

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Colin Draper – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey**

**8 December 2004**

Stage Manager of the Richmond Theatre, on changes in lighting technology, Repertory Stage Management, the impact of 'Realism', Repertory prop acquisition.

EJ: My first question would be could you give me a general overview of your theatre background?

CD: I have always worked on the technical side, but I started at the age of 16 as a third electrician in a touring theatre, which took pre London shows and shows going off on tour. It was at Streatham Hill, which is actually very near London. To me at 16, it seemed a big theatre. It had been bombed in the war and though I didn't realise it until later it had only reopened in 1952, so I was actually working in the theatre three years after it had been reopened. We had classy shows of course, and as the third electrician. I wasn't qualified. Truly, I got the job out of The Stage and went for an interview and got the job.

EJ: What kind of work was that?

CD: That is doing get-ins and fit-ups and working the board. We had a big grand master and a separate board to work the front of house lights and I used to work the front lights. They are cued together, but it is all very physical and very manual. You would do the focusing of the lamps, holding the ladder when the chief electrician went up to focus the lamps and you did this every week. Lighting then was much more primitive than it is today, very basic and very strong colours were used and that was a weekly turnaround. Sometimes there was a Sunday getting, sometimes a Monday, more or less on Monday morning getting and open Monday night.

EJ: What was the work structure and relationship, who were you working for particularly?

CD: There was a qualified electrician above me and a chief electrician, and we worked the strangest hours. We worked from nine o'clock until one o'clock and then went back for the evening show. I lived in Ealing and used to commute to Streatham Hill and go all the way home and then all the way back again. On matinee days we still went in, but we went for an early lunch and waited on a Wednesday matinee and a Saturday matinee. The structure, it's almost the same in the West End now, is that you do mornings and evenings. So there is this dead period in the day where you commute and go home. It is an antiquated system of using labour. The larger management tend to, technicians or resident technicians work a ten hour four day week, so you go from ten in the morning until ten at night and they make you repair seats and do maintenance and at many theatres you can move your staff around. At night here is always a stage manager representing the theatre owners on call.

EJ: What sort of productions were you working on at that time?

CD: Mainly plays, musicals, D'Oyly Carte, large pantomimes at Christmas, nothing originated there. It was a bare stage with bare electrics, which we hung new lamps as happens today, as was required for the production. It all came on a lorry complete with washing machines, like today everything comes in complete on a lorry or lorries.

EJ: Were there any productions that were quite demanding from a technical point that stick in your mind?

CD: Musicals. I mean we used open a musical on a Monday night and you might have done a Sunday getting because there is more scenery, but you opened cold and you normally need stage hands called in, as and when required. A play wouldn't need stage hands to run the show, so you open cold and you actually make as many notes as you can and you get instructions from the visiting stage manager or visiting company manager. It is touch and go on a Monday night. It relies on the professionalism of everybody.

EJ: Can you remember any particular productions that stick in your mind at that early stage?

CD: Well, Dirk Bogarde came and you couldn't get out or in the stage door. He had been ill with pneumonia and was still a Rank Starlet I think and came back and worked on a play that was in the open air with Geraldine McEwan. Open-air brass sets are very difficult in the stage. It is easier now because I think you do more symbolism, but in those days you went for realism and outdoor sets are very hard to do, I just remember that. It had an old fashioned car in it, like a Genevieve car that came on the back of the stage. Frankie Howerd in Charley's Aunt

EJ: Did you speak to the actors much?

CD: Not a lot because electrics boards were big manual things that were half the way up the proscenium wall, in what they called a perch position, and very strict in those days. Once you were up there you stayed up there. Unless you came down to go and do a job and for those jobs where it was a play I walked across the back of the stage and through the cast door all the way up to the spot box to switch on the adverts. It had one of those slide projector things. They have gone out completely now, but in recent years they'd been worked on the prompt corner. As I physically walked across the stage, this young boy, and because actors realised that I was part of the team, once you were working the board, you might not have many cues, you sat down and watched it from the wings, you didn't really move around. You were technical and you were the rest of the theatre. The actors who came in with their own stage management, they were friendly because they knew you were part of a team, even more so today. I suppose I did speak to people, but they were doing a job. They come down from their dressing room, they wait in the wings, not long, just feel of the auditorium, feel of the house, and you don't really talk to actors when they are thinking about what they are going to do next. It is different when you are working on a new show and you are doing a lot of technical, you have a lot of chance to talk to everybody because there is a lot of hold ups. I did that for only about nine months, I think.

EJ: What happened next?

CD: The commuting, it was a long journey, going via Victoria and I was coming up to 17 and my national service was looming at 18 and most firms wouldn't take you on if there was less than a year to do. There was a law by the government that the job you had before you went into the forces they were obliged to offer you when you came out. But a lot of people didn't want to employ you for less than a year, as I was only a lad, but I

did go and sell cameras for a year. I was ... completely different and I thought it would be for a year, but of course it was nearly two and half years before I was called up.

EJ: Right, so you were selling cameras for that amount of time?

CD: Yes, which I quite enjoyed. It's always been useful, but I was nearly 20 when I was called up.

EJ: And how long did your military service last for?

CD: It was actually two years.

EJ: After that, did you move back into theatre?

CD: Yes as soon as I came out, which was December 14<sup>th</sup>. I knew that they would want staff at Richmond, I still lived in Ealing and I knocked on the door and got a job.

EJ: What year was this?

CD: December 1960 was when I re-entered the profession.

EJ: So you literally just walked into the theatre and -

CD: Richmond Theatre was a repertory theatre, which I knew took on extra people for the runs of pantomime, which is more or less twice daily. I just went down there and I said that I had been an electrician and the stage manager took me to see the electrician and he said that they had enough but would you like to come onto the stage staff. I said "yes". You know any job to get going because I was now 21 nearly 22 and it was hard to start at the bottom again.

EJ: What was the atmosphere like at the Richmond Theatre?

CD: Lovely. It was a rep, so very friendly. Theatre is a friendly place anyway. I had a little bit of experience and so I knew the discipline of the theatre and it was a busy show, pantomimes are. There was homemade scenery as they had a workshop there. I did that for about two or three years. I was kept on after Christmas to make the next set and then I think we had a musical in. I wasn't on the staff; as I was just a casual worker. Out of that I saw an ad for an ASM rep in Hornchurch, which of course was the other end of the district line in Essex. I got that job and that is when I started properly. So as against making scenery which is carpentry and that side, I started as an ASM where you learn to do the book and learn to work the rehearsal room and that was all on the job, I had never been to college. It was all before ... most of the colleges now have technical courses, but in those days there might have been one at Guildhall I don't know, but you could knock on doors and get jobs, so I started there and worked up to Stage Manager.

EJ: What was that process from moving from Assistant Stage Manager to Stage Manager? What was the difference? Can you give me a break down of the job? We're talking about the 1960's still.

CD: The difference in nature of jobs as an ASM, DSM and Stage Manager, in those days we had Stage Directors, and this is quite important. We don't have Stage Directors now and the person who told the actors what to do was a Producer. Well, that all got confusing with films, so we know now that the producer is the person who gets the money and puts the show on and a director is the person who tells the actors what to do and is in charge of the artistic side. We don't have stage directors now, which was a superior job. You do in opera, because opera is such a difficult art form to get the curtain up on. You now have ASMs, DSMs and a Stage Manager. In touring theatre and big companies the Stage Manager/ Company Manager, and he represents a management with the company and pays the salary. An ASM in those days, you propped, I think we were three ASMs, if you weren't on the book for that show you were making the

coffees and going out and beg, borrowing and stealing props. Reps were very poor. You only had a very small budget to hire any furniture and Hornchurch was a town where you could go and borrow anything. So that was your job, running around getting a props list, which developed as rehearsals went if you weren't on the book. If you were on the book, you stayed on the book and the other ASMs helped you, but at night you went and did the other play. So you rehearsed all day, next week's play. Luckily, Hornchurch was a fortnightly rep opening on the Tuesday, so you always had the Monday for rehearsal in the theatre. Ten o'clock start a six hour day rehearsing, go and grab some tea, come back to the theatre and set up for the evening show. You might be on the book in the day, but just be running around at night, because you wouldn't be on the book every week. You took it in turns because the person in the book who does all the cues and all the organising is a very responsible job. The Stage Manager floated, as did the Stage Director, because they had to find out where to get unusual props from, or hire anything in. They had responsibility. I can tell you the salary. It was £7 and 5 shilling for an ASM, £10 for the Stage Manager and £15 for a Stage Director. We knew the structure and you could see the leaps as you went up and that seemed fair to me. He got double what I did, as being Stage Director.

EJ: So you would actually go and look for props?

CD: Yes, in the town and if it was something like guns we'd come into town, we would phone up Bapters and we'd have an order book because everything's got to be answered for, even today more so. Guns are always a problem because they always seem to get pinched. We had a safe, and Bapters were the recognised theatrical hirers of guns of all types. They were all blocked off and would fire blanks, but most of them were old guns, not replicas. Today they tend to be replicas completely. So a sten gun was an old sten gun. For difficult props like that the Stage Director had the chance to use the phone and had freedom to go out and scout, but a fortnight is very short. You opened on a Tuesday night and straight away on a Wednesday you had a matinee, so Wednesday morning was blocking or reading through the next play...

EJ: Yes, one thing that is interesting in rep, in speaking to some people who talk to actors in rep, they were talking about their punishing schedules, did you find it quite stressful?

CD: Oh yes. We did do all nighters. We had a very big workshop there and we had a wardrobe. We hired in wigs and uniforms but there was a wardrobe and a certain amount was made. It was stressful because it was a long day and the fit-up weekend could be hard. We fitted it up as well as we had a carpenter and an assistant who made the sets, but when it came to the fit-up we all mucked in. Not the actors, but the ASM and the stage management and that could go on until midnight on the Sunday and then lit Monday morning. Monday afternoon would be the first technical and you opened Tuesday night so you might do two technicals on the Monday if you were lucky. The sets sometimes were still being finished. If there was a difficult staircase or something couldn't be built until we got on the stage, and the stage was only 19 foot wide, ten foot six deep and ten foot high, time was tight. It as an old cinema and it is still there now and is used by amateur dramatics I think.

EJ: So what was the theatre called then?

CD: It's called Queen's Theatre. When I read that in the advert I was thinking like Richmond Theatre is a Victorian theatre, I thought when I was going down this high street at Hornchurch I was looking for an old theatre, but it was corrugated, asbestos roof and just looking like a small old cinema. They have now got a proper theatre there with counterweights. We had no counterweights, no flying as such, a little bit of flying, but now they have what we call a proper theatre.

EJ: So the productions at the time. Do any stick in the memory?

CD: Well, because it was subsidised by the Arts Council and the local authority you had to do ... well you did your Agatha Christies, but you also did Ibsen and Shakespeare and what would be the school book of the year. It was very good. I think the first thing I did was Arms and the Man and then the next week we did Uncle Vanya , and then I think we did Salad Days , which I had done at Richmond before so I knew the show, which is a very light musical. I think we did The Boyfriend . Then we'd do an Agatha Christie, we had to do things for the general public. That sounds rude, but you had to have a real mixed bill when you were subsidised like that. You would try and put on some classy stuff as well though.

EJ: So the Ibsen that you put on, what plays do you remember?

CD: Well that was Uncle Vanya , that one in particular. David Fibian was the Director there and he played Uncle Vanya and he'd come up from Bristol . A lot of the actors had come up from Bristol because Bristol has a very good drama department, as you know. The university has a good drama and English literature department, and there is also the Old Vic School down there. Hornchurch was called Little Bristol, mainly because I think David Fibian had been an Assistant Director down there and he bought actors up that he knew. It works like that in the business. You try and work with actors that you know their work. It was very small, but the standard was ... as soon as I went there from Richmond , which was weekly rep and I was stuck in the store, which we repainted and readapted every week. The standard was tremendous at Hornchurch, even for such a small stage. We built new each time and the artistic standard and commitment was much higher than Richmond , which was a commercial rep and would do pot-boilers. It would do the annual Shakespeare to get the school in, but not brilliantly directed or anything. Costumes from costumiers in London , nothing original. Whereas down at Hornchurch it was ... I saw that straight away that first Sunday morning I was doing a fit-up on Arms and the Man . They had started the night before, and I could see that this was like small rep, like you get in pub theatre today where everybody mucks in and even some of the cast were finishing off their own costumes because Arms and the Man is a period thing.

EJ: Could you tell me something about the atmosphere in the late 1950's, the kind of plays that you saw and who you were working with and perhaps the impact of the new wave of dramatists such as Harold Pinter and John Osborne.

CD: I think we were very aware. I can remember at Richmond doing Roots and having the split sets with the kitchen. We put an electric stove, not gas, on stage but we could dim it so that we could have kettle boiling at the right time and then she could put the Brussels sprouts in. We had a real tin bath. They would draw the little curtain across the tin bath I think in the kitchen and the actors pretended to have a bath, by splashing water on the curtains and the audience had never seen anything like this. The set was a Norfolk cottage and was more or less a little bit lighter than life size, but it was a split set because you had to have this dining room where one is going to come for tea on Sundays. This young professor from Norfolk College because she turns up and her Norfolk accent has mellowed a bit because she has been away at university, but they'd never seen.... Someone lent us this electric stove, the old fashioned and I say they had the kettle boiling, the hot water ready, the steam coming up and Brussels sprouts going in and I think by the time act two the meal was over. They got the meal ready, but that was very, very real. This had never been done before.

EJ: So was the mood one of "What are we doing?" or the excitement factor...?

CD: Oh no, the actresses grabbed it. I don't know how they adapted, they grabbed the opportunity of doing these realistic plays. They realised that there was a message there, as against the old plays, the old thrillers, pot-boilers and Rebecca . I think when I went for my interview at Hornchurch, I must have gone on a Saturday morning, anyway I think Rebecca was on the stage and would you believe it's coming back to our theatre after Christmas with Nigel Havers? But we did plays like that, those little thrillers. I know that at Hornchurch we did Shadow of the Gunman , an Irish play and we had a set that jutted out. We changed the aspect of the room so that it was a square room but the corner jutted out into the audience. We lost a few seats in the front three rows, but right on that corner was a cast iron stove, but made smaller so it didn't obstruct, and we had electric in that, and the mother, she fried some sausages properly and some one wrote in and said that they got fat in their eye. The smell in the auditorium, it was only a small theatre, but to have real sausages and there on a dimmer an old little electric ring built into this mock cast iron range. I was an ASM. At the end they get the bath, we had enough money for the bath, we walked on stage with this cast iron bath, it was so heavy and as the curtain came down we had got in only three quarters on stage, that was the idea. That was realism and do you know, a very strong play, O'Casey, and I know that it is an old play, but we went for realism again in the set and the design and the rooms were getting to be room sizes now. We weren't doing 20 foot by 20 foot, I think that was a split set, I've got a feeling there was a staircase on it.

EJ: There weren't any health and safety restrictions about eating sausages on stage?

CD: Oh, no. [LAUGHS] In proscenium theatres you are a long way off, it would stick out over the orchestra pit, but there was nothing like that at Hornchurch. Designers were trying to get away from this proscenium arch again. I was bought up with four stages, not that I've worked in many theatres like that, but you were aware of them. Today when we modernise proscenium theatres we tend to make a rising orchestra pit that can make a thrust stage when Royal Shakespeare Company come or some people want to work more forward. Safety curtains come down in the first aisle. You had to be very careful in old- fashioned theatres because of the multiple levels and sidelines, but it does work and can be done. This fourth wall is really a cut-off thing and not including the audience, that's another argument. So theatre in the round, I love theatres in the round; in Richmond we had the Orange Tree, it is a different art form and works so well.

EJ: One of the interviewees that we have had for this project has been Peter Cheeseman.

CD: One of the founding members of the Stoke-on-Trent, wasn't it? That is where he learnt and how he got started. I don't have anything to do with the Orange Tree, but there is a little interchange in the summer and the last production at the Orange Tree over the last two years has gone up and started off their season up there. Much bigger stage for starters, but it's a nice idea that there is this link. The idea is that their last play of the season then comes down to us, but that doesn't always happen. The theory is there and there is obviously a great feeling between the two theatres. There was a theatre in the round years ago at Croydon called the Penbrook Theatre in the Round. It went and they built a road and they built the Ashcroft in Croydon, which was bad; they've adapted which is a very small rep theatre with a proscenium stage. They destroyed this old mission hall. They always start in old mission halls these theatres in the round, but we used to go all the way from Ealing to Croydon to see theatre in the round. It was not quite in the round; there was one bit of a blank wall where they could hang a banner or a flown or put some symbolism. Richmond doesn't have that seating all the way round, but it is adaptable seating and sometimes when they have a musical they will lose a bit of the seating on one side to put in a three piece band or something.

EJ: Could I ask you a bit more about what you might say was The Theatre of The Absurd? How did you respond to Pinter's plays?

CD: I remember going to see *The Caretaker* at the Duchess with the original cast and I think it was the last night. We knew about Pinter and I think, *The Dumb Waiter* I'd read or done somewhere. Those plays tend to be done by enthusiasts in the theatre who want to do a bit at lunchtime. Our *Waiting for Godot*, at Hornchurch we did as a Sunday night performance because there was a theatre club; were allowed to open on a Sunday. Remember this was Lord Chamberlain time with strictures. And Sunday was The Lord Day's Observance Society and you couldn't do anything ... you could read a script on Sunday on stage but you couldn't put make-up on. We used to do things on a Sunday through the enthusiasm of the actors. The Director said yes if you want to do it you can use the theatre and we used to do it under the auspices of the theatre club. We did *Waiting for Godot* there. We went up to an old wreck, an old bit of a wood in Hornchurch and found a tree, sawed down a tree, because you had to have this tree on stage. I think I volunteered to work the lighting board. So we were aware and that was 1961/1962, actually 1961 because in 1962 I was in the West End. The actors were aware. We had done *The Weskers* by then, one or two. Because I had been in the forces everybody said I should go and see *Chips with Everything*, but we didn't have many nights off to go and see that, and I said "No, I don't think I want to know anything about the RAF thank-you very much. It has taken two years out of my life". The actors were aware of the evolution of the theatre. Most of them were young and university educated. The older actors were the ones that weren't, the ones that had just got on in the profession. You know the range of people that do. Even then it was very rare for a 16 year old to play a granny with heavy make-up. There were exceptions because we all had to play many ... I was on as extras in bits and bobs and pantomime, but I never wanted to be an actor, but in rep sometimes you had to be an extra. We did *Desire Under the Elms*, which we were very proud of. We had Sebastian Shaw, quite a famous actor of the time, came and played a lead and on that small stage we put a four roomed house – two rooms downstairs and two upstairs – unbelievable. We had a guest designer who nobody said it would work and it did work. I danced because it's about a son coming back from town with his new wife and the other brothers don't like the new wife and they ostracise her. I think at one point, we were villagers and we come in and we danced. *Desire Under the Elms* I think was a banned play, because the father falls in love with his daughter-in-law and I think he rapes her or does something upstairs, so it was a banned play when it first came. So there were things put on like that.

EJ: From a technical point of view, would you say that scenery was made more difficult by the advent of realism?

CD: I had a lot to do with the sets, yes I suppose so. You still worked in wood and canvas whereas today, wood is so expensive we tend to use a lot of section metal. Metal is more rigid and it's cheaper than wood and so we all had to learn welding. We had carpenters that built staircases and realistic sets. With the lighting, more and more nude lights were getting smaller and more powerful were coming in. Strand being a major supplier. We benefit in the theatre from television, from lighting and from colour gels. The old days the Vishmont gels would either dry out in some form, or if they got wet they melted onto the lamps. When colour television, I know that I'm jumping a bit, came in they had to what they call colour control, temperature control they call it, so new gels, and they weren't gels they were much thinner material, they did not fade and they did not get crisp. Lighting in television used much more five k lamps but we never had those. We benefited in theatre from better lamps and better bulbs that went into the lamp housing and from better colours that held their colour, so I have seen all that. The lamp housing has got smaller and the lamps have got brighter. Back then, if you got

between studs, especially if their loading wasn't correct, you got a bit of a flicker on stage. That has all got much better with much more subtle lighting now. That was coming in certainly, well colour television was early 1960's, 1963/1965 when they started experimenting with it. In fact we had one of our designers at Hornchurch go and do a course for the BBC in which they were going to be the new designers for colour television. They had to go away and learn to design for colour television because the colours were different to get the black and white response. We used different colour mediums, which I wasn't really aware of because I have never worked in television, but when this girl left to go on a three year course, a long course, they were training new designers to work for colour television. Everybody benefited, certainly theatre from lighting control. They had more money, television companies and commercial television came in 1955 and I was at Streatham Hill. I started there in the spring of 1955 and that Christmas we did a live broadcast of our pantomime for an hour, with Arthur Askey. I think it would have been Redifussion, or one of those London companies, I don't know. When the adverts came on Arthur Askey went out and entertained the audience because it was an actual hour's live transmission. Us electricians had nothing to do as they brought in generators and flooded the stage with lighting and we got paid handsomely, because the unions are very strict about this when there is a cross over, and it was a jolly evening. It was an invited audience I think, who saw only that hour. The scenes were done out of sequence or scenes were lost, but that was the first Christmas of commercial television.

EJ: You mentioned before the Lord Chamberlain, what kind of impact did the Lord Chamberlain's censorship have on your job?

CD: In theatre, a tremendous amount. I remember working on a London review. I think it was called The Second City Company from Chicago, who were satirical and very with it and had a very complicated show. They had a thing when they did it in Canada , sorry North America , of getting a question from the audience, or something from the audience, and improvising a scene on it. They weren't allowed to do that in London . Lord Chamberlain went in 1968, the same year when the Homosexual Law was brought in, I always remember that. It was very strict, you had to do the script as it said and you weren't allowed to improvise in the state theatre which I was in, I have never worked in club theatres in the strict sense. I worked in the commercial theatre or subsidised theatre. I suppose we heard on the grapevine that plays were submitted and they were adapted and some authors got very upset about it. Authors even today like to push the barriers with their subject matter. The war was well over by now and one heard stories about some authors like Noel Coward would just withdraw a play. I can't say that positively, but well known authors would get too upset by it and say why should they lose a scene or do that, the structure of the play goes, and they would either just rework it or the play would never get any further. We were certainly aware of it.

EJ: When it was abolished you felt there were none ...?

CD: It wasn't there straight away, that's when Hair was done. I think the Royal Court , who had always been a leading theatre, straight away on the Monday or whatever had a play ready to do that had foul language, for want of a better word, or something. That would be in the records, but I know that they couldn't wait. They used to be called the Sunday Theatre Club, or the Sunday Club. They used to do a lot of play reading for the Royal Court and other theatres in the West End . To do plays that couldn't get a licence, or were a bit near the knuckle, or whatever, they could do them under club auspices. Certainly, I think there were some called the Sunday Club, where actors used to give up their Sundays, rehearse a bit in the morning and the afternoon and then have an invited audience, or a club audience, that was outside jurisdiction. That again was trying to get



these things performed, but they always had to be done from the script. No make-up and you had to do it with the play in your hand, you couldn't memorise it.

EJ: Can I ask you again about the first production of Pinter's *No Man's Land*? Could you tell me a little bit about the experience of seeing it?

CD: The experience was the set by John Bury. These two people arrive in this semi-circular room and they drink vodka or spirits a lot and there was a servant, butler or driver who comes in, I think that was Michael Kitchen, but this wonderful kitchen set and then I think it's morning and then the curtains are drawn and this amazing light. I was in the stalls and it just knocked you out, this amazing light. They must have put so many lights behind the net curtains. It was wonderful. This circular set and they have never done it again like that, they have done the production again, but Bury was a very good, very precise designer and he worked a lot with Peter Hall, a lot at the Royal Shakespeare, when the Royal Shakespeare was at the Aldwych. I remember seeing lots of brilliant plays, *The Latent Heterosexual*, this is early 1960's, *The Latent Heterosexual* ], they had an American season there. Another play was called *US* in which they let butterflies out I think. If you went into another performance there would still be dead butterflies coming down because they hit the lamps. They did *Marat/Sade* there. The Royal Shakespeare were doing very adventurous stuff in London. The idea was to complement Stratford and to get the actors to say that they're not only doing Shakespeare at Stratford, we are going to do these modern day. I went to a lot of those. I was working at the Opera House. You could run round in the morning and get a day ticket, or in your lunch hour, they called it a restricted view, but it was only a pillar. They were wonderful plays. That *No Man's Land* was just ... to see these two classical actors doing something so radical and still left you wondering at the end, which is lovely for a play to leave you thinking. We have always admired Pinter, a prolific playwright and an actor. To see him acting in his own plays and still directing, he's has been one of our greatest living authors. Always brings something different, has never bowed to commercialism. He has told his stories. I think he once said that he looks into a room and he sees these people and then he makes a play. So it was true with *The Caretaker* and *The Dumb Waiter*, they are all rooms where people come in and you are not sure why they have come into this room. It's a wonderful premise to say that. We grew up with him, I mean he's a bit older than me, but he is still there and still acting. He acts in films and television. He started off as an actor. He's not prolific, but he is still adding to our theatrical calendar.

EJ: So what were the performances like?

CD: Unbelievable. I hadn't seen them before, I don't think. I wasn't a Gielgud fan previously, and I have only liked Shakespeare because I have worked on them really. I would have seen Richardson in films, he had done quite a few films, but I think that I had heard the write-ups of *No Man's Land* and I happened to be in London and I got a day ticket. I think it was only the third performance and I was just bowled over by their acting styles. Gielgud was of the old school, both from the old school, but more so Gielgud, with the Shakespearean voice. He really felt he was poet. He had this terrible wig with nicotine stained hair, he chain smoked on stage. For an actor with his voice you would have thought he would have been precious about it. I think they both smoked. It was almost like you had gone to some old wardrobe to get the costume. It looked lived in. It looked real. It wasn't all pristine and new. I'm sure he takes great care with his costumes, but you felt with this that it was really him. It was the poet in him. I don't mean Gielgud I mean the poet, the actor. It's a mystery play really. We know that there is always subtexts as with any good play, but on its own level it was just amazing.

EJ: Did the audience respond well to it?

CD: I think so. I'm more aware of audiences now and I'm a bit naughtier looking at audiences. If I can sit on the side..... When I went to see Jerry Springer at the National and the preview and it wasn't full and I had a cheap seat. In fact it was more or less empty, well not empty but it certainly wasn't full, and I sat at the side and I couldn't believe this musical. I couldn't believe the language and to see the audience's reaction was absolutely wonderful. There was obviously a clique at the back who had come up from Battersea Arts Centre, because that is where it originated. They might have been invited there for a preview, so there was a sort of clique at the back. Anyway, I thought it was amazing, a landmark as much as years ago when I saw West Side Story . That was a landmark in musicals. We had never done musicals like that. We had always had front cloth scenes and if you see these old musicals now, you see Carousel and you think why is there this great big set with a little duet going down at the front. Then you realise that it was a front cloth scene and you still do it as written and they are marvellous when they re-write these musicals, but there was always a front cloth that would go to a big set, another duet, which all change in scenery. Today we either change the scenery in front of the audience magically, or it's a stand in set. In West Side Story I had never seen such energy. It was an American company and I stood at the back of the dress circle in Her Majesty's and I was on my National Service then and I remember that I paid ten shillings. The energy, the energy. I think the next landmark would have been Chorus Line . Drury Lane had always had nice shows. You knew the language in it. It is before Jerry Springer , years and years. To see this simple set and people not in costumes, but practice clothes you don't know. The thing at the end is absolutely wonderful and using this language, and people walked out. It was a show without an interval and when I first went there is a long bit that the Director's girlfriend was dying for a part in. She was obviously on her way up the ladder, and she had a big long dance number and I used to go to the toilet because I didn't like it. It is the only show I've seen five times that I haven't been connected with. I was teaching and I saw the American cast, then I saw the British cast and we would be rehearsing and finishing about five 'o'clock and one of my students said "Shall we go?" and I said "Yes, let's go" and we ran down to Drury Lane and got a cheap ticket and I saw that show five times. It is very theatrical because at the end they all come up in these top hats and tail coats and fish nets and the set turns down and it is all mirrors. What was clever there was the fact that the foot lamps were the other way round. The footlights shone into your eyes or into the dome of Drury Lane and that was brilliant. Because they had so many follow spots, they couldn't use the old follow spot positioned at the back of the gallery. They had this great gantry lowered, suspended from the dome and you could see people coming down from the top of the theatre, down a ladder, into this long gantry that was masked with black serge. They had the five follow spots there and they wanted that angle and that is not a Drury Lane thing. Drury Lane was always famous for lots of scenery and spectacle and safe shows that you could take your mother to and this one with all this language people were walking out. It was another landmark and it lasted a long time on Broadway. It toured in Britain . It is the only show, as I say that I paid five times to see. You remember those, I mean you just remember the evolution of the theatre. One is aware of it, gosh one is. You try and be positive. You never say "We never did it like that". I'm sorry I need questions from you. I jump, you'll have to, you know, one thing leads to another thing.

EJ: That's fine. Maybe to finish with, if you are looking at the evolution of the theatre, look at the post war period now. What has been the biggest change do you think to theatre now to when you were working in theatre in the 1960s? Obviously there are many different things, but what would be the key things do you think that have changed in the business and the process of stage management?

CD: I suppose, not a landmark and I talked about rep, and we didn't get much money but you knew it wasn't forever. We all did hours and I remember once we were playing Jersey in the famous cinema and we just didn't have enough staff and the one or two of the male dancers came up and asked if they could help in the scene change and we had to say no because if they had injured themselves. They were aware. If you are in a company like a ballet company, which is a family and dancers work longer than anybody else. Dancers rehearse, practice, have a ballet class, then rehearse and then perform, even at the Opera House today. It is a long day. Singers have a different sort of day. I have lost my train of thought now.

EJ: Well, we were just talking about the change in the way of theatre now.

CD: What's changed? I think that when I did a lot of new plays at Guildford, I was Senior Stage Manager there. We had two groups of stage management, which was quite a clever idea. We would rehearse in London for three weeks and play Yvonne Arnaud, Guildford for three weeks and then while we were playing at Guildford, the other team would be rehearsing in London. It worked very well. One day it got to five to five or twenty five past five and some actress said "Are we going into overtime?" and that is when things changed. You had your six hour rehearsal period and Equity got stronger, the actor's trade unions and stage manager's trade union, and we have never done that before. One was always aware of having to break off, sometimes for a coffee break. You would get stuck on the script in rehearsal and say "Let's have our coffee now and come back to that page". It has become very regimented now and once you start saying are we going into overtime now. I have worked a lot with musicians because I have done a lot of opera and ballet and they have always been the strictest of the unions. Their three hour call with a quarter of an hour's break. A lovely instance once where we were doing a new production for the Ballet Rambert, this is the old Ballet Rambert when they did classical ballet with the odd new ballets done as well. We were doing act two in Nottingham, but we weren't going to open in Nottingham, we were just rehearsing up there, while performing at night. We overran the three hour slot and the leader of the orchestra was standing in, a nice lady called Jean, she wasn't normally the leader, one of the orchestra said "Are we going into overtime?" They stopped the rehearsal; they just stopped playing after three hours, so she went to the phone and she phoned the NU in London and she came back smiling. They said, "If it's a dress rehearsal you can go on for as long and until the dress rehearsal is over". You get paid the overtime. She was so pleased because she wasn't a union waste of time. We have this now with musicians, something like, they might mean Carmen, one of the popular operas, you can just get it done in the four hours. If you go over the four hours, it used to be so much per quarter of an hour, can you believe, and now I think it is even worse. So one's always been aware of that. Once you started with people getting better salaries, then they got more aggressive about the hours they did. That is a very conscious thing and I must say that in my last two jobs, Technical Stage Manager at the D'Oyly Carte and Resident Stage Manager at Richmond at an ordinary salary and I did hours as they came. I got myself a good salary, but I wasn't going to go down that line of hours and I was happy to do that and management quite like it and you are rewarded in other ways. I can understand that you mustn't push people, rehearsal period is another area where you might play and someone says "Oh, come over here darling" and they are another half an hour of his time. And I can understand that because they earn their living being in rehearsal periods, but then when tape recorders came in, and I have done a lot of new musicals, a principal would "Oh, just record my song and when I go home I can just get the ear right for it" and they wouldn't do it. They stop and would say how stupid. You don't have a personal pianist at home to play through the new score and that was taking a stand time. They do do it now, you can get a tape made of

your bit of music, only on the piano, not the orchestral version, not what you are going to end up with. A lot of people want to practise at home, they can read the notes as they are music people, most top singers are clued up, but when you are working on a new show and it is pitching it and getting the rhythm, whatever. That was another thing, the unions not keeping in step with technology.

EJ: You mentioned before about prompting, about the fact that.....

CD: Yes, they rarely prompt now because the person running the corner, which is normally the DSM nowadays, has got the script and got everything in it. It's the Bible. At one point they used to publish acting additions, you would have all the moves that were put down by the original director in the West End, then I've worked on new plays and they come in a larger format, A4, not printed at all and you had blank pages which is lovely. They started saying that they wanted to publish this play, especially if it is by a famous author and they expected the Stage Manager to write up an acting script, so we went to Equity and I think we get £50 a time now to provide a script ready for publishing. You've got all the alterations and all the deletions and whatever. Now the prompt script is the bible and it is taken away every night and put in a safe place. In there are all the cues, lighting cues, sound cues, cues for revolves and really you don't count anymore. You mark it up. It might be a light switch cue, which you would nowadays most lighting boards are front of house and you used say to the electricians "cue 21 is a visual okay"? He says okay and it is a visual for someone to put their hand up under a lampshade and knocking them. We call them practicals, though they never actually physically switch them on. They are done from the lighting board. Prompting now you might be careful on the first night of a play, if it is a musical or anything like that, they are on their own. There is so much that the prompt script delivers to the technicians around the building, up on the side floor, front of house, under the stage, on revolve, on anything that is moving in view of the audience, is all done from that prompt corner, so no, we very rarely prompt now. In the rehearsal room, you'll find that when you know the actors that are getting DLP (dead letter perfect) you will find the DSM marking it up ready for the technical on stage. She has got her blank pages, or she has interleaved it and she is already thinking that there will be a cue there and by that time a lighting director will be sitting with her, or sitting on the production desk, and you are working towards getting on that stage and doing your first technical. By then you know which actors are a bit dodgy. It's a bit like the conductor of the orchestra, he knows when a singer needs a lead in and will look up purposefully. Even to me on the book when I have done ballets they would say "don't worry, Colin, I'll give you a look in the corner if you're not sure of that cue" and I would say no, and he would look up from the pit and you can see if you're clever. Now of course we've got televisions. We've got televisions both ways. We've got camera on the conductor for the prompt corner and then you have another camera on the front of house on your show and in the prompt corner you've got both. Sometimes prompt corners are secreted away. You don't have wings as much now with box sets and so much realism on the stage, so you have two televisions over your desk. One is the conductor if it is a musical and one the other way around for you to see your set from the front. In colour, all is in colour now, which is great. If it is a musical you really physically want to see the stage because of moving scenery and actors. If you've got a moving stage there is so much to go wrong so the actors are on their own. Singers can cope, dancers of course once the curtain goes up it's up to them isn't it, so you concentrate on your music and your lighting or other directions to other technicians. That is quite technical sometimes. I did a review, where I used to hold the score, hold the prompt script and the DSM, actually the company manager, did the cues because there were so many he had to remember them. He said just follow me and he would read out side cues, movie cues and lighting cues one after

the other and he had to memorise them because they were so close. That side is satisfying for the technicians who get it right. Technical shows are lovely to run because you get the satisfaction. People say, what's it like to stage manage? You say, well you do enjoy doing a show, it's a challenge and a lot of professional actors thank you for the show when they come off. I had one particular actor who always used to thank me when he came off and I used to say "thanking me? You did the performance".

EJ: I'm trying to work out perhaps why in the past people had the need to be prompted more often and I'm wondering whether...

CD: But I'm talking about rep, sorry. You are performing a play at night and learning another one. Fortnightly is not so bad but there are matinees in between. It is hell to learn a new play and keep the other one in your head at night. You had to prompt, you really had to follow with your finger or mouth it with them. You marked up your script very precisely with the choruses in, you know that music chorus with the little dots. Yes, you helped them through it. You really mouthed it to them. In those days we were working on lights anyway, so we didn't have to think about speaking to somebody else. I think the first cues to go on microphone and headsets would be the lighting man, because once we moved it out the front, but we were using green and red lights for a long, long time. Even if we put the just the warning light on, the red light, and then do the 'go' verbally. Sometimes electricians like to see that light coming on. Before the boards got computerised, we had very small boards with very small sliders and no mains juice going through, all done on very low voltage, you were still pre-setting up your lighting cues. We might have three presets, so while you were reading your cue sheet if you had a little red light come out the corner of your eye, it was better than a sound in your ear. You could say "Ready" or "Out of our way" but now with disks and computerisation, there is a different worry, there is a different worry of the board going down.

EJ: Which means everyone is in trouble I suppose?

CD: I mean we got so much that goes on now, really, from electric winches, you know. In Richmond we had counter weights; we have counter weights now, but when we used to have big shows we would have electric winches go up. Sets got so heavy, even with three men couldn't physically pull them up on ropes, so some big shows they put above the grid electric winches much like you use at pop shows now to put up lighting grids. We have used them at Richmond even recently. We have a metal grid now, not a wooden one.

EJ: Thank you very much for the interview, I think we can leave it there.