

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Richard Digby Day – interview transcript

Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey

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Freelance Director, Artistic Director of the Northcott Theatre 1978-80, on training in RADA, Wesker's plays, Kenneth Tynan and censorship.

EJ: Can you give me some information and background from 1951 onwards?

RDD: I was a theatre-goer from the time I was ten or 11 and one of the things I distinctly remember in 1951 is being taken by my parents to stay at Stratford-on-Avon and seeing that famous cycle of history plays such as Henry IV (part 1 and 2) and Henry V in that Festival of Britain season at Stratford, and I also saw Laurence Olivier in London at that time. We were lucky in that the following year in 1952 we moved from Wales where I'd grown up and my father's business took him to the Midlands and from then until the 1970s my family lived in or around Stratford-on-Avon, so I saw pretty well everything that happened there. I always wanted to be involved with the theatre, I thought as an actor. I eventually won the Leverhulme scholarship to RADA in September 1961. But while I was there I changed and become one of their first students of direction. Of course during this period I went extensively to the theatre and then I won an Arts Council bursary for promising young directors and I won the Thames Television Theatre Directors Award and got sent to Nottingham Playhouse in November 1963, where I assisted Tyrone Guthrie on Coriolanus and did a number of productions myself. I was not expected to get productions as quickly as that. And in 1965 I paid the first of what turned into many visits to Canada working there. In 1966 I became director of the Bournemouth Theatre Company, which was an ill-starred venture which lasted for only four years, organised by the Arts Council Palace Court Theatre in Bournemouth. So I was there until 1968 although in fact in 1967 I did my first production at the Open Air Theatre in Regents Park which was Cyrano de Bergerac, which weirdly had been the very first play that I had ever seen in London 20 years before when I was a child of seven.

EJ: Can you maybe tell me a little bit more about the RADA experience in the early 60s? What was that like to be working there, to be studying there?

RDD: Well it was a time when John Fernald, who was a reasonably distinguished director and had taken over in the late 1950s from Kenneth Barnes, who had been there ever since it was founded. Under Kenneth Barnes I think was pretty much a dead letter in his later years but the kind of new influx of talent which was kind of I suppose characterised by the work of people like Tom Courtenay and Albert Finney certainly changed RADA to a degree. I didn't like it very much. I didn't think there was ever really enough individual attention, which I think is terrifically important in theatre schools. On the other hand I was a Leverhulme scholar so it was difficult in a sense to complain when I was getting everything for free. But I must have been observed and John Fernald is a particularly sensitive person in that he actually understood something about me and saw that I

would do better as a director. And I think this arose really because at the end of the first year we had to do a mime play, you wouldn't have to do a mime play now, but I was put in charge of directing it. And then I asked JF, as we called him, whether I could persuade the students to come back early to do a production of a play myself that could be performed in the first few days of term and he was absolutely brilliant to let this happen and I did a production of 'Tis Pity She's a Whore the cast of which included Anthony Hopkins, who was a student somewhat older than the majority of us. I then did a production and that was a terrifically useful contact for me. Dame Flora was amazingly helpful to me. And then I finally did a production which was the first production ever in England of Schiller's Don Carlos and that got me the Arts Council award and sort of began to get me a bit noticed. The best advice John Fernald ever gave to me was...he said, "I believe you are a director", he said "Don't ever accept a job as an ASM and work your way up. Only accept a job that will establish you in some way as a director".

EJ: What was the reaction to Don Carlos do you think?

RDD: I think people were very excited by it. I was enormously influenced rather by a Swiss girl who was there, who introduced me to a whole repertoire of what basically was an unknown repertoire in the British theatre at that time. It still remains to a considerable degree an unknown repertoire. Don Carlos is about to be done at Sheffield, isn't it? With Derek Jacobi?

EJ: Yes - the reason I ask that is because it was this big production that was...

RDD: I think that it's an extraordinary interesting and powerful play.

EJ: Yes. Perhaps we can focus on RADA. What do you think the biggest difference is today? What is your experience of RADA currently?

RDD: I on the whole think a grave mistake is made in a lot of drama schools by not asking people who have had a colossal amount of experience in the professional theatre to put that back into the school. Not all actors, directors, designers are naturally good teachers but there are many more good teachers amongst them than are ever asked. I think often the schools are in the hands of people who have not had a successful career themselves in the theatre and are working out that on the students. I don't think that applies particularly to the principals. So this is about RADA; I would be very concerned now RADA being whether you like it or not the principal British drama school by reputation and certainly with those series of grand buildings, it concerns me that they spend a lot of time studying acting techniques, which quite honestly has very little to do with the British classical tradition. And the other enormous problem, I was talking about this the other day to Peter Schaffer, is the shocking standard of teaching on the English stage in classical plays.

EJ: When you were studying at RADA did it occur to you that you might have wanted to move to film. What was the principal reason you remained based in theatre rather than film?

RDD: I always preferred theatre. I liked the danger of theatre. I like the sense of basically you're only as good as the thing you're currently doing. I slightly regret the idea that productions are filmed and so forth which takes that away from them. I like that whole atmosphere; I like the feeling that each night it's a new experience. And I've never been particularly interested in the idea of being involved in films. My agent once sent me to meet François Truffaut to see whether I could be his assistant on Fahrenheit 451 but I knew that I wouldn't care to do it and as far as television...I come from I suppose the last generation when television wasn't part of my growing up. It matters to me not at all except in terms of documentaries, and very occasionally plays. And I'm grateful for the television that when I was a child I certainly saw a large number of classical plays that I

mightn't otherwise have seen on the television. Now those are never shown at all, television drama is on the whole an atrocity.

EJ: It must be interesting working with people who have moved into film, such as Anthony Hopkins. Do you think people see that as a progression onto film or do you feel that they've in some way betrayed theatre?

RDD: I don't think they've necessarily betrayed theatre. There are some very great film actors who are not necessarily people who would be very good on the stage. And indeed when we have seen the Hollywood stars come to appear in quite often tailor made productions in the West End it hasn't worked because they don't actually have the technical abilities that are required, just in the same way that certain stage actors don't have the technical abilities to appear satisfactorily on the films for television. If I consider a career like Tony Hopkins, who I think shows an enormous amount of promise, I'm not sure that I ever really considered him to be a stage actor or a film actor of the first rank. I think he's been extraordinarily lucky. I don't think he remotely compares with somebody like Albert Finney. I don't think he's in the same class. And you do have the feeling with Tony Hopkins, from what he says and so forth and of course he's got an enormous amount of personal problems, that he has "sold out". And when I saw him for instance in *Silence of the Lambs*, I remember laughing out loud because much of what he was doing he used to do to frighten the girls at RADA. So none of it surprised me or shocked me. It's all I think for somebody like that, too easy. A very distinguished actor said to me not long ago that she thought of Tony Hopkins as an imitator rather than an actor.

EJ: That's interesting. So you visited the theatre visits between '51 and '68: part of the project is focusing on the actual physicality of the productions and what it was like to visit the theatre then, to go. Could you describe what that experience was like between '51 and '68 in contrast with today?

RDD: Well there was The Royal Shakespeare Theatre which had been built in 1932 and the Belgrade in Coventry in the late '50s, and that was the first of the new theatres so they were all, in one way or another, old theatres that one was in. And I suppose when one looks back historically one wasn't particularly aware of it. The Festival of Britain was the first kind of outpouring of the feeling that we had put the war behind us, although in fact I don't think we quite had, but a great effort was being made to put it behind us. And everything I say about production or the atmosphere of going to the theatre is, of course terrifically coloured by my own enthusiasm for going to the theatre and also seeing all these great plays for the first time. And you don't...you read in all these memoirs and things that the first production affects you so strongly that you can often not like subsequent productions. I have certainly got to the stage like most of my generation in the theatre where I want to see about one Shakespeare production in 20.

EJ: Right. OK.

RDD: Because they're mostly unbearable to us.

EJ: So in terms of first productions, which is something I did want to ask you about, can you recall any particular plays that had a huge impact on you when you first saw them?

RDD: Oh yes, I would say a lot. Looking back to my very first visit to the Old Vic Company of what is now the Old but had been the New, seeing *Cyrano de Bergerac* with Ralph Richardson and Margaret Lakeman, Alec Guinness...and I was sort of seven or eight...made an enormous impression on me particularly pictorial. I had never seen anything that looked so beautiful. Which is something that *Cyrano de Bergerac* must look different in horrific current production at the Manchester Theatre. I can't really remember much about the performances but I do remember the images. For instance the lighting of a kind of great scone which was then realised in the first act and the

leaves falling from the great tree in the last act. And I remember my visit...going to Stratford for the first time and seeing Tony Guthrie's famous production of Henry VIII. And I remember as clear as anything Wyn Clark as the old lady who says "I come no more to make you laugh" and coming up from the front of the stage those steps that led up from the front of the stage, she climbed up the stairs, turned round to us and spoke. And the sheer excitement of the stage business...when I actually worked with Guthrie, I don't think I actually appreciated it enough, his command and detail of stage business. I was rather puritanical about those sort of things. I now look back on it as a very formative and great experience indeed, and his management of the crowds in Henry VIII was remarkable. What else? That season of the Histories at Stratford, particularly the astonishing range of an actor who is tended to be rather forgotten, Michael Redgrave. Played Richard II, Hotspur, the chorus in Henry V and then a rather staggeringly beautiful production of The Tempest in which he played Prospero. Michael Redgrave seemed to me at that time...I had seen Olivier, I had seen Olivier as Richard III when he did it in 1949. I don't have very clear memories of it but Michael Redgrave seemed to me to be a startlingly protean actor. And I was certainly aware the following season at Stratford when Ralph Richardson had the company that Ralph Richardson was not happy in the classics, even I as a boy of 12 I could see that. What else do I remember out of that period particularly? Olivier as Macbeth. And because I lived in Stratford I was able to see these things a lot of times so they are really fixed very strongly in my memory and certainly the very best Macbeth I've ever seen. And that was in spite of a rather dreary and ugly-looking production.

EJ: But he transcended it?

RDD: He transcended it. I also saw the first night of that famous Peter Brook's Titus Andronicus and I remember the excitement of that also it was the first time it had ever been performed at Stratford-upon-Avon. Now if I'd known I wouldn't have been very happy with all the cuts that Peter Brook inflicted on the play, which it actually doesn't need. But I certainly remember Laurence Olivier's astonishing ability to change himself physically and a lot of things are said about Olivier but I have to say that there is no actor I have ever seen who created such a strong physical as well as verbal presence on the stage. And you feel quite confident that among the very few actors who are going to be remembered after each generation Olivier certainly will. In fact the only people I have ever seen really to compare with Olivier and to a degree Peggy Ashcroft, are ballet dancers and opera singers.

EJ: What about Gielgud?

RDD: I find it difficult to like Gielgud because of the cerebral qualities. We now can look on with an enormous degree of enthusiasm and energy...it took me a long time to like Gielgud. I liked Gielgud in the later stages of his career. When I saw him for instance as Prospero in a production by Peter Brook at Stratford in 1957, I thought he was really boring and I thought the production was really ugly and boring. It had no element of the masque, no element of the kind of...well it was the usual thing, a Peter Brook kind of - who can sometimes be a genius-imposing an overall vision that I thought was pretty Spartan in the wrong way. On the other hand when I saw Gielgud do it at the National Theatre in the opening of Peter Hall's regime, I had quite different feelings about it.

EJ: What had changed do you think?

RDD: Well it was a better production, the Peter Hall one, and certainly truer to the play, and I think my attitude to Gielgud had changed. I mean, Gielgud was not a physical actor, he was an actor in his head, and of course eventually I realised the astonishing power of beauty. And of course the enormous wit and style and command but that

really came much later with seeing him in plays by David Storey or in Pinter. But I think Gielgud '50s had a rather uncertain kind of element in his career.

EJ: Do you think that this adoration of Gielgud, Olivier and Richardson have eclipsed... in a sense that they have detracted from the other great actors of the time?

RDD: They certainly have detracted to a degree from Michael Redgrave and I was saying to somebody I was going to do this interview on what it was roughly about and they said, "Do you know, I never thought Richardson was a great actor at all!".

EJ: Really?

RDD: Now I certainly did but he was an eccentric actor. He never took the straight line through a road, he always looked for the kind of byways. And you couldn't always tell what he was doing but it was...or why he was doing it but it always remained fascinating. But I think he has, for instance, damaged to a degree Michael Redgrave's career as a great actor.

EJ: Do you think there should be some reassessment?

RDD: Yes. Michael Redgrave was erratic but then actually if you look at all four of them, they were all erratic in a variety of ways.

EJ: What was your response to plays such as *Look Back in Anger* and this notion now, which we're trying to pick apart, the angry young men? Did you feel that it had an influence on you, this style of play?

RDD: Yes. You can say historically maybe *Look Back in Anger* wasn't all that important, it was part of a much bigger pan-European movement in the theatre, but I couldn't see that then. And I bought a copy of it and I remember reading it with such pleasure, screaming with laughter at a lot of it.

EJ: Really.

RDD: I just loved the kind of potency of the language. I only saw it actually for the first time on the stage when it was last revived at the National Theatre and I thought it was over-written. But the best of it seemed to me to be kind of just joyous and really kind of freedom of the language and the chicken out of the windows of the smashing up of kind of convention. The thing I remember most about is not being shocked by it but laughing.

EJ: Sure. I mean do you think it's completely dated now?

RDD: Well of course it's entirely dated. It is absolutely dated, it won't work except as a period piece. You wouldn't want to see it performed in costumes of 2000 but...and it's also isn't it, it's a *cri de coeur* from the provinces, it's not happening in London, it's happening in Derby. And I think that's sort of important about it.

EJ: That's interesting because it's something I was going to ask that a great deal of attention is paid obviously to the London stage between '45 and '68, do you think this ought to be the case or we ought to look at what's happening outside London? It's always difficult with projects such as this that we kind of prioritise London in some ways because there were so many good things happening there. Do you think this is to the detriment of other provincial theatres, regional theatres?

RDD: I used to read in the *Guardian* and to a lesser degree in the *Telegraph* all sort of reviews of productions, particularly at Nottingham and at the Birmingham Rep which was actually manageable for me to reasonably easily get to and plays at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow long before Giles Havergal and his associates took it over and made it a sort of international theatre, that always made me want to go. And I certainly saw

work done by Frank Hauser and Minos Volonakis at Oxford that was just as good as anything that was going to be seen in London. And certainly widened to the repertoire. Queen After Death by Henri de Montalou I vividly remember seeing with Leo McKern who was the leading part. Interesting things at the Birmingham Rep, a very rare and early play by J.M. Barrie called Walker London, that first made me interested in J.M. Barrie as one of the dramatists I'm most interested in.

EJ: I was talking to Arnold Wesker about this and it was quite interesting that obviously his work was performed in Coventry...

RDD: And I saw certainly those plays in Coventry.

EJ: What was your response to those?

RDD: Liked Chicken Soup with Barley, liked Roots, found it a sort of a triumphant life-affirming experience and loathed I'm Talking About Jerusalem.

EJ: What was wrong?

RDD: Just bored me. I probably wasn't the right age to be seeing it, I didn't understand the milieu. It's very interesting that you know these plays which actually basically have a kind of London background, sort of ended up first of all being performed in Coventry but yes I remember then vividly. But the play of Wesker's I remember the most, just in sheer kind of energy and vitality, was Robert Stephens in The Kitchen.

EJ: Do you think the Jewish milieu was also something that perhaps was difficult to...because it was centred obviously in London, did you feel the Jewish aspect of the plays was in some ways difficult. Because when I was talking to Wesker he said that he and John Osborne had had a difference in agreement when Osborne left and his wife half way through one of West's plays, he felt that it was because it was very Jewish. Do you feel that to some extent?

RDD: Do you know I wasn't awfully conscious of the Jewishness except in the sense that as the plays went on and particularly I'm Talking About Jerusalem, that I was lost because I didn't understand that culture from which they were drawn. Whereas in Roots of course it's a different experience. There is only one Jewish character and everybody else is in the kind of rural north milieu. But the Belgrade was certainly an interesting theatre. There was interesting stuff going on in Salisbury, there was fascinating stuff going on Bristol. I didn't see very much of it but the shock is that all this is gone and there are now perhaps 15 regional theatres of which perhaps five or six really matter. It's a very low shocking situation for people like me who devoted their lives entirely to subsidise theatre.

EJ: It's sad, isn't it? I was speaking to Malcolm Farquhar who was the Artistic Director of the Everyman in Cheltenham.

RDD: Oh yes of course yes.

EJ: And it was interesting what he was saying about regional theatres as well...You mentioned critics, this is something you probably haven't a good relationship with critics but when you were a theatregoer when you started working did you read the critics?

RDD: Yes I was an enthusiastic reader of the critics. I also had to persuade my parents to try and buy a daily newspaper and my great aunt, who used to stay with us sometimes in the holidays, had the Telegraph. And I sort of liked, I got to like the Telegraph. It wasn't so much the Torygraph as it is now. And I liked reading W. A. Darlington, and then we went to Birmingham I liked reading in the Birmingham Post J.C. Truitt, because they did something that is a key to dramatic criticism as far as I'm concerned, and certainly it was done wonderfully by Tynan in his Sunday reviews and to a degree by

Harold Hobson and Ivor Brown, which was that they made you feel what it was like to be there. There is almost no critic today... Charles Spencer partly does it, but on the whole most people do not convey what it is like to be there. I mean I saw a review the other day of a Hamlet which failed entirely to mention anything about the performances of Claudius or Polonius; the two principal characters in the play after Hamlet. I find it utterly extraordinary. And I certainly remember loving Kenneth Tynan's reviews because they were anarchic and they were dangerous and once or twice I had dinner with Ken Tynan I certainly thought they were amazingly entertaining occasions. I always remember a wonderful thing he said about Michael Redgrave's Hamlet where he said that Michael Redgrave was the oldest Hamlet that anyone had seen since Esme Berenger struck a blow for feminism by playing Hamlet at the age of 60 and that the queen was played by a woman who looked even younger than Googie Withers although Miss Rivers herself essayed the role!

EJ: Was he different do you think Tynan, from the person you imagined when you read the reviews to when you actually met him? Did he come across as a different character?

RDD: Yes more obsessive. Yes, I mean I thought that he was like someone... I know this was around the time of Oh! Calcutta!, I thought he was like someone who kind of once he had a bone in his mouth he was gnawing it until every bit of meat was out of it. I found it an interesting and inspiring experience but also for someone quite young in the theatre, also alarming.

EJ: Because he felt dangerous, in some ways do you think?

RDD: Yes I felt that he was sort of dangerous in some ways yes.

EJ: Interesting contrast between Tynan the writer and Tynan the person.

RDD: Yes. I liked J.C. Trewin very much and I liked B.A. Young very much. I probably liked them because they tended to like my work enormously. Irvine Wardle I thought did a terrific job at the Times. Balancing everything extraordinarily well, he's a very ordered person and an observant person. Michael Billington I always thought and still find that I love the fact that he's enthusiastic with the theatre but I think a lot of the time he is far too kind. As if the theatre is actually going to go away if we don't actually pet it. And at times you think it would be better if quite a lot of the theatre did go away.

EJ: Do you think we have more of a cult of a personality now with critics? Just thinking about recent spat between Sheridan Morley and Michael Coveney?

RDD: Well in one sense well Sherry is a sort of personality to those that know him and see him on the television and things like that. Michael Coveney is a very curious character who seems to be somebody who moves from the Financial Times where his reviews were quite highly thought of to write an adulatory piece of nonsense about the person who's done more damage to the British theatre than any other: Andrew Lloyd Webber. And then ends up as the critic of the Daily Mail. I mean I'm at a bit of a loss to know who Michael Coveney is. But I know who Sherry is, I mean he's an enthusiast of the theatre but I don't rate his reviews anymore than I rate his books because they're sort of very enthusiastic hagiographies. They're not proper critical examinations of people.

EJ: Thinking about Billington's biography of Pinter is there a difficulty in examining work in a completely levelheaded way and -

RDD: I think it's a very difficult thing to balance a book which contains the life and one piece of the life that I happen to know quite a lot about is the relationship with the actors Dilys' Hamlet is very fairly presented. I think any book that's trying to do a critique of the work and at the same time balance it with a kind of overview of the life is on the

whole doomed to some sort of failure. Michael Holroyd wrote a very famous book on Lytton Strachey eventually removed all the critical material from it and printed it separately. Perhaps you have a clearer idea of it like that but I don't like theatre books very much. But I quite enjoyed Michael's book on Harold Pinter.

EJ: So did the critics influence you as to what you would go and see?

RDD: To a degree and you still get caught by it. In both directions, sometimes when they tell you something that you must go and see that you utterly loathe and when they tell you that "I utterly loathed it" and you absolutely loved it. I very much enjoyed a play of John Osborne's who is perceived almost overwhelming combination a sense of detachment. I've always...part of one's sense of theatre is I think there's always a desire to shock and it can be quite infantile sometimes but I think it's awfully good for people to be shocked periodically and I enjoyed both what the play did, although it wasn't a particularly good play but I also enjoyed the effect it had on the audience, because people got really seriously upset and started shouting and walking out and getting into a state. I think that's good periodically. But as far as the critics are concerned, yes one is sometimes influenced to go and see something. You were saying about for instance that plays in the 1950s and early 1960s in London, at least two-thirds of them may have been often very well acted but they were mostly rubbish. As you know, they were pure...rubbish but perfectly entertaining rubbish. A very small proportion of them seems valuable or interesting but then that's the winnowing out of time. However, possibly the very most important thing you can actually do is actually look at a list of plays that were on in London in the 1960s and compare it with a list of the plays that are on 40 years later. You're in a state of profound shock. So not only that there are no longer any really great stars, there are sort of manufactured celebrities but also the sort of material that is on. In fact a lot of the plays...minor plays of Terence Rattigan were rubbish, what am I supposed to think about three quarters of the musicals that are on now.

EJ: Right. That leads me onto talking about shock, did you have any experience of Edward Bond with *Saved*?

RDD: Yes I did. I saw *Saved* in its original production and there were people I knew and had worked with in the cast; Ronald Pickup amongst others, John Castle. I remember being...I'd been so prepared for the shock that when the stoning of the baby came the only thing that could shock me was if it had been a real baby. I remember watching that scene and thinking "this is doing absolutely nothing for me at all". The only play of Edward Bond's that I overwhelmingly enjoyed is *The Sea* in its original production with Coral Brown who is another very great actress and underrated.

EJ: I think the play's underrated.

RDD: And the play. I directed the play quite recently at a drama school and it was just such a marvellous experience.

EJ: Do you think it's a comedy?

RDD: I think it's exactly like said, "Life is a comedy to those that think and a tragedy to those that feel". And I think it's a marvellously encompassing play, I don't think it's particularly well-organised sometimes. But the very fact that things are left to stand and you just take it or leave it. Wonderful.

EJ: I do find the scene between Hatch and Mrs Rafi disturbing.

RDD: Well of course it is. On one level it's seriously upsetting and on another level it's screamingly funny. I mean let's face it, we all want to laugh at lunatics in the street, we'd be less likely to laugh if there was somebody in our house with us in the same way

that we can laugh at people who are extremely right-wing, but if they're in power they're frightening.

EJ: Interestingly talking about Bond and Kane, I think there was a similar reaction and they obviously caused huge media outrage. People it seemed to me who are actually shocked by the play when they went to see it...

RDD: I think that's the case. I do think that's the case. Don't forget that so much of what is said about the theatre is written by people who haven't seen it and who haven't been. I was always saying to people "I'm sorry..." often to members of the theatre boards, "I'm sorry but you haven't seen it. You're disabled from commenting".

EJ: Right. What effect did the Lord Chamberlain sensor have on your career do you think? Did he impede...?

RDD: I don't think he impeded anything because there were all sorts of ways of making things happen. I mean when I was in London at the beginning of my career and was at RADA I was awfully lucky because I lived in a room in a house in 1 Sloane Square which was a stone's throw from the Royal Court. So all I did was pay five shillings and join the club. And in fact you didn't go "it's dirty" or "it's peculiar", I found that exciting. We liked the idea of thinking "well, I'm standing up against something here". They can't actually stop the play from happening and I think that subsequently the sort of explosion that has occurred immediately after the end of Lord Chamberlain with things like Oh! Calcutta!, that sort of thing...Hair. I found Oh! Calcutta! rather boring and Hair fabulously liberating and joyful and affirmative and I remember Hair much more clearly than you could ever remember Oh! Calcutta!.

EJ: What do you think the problem with Oh! Calcutta! was?

RDD: I know Clifford Williams pretty well and I've met Kenneth Tynan...the problem was that so much of what Ken wanted to put on the stage couldn't be in one way or another. There was also finally something utterly absurd, I remember feeling this about Oh! Calcutta! when I saw it at the Roundhouse that if you were supposed to be seeing people in a state of high sexual excitement, why haven't they got erections? There were sort of a lot of flaccid dicks you know.

EJ: In terms of the theatre you've obviously done a lot of work overseas, my most general question is; between '45 and '68 if you can remember it, what would you say were the differences between the British theatre and international theatres?

RDD: If you think of the Britain at the beginning of the 20th Century [...] it was an extraordinarily insular theatre. Here was a country with a colossal empire tentacles stretching all over the world but as far as the theatre was concerned we were kind of a cordon sanitaire made by the waters around this island. And for everything that Shaw did, that William Archer did, that Edmund Frost did, it really was very difficult to make a difference but you had to be dragged screaming into 20th Century theatre and you weren't actually sure how much they really liked it. I think there was a general attempt to relate to French theatre although rather in a sort of frivolous way, in a sort of Ring Round The Moon style. The popularity of someone like Anouilh, who now nobody ever does at all, although he probably he actually is genuinely worth reviving. I did mean that there was some attempt and you have to say that some commercial managements like H. M. Tennent did try and make some steps forward in this direction and sometimes quite successfully. But it wasn't really I think until the 1950s when I heard the very potent name of Bertholt Brecht...I mean the biggest regret to me was that I wasn't able to see the famous season of the Palace Theatre just after Brecht's death in 1956 and that I never saw the Berliner Ensemble until 1963. But the influence of Brecht has been absolutely colossal and it's become fashionable to denigrate the influence of Brecht and

to kind of hand the British theatre over in a kind of way to what might loosely be described as a Stanislavskian element. I don't think there's any doubt that Brecht has finally had a much greater influence, consciously or unconsciously on British theatre through directors, through actors, through staging than anything that Bond had to say or do. I think there was obviously a kind of continental influence, although must resented. I'm interested when I read histories and lives and letters and things how much for instance Michel Saint Denis, who had such a terrific influence on training of actors and still has a terrific influence in France and in America and Canada. The great movement to start a really interesting theatre school at the Old Vic school was pretty much strangled at birth by kind of mixture of maverick elements in the British theatre like Tony Guthrie, who was a wonderful man in all sorts of ways and also like kind of stick-in-the muds. So as I feel now pretty concerned about the directions in which we are going. The National Theatre I think is much better under Nick Hytner than it was under Trevor Nunn who should never have been appointed. On the other hand I don't think they should be doing plays like Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*. I think that's just the sort of thing that should be opening straight in the West End. The very fact that the National Theatre does so many new plays seems to me to have seriously damaged the West End. Subsidises theatre on that scale has seriously damaged the West End. I agree the National Theatre's job at least 50% of the time is to have on view a cross section of international and British drama. There's something grotesque that people come to London and they can't see on a regular basis a Shakespeare, a play by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, a restoration comedy, Goldsmith or Sheridan or one of the 18th Century dramatists, Shaw, Granville-Parker, Wilde and some of the Irish dramatists. Right on up to Noel Coward and Lonsdale. That ought to be on view in the same way that they are on view in the Comédie Française in the French repertoire.