*, a 21st century view now on exhibit in the art gallery on the eighth floor in this building. The exhibit is actually closing this Sunday on the twenty seventh. And we hope you'll take the time to see the items that are in the library's collection that document the history of the Space Needle. It's divided into two sides, one side is more historical, and the other side is what we call that sort of trivia artsy fartsy side with some memorabilia there. Also, we hope that you will take the time to write a *Space Needle* memory. We will add this to the exhibit. And in fact, if you go up, you'll be able to read some of the lovely memories people have had, marriage proposals, a little child center, a drawing of the Space Needle. So there's some really sweet memories there that I hope you'll enjoy.

[00:03:30] B.J. Bullert's Film *the Space Needle: A Hidden History* traces the creative origins of a structure that is familiar as rain. And yet here in the 21st century, decades after the 1962 fair, we're getting a second look at this iconic structure after the film. We will be in conversation with the filmmaker and some of those who contributed to the content of the film. B.J. Bullert is a

communications scholar and documentary filmmaker. Her current intellectual interests focus broadly on the arts of making media for social change. Her intellectual moorings rest and the qualitative sociology of Howard S. Becker and the historian Howard Zinn. She is the author of Public Television, Politics and The Battle Over Documentary Film and a handful of scholarly articles about film and politics. We'll be hearing from B.J. later. But now let's see what the Space Needle. A hidden history is all about.

[00:05:01] The wonderful thing about architecture is that symbolism is deeply part of it. The styles, the influences and the expressions come from different cultures, different eras, architecture builds on itself.

[00:05:19] The unique shape of the Space Needle has made it retained interest. Until today, I mean, even though they might think of Starbucks and Microsoft, it's the Space Needle. That's really what everyone wants to know about when they come to Seattle.

[00:05:36] The Space Needle has this beautiful grace. It is lady like it's a ballerina. It's something of substance and it's of great beauty. And why is that? How did we get that?

[00:05:50] Is it a building or is a piece of sculpture? A building serves a function as a sculpture. It's just a sculpture and I think it's a little bit of both. Why does that form combine art and architecture? Well, it was inspired by art in the first place.

[00:06:19] Everybody is planning to see Seattle's spectacular \$100 million Worlds Fair, in 1962 Seattle was dominated by Boeing and Safeco and other large firms.

[00:06:43] It was really a time of hope for Seattle and for Washington State. It was signaling that Seattle was going into the future as a major city.

[00:06:53] You know, the forward frontier, the Jetsons, the future in space. People at that time, they wanted to promote Seattle.

[00:07:01] What kind of a city would give rise to such a surprisingly different tower? It's an impatient, forward minded city where men like to look to the future.

[00:07:13] So the fare was fairly far along in the planning effort. When Eddie Carlson, who was head of the fair, was in Stuttgart, Germany, had dinner in a radio tower and thought, gosh, we need something to really show off Seattle and show off the fairgrounds and a tower would be wonderful. So he called John Graham there that night and they had some pencil drawings that they worked on. And John Graham had a large architectural firm in Seattle, and they had many people grinding out ideas and some were balloons held by cables and others were big steel. You know, a building going up. And John never felt that they really had, you know, the right feeling. And so he reached out to a University of Washington architecture professor, Victor Steinbrueck.

[00:08:07] My dad came in late in the game, I understand, because they were struggling for the right idea, the right concept, those futuristic cool had a wow effect and would be, you know, the talk of the town. But whatever they did that had us support a flying saucer like restaurant on top. And he relished the opportunity because this was something to do, something really important, progressive in terms of the world of architecture and design. He was motivated to come up with something that was truly cutting edge in terms of engineering and architectural expression.

[00:09:01] You know, if you're going to study the form or the shape of the Space Needle, you have to start at the beginning, of course, which is the obelisks in ancient Egypt. It's a pedestal with this rising straight form and then more current times. Of course, you look at the Eiffel Tower, which is a similar type of thing, you might want to call some of these phallic. Some people do see it that way, that their male forms the earliest designs that I've seen.

[00:09:31] Sketches of them were not by my father were actually borrowed from the Washington Monument.

[00:09:36] So you had an oblique obelisk with a saucer at the top poking through it. And my dad didn't like that at all.

[00:09:43] He thought that was terrible. It was just there was no aesthetic quality to it. It was borrowing from a static old form made of stone. Basically, it had no elegance.

[00:09:57] Of course, I can't imagine that the towers that were constructed for the world's fair sit and have some type of influence and the shape of the Space Needle, because that's what people were looking at. So you look at again, Paris, and then you look at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair in the 1939 New York World's Fair. Then you start seeing these more curvilinear

forms after the war. You look at 1958, which is the Brussels World's Fair, and that's when it starts getting atomic. They always reflect the design aesthetic of the times. But where did those design ideas come from?

[00:10:41] In 2012, we were getting ready to celebrate our 50th anniversary of the Space Needle. And we looked back through our archives and tried to, you know, if we were putting a book together and trying to find interesting facts and directions that people were leaning in and so we came across a reference to the Feminine One in Victor Steinbrueck's office.

[00:11:05] He tells the story in a journal that I have that he wrote in the summer of 1960, a handwritten journal.

[00:11:17] Feeling that I needed to try for some fresh ideas without the pressure of producing something with the forms that Graham liked in the office, I started to work at home looking for ideas.

[00:11:34] And Victor took that summer and just worked alone. Just kept coming up with ideas and at one point he looked across his table and there he had a beautiful wood sculpture and suddenly it dawned on him that this beautiful sculpture really represented how he wanted to go, and he used that as his guiding light.

[00:12:02] So one evening I thought of and put down on paper the essential concept that has become the Needle.

[00:12:09] When I had drawn the idea in my office, I came out and told Elaine that I've got it, I've got it.

[00:12:15] The idea that they'll take for the tower, the source of the idea is the wooden sculpture of David Lemmon's that we had for about ten years. Dave calls it the Feminine One.

[00:12:30] And he had that sitting at the end of his desk when he was working daily on the design, a new design and outside the box design of the Space Needle.

[00:12:40] That's where this idea came from.

[00:12:49] When we became aware of the Feminine One by David Lemmon, I really wonder what he was thinking about when he came up with the idea when he carved this. It does have that grace of a woman dancer and with her arms up over her head.

[00:13:04] In the 1930s, when David Lemmon would have been active here, there was a great group of artists here during the Depression, but it was small. I mean, it's not the same as New York, obviously, or Philadelphia. We had an active group and they all basically knew each other.

[00:13:20] There was a very rich arts and cultural community here in Seattle that thrived. And my dad, it was something that was very important to him.

[00:13:31] Many of his best friends were or in fact, artists, people like Martha Graham, Syvilla Fort and other dancers. You know, they made it big. And so they were a source of inspiration for the local artist.

[00:13:47] In fact, Syvilla Fort did serve as a battle for many local artists. So, yes, I can see how a sculpture like the Feminine One could have been inspired by dance.

[00:14:01] Well, by intent, it was also inspired not just by the Feminine One, but by a classic dance form.

[00:14:10] My father describes in his journal three dancers back to back, legs slightly spread apart, arms outreach to the sky forming each of the three facades, if you will, of the structure of the Space Needle, arms outstretched.

[00:14:40] My mother tells me that my father before my mother's time had a romantic relationship with Syvilla Fort. She moved to New York and my mother tells me also that they visited her there and watch a dance performance of Syvilla. Dancer choreographer Syvilla

[00:15:00] Fort has made a great contribution to the world of dance in this country as a member of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. She performed many, many years and performed in the classic movie Stormy Weather, she has indeed given much to the world of dance. And tonight here at this theater, the world of dance and theater will give something back to her.

[00:15:21] I'm here to honor a lady that I met a long time ago, and I see her work and I have seen the results of her work and she's a very important woman. Without her, there would be no Katherine Dunham or Alvin Ailey and all of the fantastic dancers whom we have today. More silently, more tenaciously and more gracefully than almost anybody else I know on the face of the earth.

[00:15:43] One of the most powerful contributions to the field of dance, field of theater, and as a friend is someone who has been so much to all of our lives. It was an honor for me to be asked to participate in this tribute to her tonight.

[00:16:07] People that I know or knew her. She had this very wonderful personality, really intelligent and bubbly and just a really cool person. She ends up going to New York, of course, and ends up teaching people like, you know, Eartha Kitt and Harry Belafonte, James Dean. You know, these were all people that studied with her. So she had this theatrical connection as well. Of course, the most famous thing that she's associated with is the dirty footer's (unintelligible). The modern dancers were all about expression and improvisation, where if you were a classical dancer, you had this sort of rigorous format that you had to follow. So she's right in the middle of it. And she was trying to reflect her African heritage. It's classical training, but with the modern aesthetic blending in with it.

[00:17:15] I did go to the Seattle World's Fair when it opened and riding up in the Space Needle in that glassy metal elevator that hung outside. You know that that in itself was a thrill ride.

[00:17:31] One of the great attributes of the Space Needle is its relationship to the surrounds, to the city, to the sound and the ocean. We are not so high that you can't recognize a person walking on the street. And we really connect well to our city. And so there is an there is a feminine angle to how do we bring people together and work. If he goes from the forties, that may be where the inspiration for the artists, the artwork coming out in the 50s. Victor Steinbrueck looking for a design in the 60s.

[00:18:05] It is built. And then here we are. Fifty six years later, the Space Needle certainly has become the Grand Dam and the matriarch of the city.

[00:18:18] There's gender in architecture. We see faces in architecture. We see bodies. We see other body parts in the architecture.

[00:18:26] To fast forward and see the emergence of powerful, strong leaders who happen to be women. Is interesting. Was the Space Needle a predictor of what was going to happen in the future? Did they all come into their power and strength, you know, together? I don't know.

[00:18:52] It's really hard to speak on behalf of an artist that's not with us any longer. You know, you can look at romance and love, which is the inspiration for so many pieces of art and literature and music. But trying to get to the source of any artistic expression or inspiration is almost impossible because we're going to project our own experiences into it. And maybe that's what the artist wants in the first place.

[00:19:41] We cannot let you dance they said. We cannot let you fly. Your buttocks doesn't tuck, they said. And that's the reason why. If your skin was white like ours and your buttocks small, then perhaps you'd have a chance, they said. But I refused that call.

[00:20:11] I learned to dance indoors I said. Find some other songs.

[00:20:18] Ones that tell me who I am. Tell me I belong.

[00:20:24] I'll be the first at Cornish and then one day you'll see your children will walk and watch, search the sky for me. At first, my curved winged fire, at first my blossoming bloom will be the stories that you tell back in your living room.

[00:20:51] The Space Needle is my whisper. My arms are still in flight. My leap of legs in concrete, a grand plie at night. I danced throughout the city, though so few know my name. I am not done, but I pirouette her flame.

[00:21:19] See my curved wing fire, watch my blossoming bloom. But the unknown children in Seattle living rooms.

[00:22:07] Well, let's give B.J. Bullert a hand. And so now B.J. is going to introduce her cast.

[00:22:21] Well, thank you all for coming. And it's so gratifying to see some of the people who helped make this film possible here with us tonight. And I want to do a couple of special, real, real special shout outs to the creative women who were able to, like, bring this vision to life. And I especially want to shout out to Jourdan Imani Keith and Nia and Gretchen Yanover and Edna Daigre.

[00:22:56] It was Edna's idea that we danced the poem and I thought, well, what could be better?

[00:23:03] But there's some other people I really want to acknowledge as well. I'd like to acknowledge some of the people who helped weave this story together, my editor, Erik Dugger.

[00:23:14] And I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

[00:23:16] My director of camera, my cinematographer, Joseph Hudson's here. But, you know, he has that artistic eye that was able to capture the Space Needle in a really unique way, particularly through the glass floor. And you know, there are other people here in this audience that I would really like to call out and especially I'd like to call out very special honored guest, and that is Syvilla Fort's little brother John Fort, who's joined us here with his family. You know, making a film is such a collaborative endeavor, and really it's not just my work, it's really the collective work of the people who came together who help helped help me articulate division and help bring it to fruition. So I see a couple of people who helped me in that final mile of, you know, getting that final cash to go.

[00:24:18] And I really want to thank them. I'm not going to put them on the spot, but I think it's probably now a good time to move to the next session. And I'm supposed to go over there, Carletta. Oh, one last thing. We got to give a super shout out to Carletta because she put this thing together.



[00:24:42] Ok, so Jourdan and Nia-Amina. Yes, they're coming up. I have a different question for them.

[00:24:56] So first, I have a question for all of you. But before that, I'd like to just introduce Jourdan and Nia-Amina. They are long active in their particular disciplines in Seattle and beyond. Jourdan is the current civic poet give her a hand. Wait.

[00:25:24] She's the next civic poet. When does your term start Jourdan?

[00:25:28] Jourdan, when does your term start? It started. OK, so last month.

[00:25:34] Sorry, sorry. It's been three whole weeks and it goes until 2021 or two years causing trouble ahead.

[00:25:44] Do you want to say a little about what you plan to do or is that putting you on the spot. I don't mind.

[00:25:50] Hi, everyone.

[00:25:52] So I assume that most people don't really even know what the civic poet is or the title.

[00:25:59] It's part of being a very unique city. Well, unique. Not really, but a head. So it's part of a vision. It came from Nick Licata a while back when there was a poet populace that not just to have a poet laureate, but to have it very explicitly be a poet that's engaged in having people reflect on the social conscious and fabric of this place. And so for the next two years, that will be my work and I specifically will be inviting people to participate in writing workshops that will be in response to public art. Specifically, public art that is grounded in unknown histories or histories that are very critical to our consciousness, without us even realizing it, so that we can not just tell single stories and avoid the danger of that narrative that's evolving, where the complexion of the city is changing, therefore the stories might change and everything that the city is built on people who we may not know about. So that's going to be my work over the next two years of a variety of forms. And then if you participate, you'll be invited to perform. But I won't leave you hanging. I'll teach you how to do that. So that's my work.

[00:27:19] Thank you, Jourdan.

[00:27:22] Nia-Amina is a member of Spectrum Dance Theatre. She's very involved in the community and community engagement. Nia, would you like to say something?

[00:27:35] Yeah, absolutely. As Carlos said, this is my fourth season with Spectrum Dance Theatre under the direction of Donald Byrd. Spectrum Dance Theatre just down on Madrona Beach. Kind of like a public building that's right by the water. So if you ever down there, you can go ahead and go in.

[00:27:52] They have open classes and also we have an extensive home season and Donald Byrd's work right now is on exhibit at the Fry Art Museum, is a retrospective of his career. And it's a beautiful exhibit and we're performing there every Tuesday and Friday and Saturday and Sunday. So there'll be some number of folks from the company. So that's very exciting. The work we do there is also based in the social fabric, particularly social issues of our time and historic times. So the work is challenging and ask a lot from the company artists and also asks from the audience to to be engaged in that kind of work. While we're also experiencing kinesthetic art. So movement in dance and I also the role of community engagement. So I help facilitate and direct a couple free dance classes for youth ages 8 to 18. It's a wide range and we are just starting our first fall session and we're gonna have our spring session in March. So if you're interested in then you have some young folks that are wanting to dance and move outside of kind of the structure of discipline, but really about improvisation and creating choreography, generating ideas.

[00:29:04] Let me know because we like to get them in there. Yah, that is a little bit about the work I do.

[00:29:09] Okay, great. Thank you. Okay. And actually, Gretchen, would you mind coming up? Yay! Yes, Gretchen.

[00:29:21] Ok, so now I'm going to ask all of you the same question, and you each have had a particular role that you've played in the film. So the question is, how has your involvement in this film and the process of your contribution to its creation changed your view and or opinion of the Space Needle?

[00:29:50] B.J., that's a big question. I know. I think the film is kind of my answer to that. But, you know, the the notion of gendering architecture and seeing this symbol of the Northwest as a matriarch to me is kind of emergent and it's really the more I learned about the Feminine One and the more I learned about a hypothesis or a possibility that Syvilla might have, you know, you might have had a connection in some indirect speculative way is to me really quite fascinating because it's a statement about the time and it's something that inspires, I hope, a more inclusive way of looking at our cityscape.

[00:30:34] Are we going in order? Mm hmm. Well.

[00:30:39] It's I you know, um, I'm from Philly and, um, how that plays out is at the symbol in Philadelphia for what the city is, is William Penn and Billy Penn at the top and his hat and his jokes about what angle you look at him from and what you might see. And so I never really cared that much. But whenever I've been away from Seattle and and coming home. When I lived on Orcas Island, I would see the Space Needle and I would feel like I was home, but I didn't feel like I really knew why. And now I feel.

[00:31:20] That.

[00:31:23] There is a bigger connection for me in relationship to the Space Needle, too, that there's all these stories and all these reasons for being here and a lot of people leave here to go other places.

[00:31:37] And be more known or.

[00:31:40] Have huge influence. And it's kind of like there was this silence in Seattle. That's beautiful and huge has this huge influence and yet we don't really know. So I think of that when I see and I definitely feel like looking at that piece of architecture. Whether we define it as being gendered or not has probably influenced the very, um, raucous history under this city that, you know, this is a place of actual revolution. It's not just a revolution. Some of it has been technical, but some of it is. A lot of it is the social fabric. So I feel like that makes sense.

[00:32:24] Okay, I didn't know I was going to be up here, so for me, it was just fun now to look at the Space Needle differently because I grew up here and so I just have taken it for granted this whole time. But having my music in the film as the trio element at the end now with the trio of the Space Needle, that I can think of that every time.

[00:32:49] I'm not from Seattle, originally from Los Angeles. And I think that, you know, there's all these iconic things in each city. L.A. is full of them that often get kind of lost in translation or just lost on imagery and end up not on purpose, but having some sort of shallowness thrust upon it when they're lost in the visual form.

[00:33:11] I think what happened with this film was using the visual form and weaving together all these other artistic elements to give it back some of the depth that it already had. You know, not simply just a picture of it or a postcard or memory, but weaving in the histories that, you know, as Jourdan said, are often not talked about or are not included in the postcard is not enough space to tell you about all the things that have happened there, all the people who have influenced the creation of it and all the people that looked up in this city at it at one point in time and maybe walked away. So I think that I feel definitely a deeper connection. And I really feel a deeper connection to the Feminine One that the sculpture and the beauty of that sculpture.

[00:33:53] And I don't even think I recognized that it was there the first time I went to the Space Needle and it's crazy because it's right there.

[00:34:00] Now, every time I go there, my eyes are open in a new way. And anytime I'm in Seattle Center, you know, I think that's my breath of fresh air with all of the traffic and construction down there. You know, I can look the Space Needle and kind of sigh a little bit thinking about all this history. Syvilla, I can hear your music here, your poem. And, you know, it feels makes me feel a little bit better.

[00:34:24] Thank you. OK. So, B.J., I'd like you to introduce Peter and Alan. Could you come to the stage?

[00:34:36] Ok, Peter Steinbrueck is Port Commissioner and he's also the son of Victor Steinbrueck and obviously he's in the film. Alan Maskin is an architect with Olson Kundig whose firm did the renovation of the Space Needle, which created the glass floor and just did some pretty extraordinary work as as he went back and looked at the history and started stripping away pieces that seemed maybe extraneous. He'll be able to talk about that a little bit more. But he's an artist in steel. So are you going to ask the questions?

[00:35:18] So this is for both Peter and Alan given your historical perspective about the Space Needle, what new thoughts, ideas and or impressions have come in mind and regards in regards to the Space Needle and its history?

[00:35:37] I do, yes. Is it on. The role of history in the design and the redesign of the building? And Peter can speak certainly to his father's input in the original design. But 54 years later, we're working on a reimagining of an amazing structure. And for us, the project is about the role that research and history plays is actually really deep and significant. And we're going to show some images while we're talking up here. They're going to show not only some historic original construction images, some dress, some of the original renderings and drawings for the project in the 1960s. And that's indicative of a lot of the research that we actually did in preparing for the project. So we did go back fairly far and we were certainly aware of Peter's father's sketches in his sketchbook, and we were aware of the fact that he was inspired by the sculpture by David Lemmon. But for me, what I find so deeply interesting about B.J.'s film is that you can never really take that lineage back far enough. And so the fact that an architect was inspired by a sculptor and possibly inspired by a dancer and then who is Syvilla inspired by we know we know a bit about her past and her experiences. And then so the lineage of ideas and creativity and how that flows through really changes, I think the project. And so I'd love to tell one really quick story, which is when we started in the project, we were we visited the existing conditions and imagined 54 years of things being added in accretions over time.

[00:37:08] So what what Victor and the other architects created originally was obscured. And from my perspective and in many, many layers, layers and levels, so crawling through the floor of the very bottom layer, I'm crawling through a plenum that is about this high on my hands and knees with my colleague Blaire Paisan. And we literally are investigating that subterranean structure under the rotating floor of where the restaurant is located. And we saw a hole and we crawled over to the hole and we looked through it again and our hands and knees and we put a camera through it and we took a photograph. And the photograph was remarkable. And then the photograph looked exactly like construction photos that were taken when the building was really taken. But the view had been covered up over time. And so one of the things we realized is what the original architects and engineers did was brilliant. And that much of it was covered. So part of what we wanted to achieve, along with other goals of trying to understand the underlying logic of the building, was to literally reveal some of that and put that back. So now there's a staircase that will come up at some point and there's a glass floor in the bottom of it. And that glass floor is an oculus stair. But now when I stare in there and look at it, I used to just see I would see Peter's father sketch. I would see the sculpture that inspired it.

[00:38:29] But now when I stand there and look at it as a consequence of B.J.'s films, I see something else entirely. And for that, I'm really grateful.

[00:38:36] Could you repeat the question now?

[00:38:39] You know, that's wonderful. Given your historical perspective about the Space Needle what new thoughts, ideas and or impressions have come to mind in regards to the Space Needle and its history?

[00:38:56] Well, for me and first of all, a magnificent piece of work. B.J. and all of you who've contributed to it. This has taken it to a new level. The continuing story of the Space Needle. It's very much alive today. And I'm so, so pleased that as John Ford. Yes. That you're here as part of that living legacy and the others who come out tonight. It's just truly remarkable, B.J., how you put this all together and and build on little pieces of facts and little pieces of myth and history and drawings and photographs and memories and recollections. It's really a wonderful piece of work and the music and art and the poetry and the dance all coming together. You know, they say that architecture is the mother of the art that goes back to a great recent Greek times.

[00:39:52] Maybe this maybe art is the mother of architecture.

[00:39:56] Well, that depends on.

[00:39:58] But in classical times, architecture was the mother of the art because it brought it all together in a composition that was enduring. But we can debate that.

[00:40:09] But for me, it's not a historical perspective. It's a family perspective with memories and visualisations in my mind and recollections from early childhood when the fair open visiting the fair. I was just a wee boy at bay, but a very exciting time. But it's really interesting to me, as Alan said, this lineage and by the way, we're classmates from graduate school and you did you and your firm also Kundig. Is it also with your name on it now, too, yet? Not yet. Okay. Did a remarkable job of this very, very challenging assignment to touch and alter and to to bring some new life and new spirit to such an iconic structure. Can you imagine working on the Eiffel Tower in a similar manner? You know that space, while not quite the Eiffel Tower, but it's up there in the iconography of world monuments these days. And you guys just I have to say, hats off to you for the remarkable work that you did. It brought some new elements to the experience. And then, frankly, the NATO (unintelligible) needed some some a little bit of work and loving care. It was time for it and some of the attachments were taken out. But Alan is

absolutely right about revealing more of the structure, which I so love. If you haven't been up there seeing the glass floor and removing, you know, the screening that that obscured some of the exterior form, I think was also beautifully done with loving care and consideration.

[00:41:53] So I just have to say that and by the way, George Gulacsik was the photographer of some of the photographs of the construction. He was a very close family friend. Both my parents, my mother, Elaine, and my father. And he was assigned to photograph the whole project during construction. And those photographs remained in a box for nearly four decades, I think. And Sally Gulacsik, my mother's dear friend, artist and record a musician, turned them over to me. She didn't know what to do. She didn't know what was there. She didn't know what to do with them. And I said, this is an incredible, you know, collection of historic photographs. And the library has them now. And they're in the public domain and they've been digitized. And the Space Needle is used, some of them, and help support the digitizing of it. Thank you, Space Needle Corporation. So there's lots of, you know, credits to go around. I think what remains is that I think you've built on the mystique B.J. with the editing and the choreography and all that. This aspect of the Feminine One had been in my family since early memory. You want to come see it? It's at my home. I put her to bed. She's been doing a lot of work lately.

[00:43:14] So she's in bed right now. But she she lives and you and you have allowed her to continue to live. But that connection to dance, the Feminine One became known as I shared the story.

[00:43:26] And my dad's journal, original journal that's contemporaneous with the Space Needle construction, which I have at home. Also, by the way, there's a new Feminine One, the bronze 2, brought Feminine One 2 or whatever they're going bronze that was scaled up to 9 feet. The actual little wood sculpture is only about this big about 2 feet in height or so, but the scaled up version is scaled up beautifully. And the Space Needle Corporation again, thank you for recognizing its value and meaning commissioned to have it basically cast in bronze and scaled up and I was involved in that project, was very pleased to be a consultant for that as well. Make sure it was done right and it was done extremely well. But the intrigue here is really the dance aspect of this. We have the artist, David Lemmon. Let me tell you a little interesting and this mystery here that there's lots more that I don't know and I'm not an expert on her life achievements. And her you know, I'm not I don't know all about that, except I have a very nice photograph of her and my dad's photo collection. Wonderful studio photograph.

[00:44:43] No, that's. Oh, yes. I mean, was Syvilla. Oh, yes. Are you serious? A beautiful studio photograph.



[00:44:49] And her the peak of her dance years. Well, there was another woman. The three women represent this, the Space Needle, as you heard my dad's words there back to back. Well, there were a couple other when my mother was a dancer. She wasn't a professional dancer, Elaine. And by the way, my girlfriend is a dancer. I don't know how that. She's a contemporary African dance artist in Oaxaca, Mexico. BJ.'s matter.

[00:45:17] But there's all these little intrigues. But another woman, Bonnie Bird. Does anyone know her and her name and legacy? Well, Well, she was a contemporary, maybe a little older, maybe a mentor in some ways, too, to Syvilla at Cornish School, she was the director of the dance program.

[00:45:35] Now, here's the interesting thing, David Lemon was around here. His father was also a sculptor and art who produced a lot of the terracotta that you see on old buildings.

[00:45:51] So he had a family history of artists, but he was a boat builder, a sailor. My dad was a sailor. Love sailing boats. The San Juan Islands. But Bonnie Bird or isn't I mentioned her is because she died in the same year that David Lemon did 1995 in Tiburon in Northern California, where there was an artist colony where David had moved too years before with his partner artist. To this day I don't know why she was there, Bonnie Bird, who was also a very close and dear friend of my father's who I had met several times. But the fact that they were there in this same little artist's colony in their old age and they both died there. What's going on here?

[00:46:36] Oh, so many mysteries and legends and stories that the film evokes that you all of you've contributed evoke in the poetry and the dance and the music that will continue, you know. But there's no one thing in reality. You know, it's this and that and a little bit of something else that goes into the creative process. But to take these inspirations from dance to sculpture to a steel structure. Five hundred and fifty feet, is that right? Six hundred. Five hundred feet. You know why it's that height. By the way, so you could see over the hills. And the reason why it rotates, obviously, to see the panorama, but why it rotates for one hour is that's the limit of time that they want the restaurant goes to be, that they want to move around, get the next. But you could see the entire 360 panorama in one hour. I think that's still true today.

[00:47:33] Yeah, but after an hour. Time to go on. We've got more customers waiting. So anyway, so there.



[00:47:40] This is the lore of the legend, the history, the influences that all sort of blend in this wonderful way. I will tell you, the original base that you see that is a spiral was part of the original design, but it was done in the late nineties and it was taken from my dad sketches and so they did a great job. It was it was it MBBJ that worked on that. Callison, but the other thing that hundred-foot piece of convention center or whatever it is that made it into a spoken wheel should never have been put on the Needle. And unfortunately, I think even the Space Needle family regrets that now. But that sort of altered, you know, the overall simplicity of the form. But to take steal a hard piece of material that doesn't lend itself super well to curved, curved forms, particularly, it can be bent and wrapped and so forth. But at that height, this was a technical feat they had wanted. My dad had wanted to do it in concrete and at one time using tensile strands and other ideas for the structure and concrete was prohibitive. It was, too. It just wouldn't. They didn't have this whole thing was done in less than a year. You know, so is a remarkable feat in the construction itself. But the steel actually simplified the form, I think, and worked in a in a practical way to kind of establish what was sought there and in the overall form of the Needle. I think I better stop here. I could go on, but I've talked a lot. So others we want to hear from. So. Thank you. Thank you all for being here.

[00:49:32] Ok. Thank you so much.

[00:49:33] So I just wanted to say that I hope that you will fill out a postcard with your memory of the Space Needle and you can place it at the end of the table there. You know it. There's not a day. Well, if you come around Queen Anne or thereabouts that you spy the Space Needle and it is just so much a part of our story of Seattle. At this time we're going to open the floor to some questions for our panelists. The other thing about the Gulacsik collection, it is part of special collections. You can put Space Needle there and you could see all of the construction images and also some of the advertising publicity images of the Space Needle. So hold on. Does anyone have a question or comment?

[00:50:33] Thank you all for being here tonight.

[00:50:35] Question about the combination of the music and dance the two of you work together.

[00:50:43] The music, the tempo and so on. Was that a new piece for the film? And when you choreographed the dance.

[00:50:55] Did that depend on the music itself? It looked like it was in time. You were dancing to that music.

[00:51:04] So B.J. chose all this music from albums that I have already put out. And it was a completely virtual collaboration. So I'll let Nia-Amina talk about her part.

[00:51:18] Um, yet to kind of reiterate I was given the music. And the poem and I think.

[00:51:28] Only in text.

[00:51:33] Do we do we have it? I think you said it in text form, also it because I remember reading it.

[00:51:38] Yes. Right.

[00:51:41] It was. Yeah. Layered already. Yeah, that's right. So everything was already layered. And then it was kind of my response to the music, the text and obviously the subject matter. And so I think the musicality that you see in the film though edited is true to form to what it was like to be there in person seeing it.

[00:52:06] The inspiration for a lot of the movement was definitely from both the rhythm and the romance. It's kind of in the music. Is it called a waltz? Yes. And then also the text and the imagery and the metaphor that's present the texts and my own response to the historical connection between Syvilla Fort and the Feminine One. So there's some reference to Syvilla, dance background and my own as they kind of combine in the ways that I researched. I could see that being kind of this blend of modern and classical form, but also black dance and African-American dance history through her connection with Katherine Dunham. And I studied Dunham when I was young also. So I kind of thought about the verticality of the Space Needle taking out of the hierarchical sense and bringing it more in to like elongation of the spine and undulation of the spine, which is big. This is a big idea in the Dunham technique.

[00:53:11] And so kind of using that in images of Syvilla in the Bacchanale piece, the John Cage composed for her and some of the other pictures and images of her movement story, whether, you know, just watch that scrape, you can just watch Catherine Dunham's dancing or

all the musical numbers of Stormy Weather to be real. They're amazing to get kind of a historical reference for the movement and also placing that in relationship with the Space Needle as it is in a visual form as well.

[00:53:42] So it was all layering.

[00:53:50] That was Nia worked with the tempo that was recorded already, and I think B.J. probably intentionally chose a waltz that is in triple meter in three. So everything is about the three.

[00:54:03] Hi. Thanks for sharing the history of Space Needle. I have a question for Alan. I am an architectural designer and I wanted to know a little bit more about the construction challenges you and the team at Olson Kundig faced during the remodel.

[00:54:21] I think the most challenging piece of the project, frankly, was a construction project that's 500 feet in the air. And so you might as well be in outer space, honestly. And so if you think about all of the construction materials, we added almost 200 percent more glass than there was the original, which the original architects were interested in, in providing these sweeping views. And it was all about the view in almost every decision they made. And so we wanted to sort of follow that and actually provide 200 percent more view as a consequence of 200 percent more glass, which was a direct lineage to them. But there was I don't know if you were here or noticed when the Space Needle was under construction, but at three o'clock in the morning, one day, a scaffolding platform was actually lifted up into place and they weren't sure that it was actually going to work perfectly. So they did it at three o'clock in the morning and then they covered the entire Space Needle. And many of you that had been here for a few years will remember that it was actually covered so that you couldn't actually see the project.

[00:55:20] But it wasn't the intent wasn't to obscure the project. It was to protect the people that would be working in that space for the year that it was under construction. But every piece of glass and some of these go out, you know, a glass can weigh it a ton. And so lift it up through a crane and put in place. And one of the photos you may have seen up here, it was too risky to have human beings putting the glass in place because of the wind and so on. So these robotic structures were designed and created to literally lift the glass and put each piece in place. So, you know, as a future architect, the chance to work on a project where you're doing things that have never been done before. It's one of the most nerve wracking things that you would ever do in your life. But it is also is one of the most satisfying and delightful to see it when it comes together. So I hope something comparable happens for you.

[00:56:10] Hi. I'm have a follow up question. You may have. Oh, and so this already sorry we came here or those people who can't hear me. I'm sorry. I have vagus nerve stimulator, which is for epilepsy. So we came here from out of state. We were those people who came to see this spike up in the Space Needle. So this is my husband and he's an interior designer and I wanted to take him to see the restaurant went around. And at that time on the page, it said that, you know, you weren't having the restaurant anymore. And so I wanted to know why. And I don't know if you answered that already, but everyone asked me that. So now he's interior designer and I knew he would love the architecture and everything like that. So. That's my question.

[00:57:13] So the question is the restaurant in the way that in the form that it used to be. And we should start by saying that, you know, that John Graham, the original architect, had done a rotating floor restaurant in Honolulu and it's still there. So if any of you had been to Waikiki, it's sitting on top of the building and it was almost a beta test for what he would later do with the Space Needle. And that was the very first time that a restaurant rotated in the world and its actually was a bar. Technically the beginning. He then took that idea. He patented it. And then. And so when Peter earlier was describing how his father was designing the legs, it was so that they could actually have this rotating restaurant, which was a critical part of the design from the very beginning, which is something they wanted to achieve. Now, over the years, the restaurant has changed many, many times. So it's been designed and redesigned and it's taken different forms. And some of you that have been here for a while have been there. And it's been a very different restaurant at different times that you're there.

[00:58:11] The idea to make this glass floor was a new kind of observation experience, a new way of looking at Seattle. That was actually really intriguing to the client, but they had no idea if people would actually go. I mean, is any anyone afraid of heights? I mean, not everyone, like, is going to walk out on a glass floor. So it was a huge risk that they took. But what they found is that it has been extraordinarily popular and that people are sort of coming in droves. So for them, it was a risk, but they very wisely gave themselves a year to sort of figure out the restaurant issue. And so they know that they will be a food and drink beverage aspects to that project. And if you go up there at different points, you'll see them trying different furniture configurations, different types of food, experimenting with different kinds of parties. And so they are literally trying to sort of reimagine what that future food experience will be like. So there will be something, but it will probably not look like the way you remember it.

[00:59:10] So the. Or the way.

[00:59:13] I never did. I just wanted to bring him because you weren't thinking about moving here.

[00:59:17] Hi. I'm very grateful. My name's Robin Dawn. I love that hidden history of the Space Needle. It's so encouraging. I'm local. I'm from Seattle. And the Space Needle was built two years before I was born. But my parents always told me it was built for the world's fair. And then as in elementary school, every year, every Easter, all the kids went to the Seattle Center. It was a tradition. I didn't know this history about the art work and the dance, sir. And I will never look at the Space Needle the same.

[00:59:57] And I appreciate that the dancing, the poetry that hit in history. Thank you for sharing that story.

[01:00:05] Thank you. I just worked recently for staff pro up there for the race up the eighty eight hundred fifty two steps. And we ate there in 1962 during the World's Fair when they were, you know, making a movie, It happened at the World's Fair. And, you know, it's really improved that revolving floor. It's much nicer up there than it was. Job well done. Thank you. Any other questions?

[01:00:39] So watching the combination of the music and the dance to the with a poem going on that was almost a sensory overload. And I'm wondering how you as a dancer with the poem. As of. Going on simultaneously in the music is as the glue holding both of the thing. Either one could have been done, the poem or the dance to the music would have all three things going on at once was a lot. I'd love to see it again by itself. And I just wondered how you were able to interpret both the music and the poem at the same time.

[01:01:21] I think it was not as hard as you think, particularly because I think anybody when they're moving or dancing in any way at home or in a studio, there's a lot of different inspirations that. Come to you when you're improvising, when you're groovin, when you're hanging out, you know. So listening to music and text actually helped generate more ideas. The kind of quality and texture of you know, the instrument that was kind of keeping a rhythm and a bass, if you will, the vibrations and a bass in that way. And the imagery that was so clear in the texts that Jourdan wrote that just brought more into it was like it was great.

[01:02:10] It's the best way to be sensory like overloaded and be able to pull inspiration. So I I'm really appreciative to the two artists that are next to me because I don't know what that

dance would have looked like had I not had any of this. Had I not had the history B.J.'s, you know, pushing to also find this connection between the Feminine One in Syvilla.

[01:02:30] It made it. There was kind of like the dance could carry all of those things and more.

[01:02:46] And what I'd like to just add onto that is that one of the subtext of the film is to make the invisible visible. And that's why using or incorporating art, poetry and music was integral to this. I want to give a word of appreciation for what was said earlier about looking at the Space Needle and feeling somewhat empowered. I mean, women are often invisible in our community. Most of the streets are named after city fathers. I think that it might be time for us to take a new look at our environment and not exclude the women and people of color from our environment. I mean, in New York, Rebecca Solnit, the writer, put together a map of the New York subway system where she changed the names of the subway stops to prominent women. So there would be, you know, Ruth Bader Ginsburg stop. There would be Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez stop rather than Columbus, et cetera, or just a friend of mine was one of the engineers when they built it.

[01:04:08] Gary Curtis, he lives up on Guemes island. And Gary told me that if there ever an earthquake in Seattle, the safest place to be is at the top of the Space Needle. Because he said you can't believe the hidden aspects of the Space Needle. There's so much concrete down there. They poured out. They poured a lot of concrete.

[01:04:35] He is still alive and he came down and advised on the project is that he's a totally charming man. He showed up with seven sheets of structural drawings. The structural set for the project you're looking at is probably one hundred and fifty. There was just this incredible economy to that these hand. And he did all that hand drafting himself, he is very proud of them. And he said you could build in a Space Needle again with these seven sheets. And I'm convinced he's absolutely right. But they were doing it so quickly that they overdesigned the project. And so they literally were like, we're just going to make the foundations bigger. We're going to take all the steel and size it larger. And so, in fact, if you think about it, the Space Needle has been through a number of earthquakes and has actually done very, very well. That's not to say it's not going to move a little bit, but it's probably not going anywhere.

[01:05:23] One more comment. And maybe Peter can address this one. How do we preserve the sightlines for the Space Needle? Yeah, I mean, we've got all this construction going on everywhere. Seems like nothing is sacred anymore. What did the city do to make sure that the public still has access to it?

[01:05:40] Great. Great question, Pete. And.

[01:05:47] The Space Needle is a designated local historic landmark. And believe it or not, and it the views are protected views from public spaces such as parks around the city. So you can't, in theory, block the view of the Space Needle from different vantage points. Now, that's not always entirely honored with all of the new construction that's going up, but there is some protection and they have to. That has to be studied when a project is built that may potentially block or obliterate the view of the Space Needle. That has to be part of the record that that's been studied and analyzed from different venues. I should also mention that the Space Needle would look tiny if it were placed downtown today.

[01:06:36] It didn't when it was put there. And by the way, it's the whole Seattle Center campus is a former burial site of the Duwamish people.


[01:06:45] I don't know. Many people know that. There's probably much that remains unknown about that location, but it was that was a precursor, which is also an interesting piece of lore there.

[01:06:59] But so so yeah. So in scale, it stands alone in its simplicity, in natural and beauty that it would not be so graceful looking if it were buried amongst the much larger towers downtown now and the crowding and shading shadowing that goes on.

[01:07:18] I have a question for you, sir. Mr. Fort. I have a question for you.

[01:07:25] When I was researching your sister, one of the things that I learned was that she had wanted to be a ballerina and she wasn't able to study. And so she studied dance in her and in your house, I guess, and then being the first African-American woman at Cornish following her desire. So I'm wondering if you have any story or memory or of her determination to dance, because certainly we know or I know from reading the history of racial lines around what activities and arts are allowed to us. So could you talk about that a little?

[01:08:12] Yes. One little thing I know she, uh. A very determined woman. Like the woman of today and the women of today are determined. She danced at first at home in the front room, which wasn't large, but it was large enough for her to dance and study there. And I don't have



too much for a memory. I'm getting up in age that I lose a lot like. Some of the names that were brought today. I remember them. Bonnie Bird.

[01:08:59] As one of them and the other thing that I would like to say, I would like to thank Nellie Cornish the original person of Cornish School. She was. Was for Nellie, Syvilla probably wouldn't be, might not be here. But she's always going to be here, my heart. That was. It's like this. Nellie Cornish, for saying just nice and beautiful things about her and how it would be in my memories. I hope we can continue to do the thing that Nellie and Syvilla wanted to do in the dancing world, they said. I don't want it to ever die. It's got to keep going. They started something and it's not going to be finished. And that is about all I have to say, just continue the good work because it will never be forgotten not in my heart and I hope it won't be forgotten in your heart.

[01:10:23] Thank you.

[01:10:31] Thank you, guys. You know, that's my husband, so thank everybody for all the opportunity that we have to go.

[01:10:45] Thank you so much for coming.

[01:10:47] Thank you. Thank you for coming. It's a blessing. OK.

[01:10:52] Well, it was really an honor to have him here and the family. Thank them again.

[01:10:57] Thank you. Thank you for coming.

[01:11:04] Ok, so we're winding down, is there just one more question?

[01:11:09] Ok. OK, go ahead.





[01:11:15] Well, it feels so hard to follow that. I think he really brought present the sense of the sacred place for me, and I appreciated to the comments, the reflection about the the land and and the Duwamish people.

[01:11:31] My question was about how and this might be mostly a question to the dancer and poet and musician and filmmaker is has to do with is there any way in which working on this has opened your eyes newly to the genderization of architecture? Have you started seeing other things in Seattle or in other cities or other places as feminine in ways that strike you?

[01:12:06] Well, the view from Volunteer Park of the Space Needle through the black doughnut hole.


[01:12:15] So, you know, I can't miss that.

[01:12:22] I've noticed architecture being gendered for a long time because it's so overtly male in so many places. And like I said in growing up in Philadelphia, that was our big joke and they did obscure it.

[01:12:36] It was a rule before you couldn't have a building that was obscured Billy Penn's hat. And then they were like, oh, my God, we forgot about money.

[01:12:45] So, yeah, you can't see it from everywhere anymore. I hope that never happens to the Space Needle, but it definitely influenced for me. I wanted to say because B.J. asked me this. It made me think about Nina Simone who wanted to be and was trained as a classic pianist in her home because of racism. No white teacher that taught her how to play. But then when she wanted to go to remember the college, she wanted to go to hmm-mm. Curtis Institute or what I. One of the prestigious institutes. They wouldn't let Nina Simone study classical music and then practice it in that frustration. But then we. If you think for me, I think of what it takes to make something out of steel. You know, the melting down. And for her. Kind of a melting and reshaping of a dream. And we got Nina Simone and we got Syvilla Fort from not being allowed to take up the space the way she wanted, she curved around like water does, I'm gonna make it happen anyway, but in a different ways. So the blessing from the frustration, the blessing for us. So that's what I think of.

[01:14:13] And that's exactly one of the things that I think is so important about the work that that you've done, and now when I look at the Space Needle, I think of endurance. I think of not



giving up. I think of standing tall. I think of being persistent and all those things that that's Syvilla Fort represented. So when I look at the Space Needle now, I see strength, endurance, persistence, ubiquitousness, steadfastness, and kind of like a matriarch, a good one.

[01:14:49] Right. That's a wonderful way to end.

[01:14:52] Thank you so much for coming. Thank you so much for being on the panel.

[01:15:02] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

