

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Donald Roy – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey**

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Professor of Drama and theatregoer in the fifties and sixties. Revival of Music Hall after the war; detailed descriptions of Music Hall routines; Christopher Fry; response to premiere of *Look Back in Anger*; *Waiting for Godot*; the American Musical.

EJ: First of all, can you give me some general background of your experience of theatre and theatregoing

DR: Well, I had a provincial background. If you regard Wales as part of the English Provinces - which I don't of course, it's a separate country, it wasn't then but it is now! It took a long time to recover from being conquered by England back in the Middle Ages. Anyway, that's beside the point. I was brought up in Cardiff where there were two regular theatres, in my days there. One was straight theatre, the Prince of Wales, and the other was a touring date for... well, they were both touring theatres, but the second theatre, the new theatre, which until fairly recently was the home of the Welsh National Opera Company was in those days a first class date for touring variety shows, of which there were quite a few in the immediate aftermath of the Second War. I think this had come about largely because of the war itself, when there were so many entertainers in the armed forces, that either because they saw their... or because they were persuaded by their agents. Quite a lot of old musical hall artists came out of retirement and they appeared on radio, performed on radio frequently during the war in variety contexts, magazine programmes, that sort of thing. One particular one which ran, I think, throughout the war and for several years afterwards, called *Workers' Playtime*. A very famous midday show which used to be broadcast from or recorded at munitions factories and such like, for the benefit of people working there. During the war. And they broadcast either live or recorded on the, probably the Home Service, I can't remember whether it was the Home Service or the Light Programme, those were the two channels during the war. I think it was possibly as the result of them coming out of retirement and getting their names heard again on the radio, that in the immediate aftermath of the war for about four or five years, I think, between '46 and the early fifties, there were quite a number of touring variety shows, starring old artists who made their name or had at least made their first appearances in the Halls before the first war! I'm talking about people like Randolph Sutton, Ella Shields, GH Elliott, Wee Georgie Wood, Sandy Powell, Nellie Wallace, musn't forget Nellie Wallace, Harry Tate. They were still very popular in the few years after the war in these touring variety show. So I was able to see people who in the normal course of events I would never have seen. By this time, of course, most of them were in their seventies or eighties. But they were still going strong, but what was so interesting about them for anyone who was at all concerned with the history of the theatre and theatrical presentation itself, they were still

using songs and the techniques that they had employed in their youth, in their very early years. And of course these were well-known music hall songs, they were known to young people during and immediately after the first world war. And people were still in the position to go to the theatre in the forties. My parents, for instance were still going to the theatre in the forties. But of course all of this was very new to me! [laughs] What was so interesting was that, I suppose I'm rationalising a bit from what I've subsequently learnt, what was so interesting was they had no microphones, in fact they were so alien to the mike that they'd feel totally constricted by it. Because they used the whole stage.

EJ: They could project, presumably.

DR: Yes, they walked around, they used the audience to bounce off. Of course the chorus song was still used in those days, and they would sing, most of the songs were known already. They would sing the first verse, and for the refrain they'd encourage the audience to join in, which they would of course, because most of the refrains were very well-known. So, using the audience, using the whole stage and using the kind of props and costumes that they had used throughout their careers. It's a concept that's unthinkable now. They were singing songs that had been written specifically for them when they were in their prime. And which they had sung throughout their lives. It must have become intensely tedious for them but of course these were songs audiences always wanted to hear, even though they'd heard them hundreds and hundreds of times before. Nowadays there are such things as 'cover versions', and there were 'cover versions' then, but there was nothing that could replace hearing the original song sung by the first artist to sing it. They were still appearing in virtually the same way, although they were decades older! They were still the same kind of act as they had been in their prime. Now I can name a few names maybe. Nellie Wallace for instance, always sang as if she were a put-upon little housewife, she toured quite a lot at the end of the war. That reminds me, one of these touring variety shows was called Thanks for the Memory and it was constructed consciously on the notion that these were people that you would like to remember from your youth. When you were young you listened to these people, bought their songsheets. There used to be a few young people in the show like a few dancers and a few trapeze artists, because variety was always a mish-mash, trapeze-artists, acrobats, singers, comedians. But most of the show was built around the old people who provided the star appeal as it were. And as I said, Nellie Wallace was one of them, Lily Morris, who actually took over, I think. Nellie Wallace died in the late forties and I think she was replaced in the touring company by Lily Morris who was very similar, even more cockney than Nellie Wallace and I remember Lily Morris in particular because she sing a song called 'Why am I always the Bridesmaid?' lots of the Music Hall songs were about recognizable domestic situations. This was a girl trying to look young, always in her middle-age and had seen people up the aisle as a bridesmaid, but had never got there as a bride. She sang this song, everybody joined in and then while the audience was singing the chorus she would prance about the stage, a kind of dance, but in a way more like a prancing horse. She'd lift her skirts right up to above her knees. And a kind of kicking motion, prancing around the stage. She had this trick which sort of defied the laws of anatomy, she seemed to be able to pivot, or rotate the lower part of her leg at the knee. I don't know she did it, but as she was prancing along stage, the lower part of her leg was going round in circles. Quite astonishing and so full of beans, there was a sort of contrast between the vitality of the act and the subject matter of the song which was supposed to be one of misery and despair! [laughs] Then there were of course characteristic attributes, I remember, for instance there were still in those days some black-faced comedian. Singer comedians. People like G. H. Elliott for one. Whose

trademark was... he had a painted black face but everything else was white. He had a white top hat, a white tail-coat which came down well below the knees. White gloves, white trousers, white shoes and a white cane. And that's how he was. He didn't do anything else but stand on the stage and sing the songs he'd been singing for the last forty or fifty years. In the same costume. There was a similar one, Randolph Sutton, was also a black-faced singer and the only difference was he'd be in black! He had a black tail-coat and a black top hat, but he was very similar, sang very similar songs. Most famous one was perhaps 'On Mother Kelly's Doorstep'. [Sings: On Mother Kelly's Doorstep, on Paradise Row... ] That was one of his reference. Then there was Albert Whelan an Australian I believe, originally, had a slight accent and he was one of the first artists to employ a signature tune, which he whistled, and he started whistling it off-stage, before he came on. So you knew who you were going to get next, but you knew anyone because of this sign on stage, there was an illuminated board with a number on it. Electric light-bulbs behind it. They would light up to tell you the number on the programme that was coming next. So you knew it was going to be Albert Whelan. His trick was to start the act in the wings. Presumably he did have a mike for that purpose.

EJ: You'd have to, wouldn't you?

DR: You'd hear it and he'd walk on stage and still continue to whistle the song. The other trick he had was that as he was whistling his signature tune, he would put his stick down and take his gloves off. and take his hat off and at the end of the act he would put them all back on again, whilst singing his signature tune to walk off. Then, what else... Harry Tate. Harry Tate did a lot of sporting things, he was a sketch artist. He did most of his sketches with his son, who subsequently became Harry Tate Junior and did all his father's material. It was Harry Tate Junior that I saw, not the original Tate. He used his father's act and his father's costume. The one I saw, I do remember, was the motoring sketch. On the stage, in a mini car. Crashing into a cyclist or something like that and having an altercation, comic altercation and the costume was a a big chequered cap and plus-fours, chequered plus-fours with knee-boots. And a handle-bar moustache, I didn't know how he did it but he made it go down on either side, using his facial muscles. He didn't actually revolve it, but it was near as dammit! Ella Shields, one of the many, there weren't as many then but there had been quite a few during and just after the first war, male impersonators.

EJ: Male impersonators?

DR: Male impersonators, yes. She was one of them who was still going strong in the forties, her most famous song was 'Burlington Bertie from Bow' [Sings] I'm Burlington Bertie, I rise at 10.30 and so on.

EJ: What sort of an act was a male impersonator, what sort of act did they do?

DR: She was a man about town. The notion behind the song was that she was Bow, in other words from one of the most lowly areas of London, slum area of London, but was she recognised in Burlington Arcade and greeted by the nobs and even by royalty, they all knew Burlington Bertie from... And all she did was to wear male evening dress. With a

cane and top hat. Immaculately turned out. White tie and tails and so on. She sang, she didn't attempt to sound like a man, but she had a naturally slightly deep voice anyway, so somewhere between a man and woman's voice. She aped the mannerisms and the behaviour of what used to be called in Victorian times 'the swell', or 'the masher' [laughs]. Who else, Lucan and McShane. Arthur Lucan and Kitty McShane, a double act of sketches. Arthur Lucan played Old Mother Riley and she was always arguing with her young daughter, who was actually his wife, because he was in drag as an old lady and Kitty McShane was his actual wife in real life, and they were always arguing the toss on stage. The one I remember most clearly is when she was out with her boyfriend and was coming home very, very late at night and Arthur Lucan as the mother was preparing vengeance, you know, 'what shall I do to her when she comes back?' and in the process was actually undressing to go to bed. And taking off innumerable layers of clothing, mostly petticoats which she used to fold them immaculately and put them in various parts of the living room. One I remember watching, she put one in a drawer and another one in the bread bin! [laughs.] Anyway! You can guess what kind of cross-talk that would be. Rob Walton, one of my favourites, again, another sketch-show artist, usually incompetent. There was one in which he was a station sergeant in the police station, a desk sergeant, at the police station, and there was another in which he was the supremo of the fire station. The line I've never forgotten, is that he answers his call, an emergency call for someone reporting a fire and he's trying to take down the address and the pencil breaks, he has to sharpen the pencil and the whole thing becomes extremely protracted, you can't hear the person on the other end of the phone, but it becomes more and more, and he saying 'yes, yes, alright, I can hear what you're saying' and the punch-line was something like 'we'll be there soon, try to keep it going till we get there!' Yes, I remember that line, more or less that was the line. Wee Georgie Wood, yes, Wee Georgie Wood I never really liked. I liked him on radio because you couldn't actually see him. I suppose he was technically a dwarf. He was very short and throughout his life, he was well into his fifties, he was playing a boy on stage, usually in a sort of sailor's costume. He used to dress as young children in such children in these costumes at the turn of the century. His partner, Dolly Harmer, was playing his mother. It was the cross-talk between the little boy and mother, but of course you knew the little boy was the same age as his 'mother' in reality. So there was always that tension between pretence and reality. While appearing to be a little boy he would say very, very adult things. That was the gag, you know. I never actually warmed to him after I heard him in one of these touring shows where he was acting as a kind of a kind of compere, introducing another artist and he used so much blue material as the compere that he lost me, I'm afraid! [laughs] Who else? Oh, Vic Oliver, yes, I remember Vic Oliver too. He was younger. I think he must have been born about 1900 or so because when I saw him he was still in his forties, I would think. Not really an old-timer at all. But his distinctive trademark was that he was originally trained as a musician and he was in fact quite an accomplished violinist who I believe actually conducted an orchestra at one time, he had a career as a conductor as well. But his distinctive trick was to play the violin while telling jokes. He seemed to be able to talk with the violin under his chin, then of course he would break off and tell a few stories and then go back to playing the violin. Once they'd marketed a particular trademark, something they could do which people recognised, they stuck to this throughout their careers. You expected to see Vic Oliver walk onstage with a violin, and he never disappointed you. He was married, not for all that long, to one of Winston Churchill's daughters, Sarah Churchill. I think it ended in rather acrimonious divorce, I can't remember the details, I can't remember when either. I saw him, the last time I saw him was in London, when I went up to London. Now we're going off the subject a little bit. My first theatrical visit to London which was in December 1947. I went up specifically to see the new musicals which had opened that year in London and in the

wake of the War everybody was looking for light entertainment. There was a certain surge in musical theatre. And in the same year Oklahoma! and Annie Get Your Gun and Bless the Bride .

EJ: You saw them?

DR: I saw them all. I went up specifically to see them. And another one, a review than a musical comedy called Starlight Roof which was on at the Hippodrome. He was in that, he was more or less the compere in that revue. But the other three shows I saw because I'd become interested in musical comedy, having seen some at the other theatre in Cardiff, that I used to go to... should we move on to that?

EJ: Sure.

DR: The other theatre I think I said earlier on, was called The Prince of Wales, and was again, it survived on... there was no rep company in Cardiff in those days. It survived on touring shows, and during the war it was very much a mixed bag of straight plays, musical comedies, operettas, and I saw... My mother took me, I don't know why she did it but it was a very astute move on her part and I think a very perceptive one, she must have noticed that I was interested in... perhaps because I listened so much to the radio, I don't know, she must have noticed that I was interested in things theatrical and so she started taking me to the theatre when I was thirteen, which is quite young, I suppose. I still remember the first play I saw, it was a pre-London touring production of a play... I'm not sure who it's by... I think it's Clemence Dane, a play called The Duke in Darkness. And what I remember about it is that the cast of this touring show, this pre-London show (which is why they were there) had two stars whom I'd seen in films, and of course the magic for me was to see these people in the play in the flesh. They were actually real people and they were in the same room as me. Admittedly separated by a Pros arch, but it was still the same living space. They were there in front of me and one of them was Leslie Banks, he was mostly a film star, I think in the thirties in particular. But he had stage experience before that, of course, as most film stars did in those days. British film stars, anyway, they were mostly theatre-trained. Leslie Banks was playing the Duke who was in prison for some reason or other, I can't remember what. And Michael Redgrave was playing one of his attendants. I'd seen Michael Redgrave in films as well. Mostly patriotic, propaganda films like One of Our Aircraft is Missing, Eric Portman he was another, The Way to the Stars, In Which We Serve and so on. Anyway, I don't remember what films he had been in, but I certainly had seen Michael Redgrave. And he was a name to me, and that, as I said, was really one of the memorable things about the evening. They were there. Another person I saw... I used to go round the stage door afterwards, by the way, every time and wait for - it seemed a very long time - until they they came out and ask for their autographs. It was standard practice, I don't think it exists now, to the same extent nowadays.

EJ: No, it doesn't happen so much.

DR: No, well, I used to wait at the stage door and one knew where the stage door was, I'd wait there, never went inside. They used to come out and sometimes they would sign

the autographs books, and sometimes they wouldn't. The other person I remember, distinctly, I waited a very long time... characteristic of the star who was fond of making a late entrance - he made a late exit! Everybody else, the cast, had come out long before, but I wanted to wait for Emlyn Williams, because I'd seen Emlyn Williams in films and he was Welsh and so he was very special. He was in a touring production of one of his plays called *Night Must Fall* which you may remember the title of, and he eventually appeared looking every inch the star. I remember still, in a dark overcoat, with a white silk scarf. And a black homburg and I was thrilled that I was so close to him and this was this magical figure that I'd seen on the screen. Yes, so yes, the other person I saw there regularly because he came every year was Donald Wolfit in his touring company. You can say what you like about Wolfit, he was in large measure a bit of a ham, I suppose, on stage, although he was also a fine actor. Some of his screen performances have demonstrated that. But he was the traditional actor manager when touring in Shakespeare and the remarkable about him is that he kept touring throughout the war. And had it not been for his touring company, Shakespeare would have died the death in the provinces, throughout the war. He came every year for at least a week, I think sometimes two weeks in a repertoire of maybe four or five Shakespeare plays each time. Always with the leading part for himself, and another leading part for his wife! Rosalind Iden. I remember seeing them... by this time, of course, he wasn't all that old, he was probably only in his early fifties then, but he was already quite portly so I never saw him as Hamlet, for instance! [Laughs] But I did see him as Lear, I remember Lear very clearly, and I remember him playing playing Iago, a very good Iago I saw. Opposite Frederick Falk. I think he was either a German or Austrian emigre actor who was blacked-up as Othello. Rosalind Iden of course was Desdemona, inevitably. I remember that very clearly, I also remember him as Touchstone! A very rotund Touchstone in *As You Like It* and I can't remember what his wife was playing. What I remember about that was that a piece of scenery fell over! It was a touring show, and it was a fairly tatty touring show. Most of the company were youngsters straight out of drama school, and the men were usually waiting to be called up. So there was a great discrepancy of age between some members of the company and there were the oldsters and there were people straight out of drama school. Some of them weren't very good, I mean they were playing for peanuts and touring maybe four or five shows, each time. So the scenery was pretty rudimentary and a bit tatty too. And I do remember this bit of the Forest of Arden actually collapsing in mid scene and bisecting the action! It sort of fell diagonally forward. Fortunately it didn't hit anybody.

EJ: How did the actors respond?

DR: Well, he obviously fulminated about it, because he apologised afterwards. He used to appear at the end of the show, that's the other thing I remember about Wolfit. After every show, he would appear quasi-exhausted, from his exertions, he would appear, he would come through the curtains, part the curtains and slowly appear, and then hang himself from one hand, one hand would remain on the curtain as if he was pulling himself, because he was so exhausted. Then he would make this final curtain speech thanking them for their attention and their kindness and so on, it was also a pleasure to be in... where are we this week? Oh yes... and so on. And then at the end a huge sycophantic bow to the audience before disappearing behind the curtains. I remember he must have been rather miffed by the scenery collapsing, because he referred to it in his closing speech. What else? Oh, the other other thing I used to go to at The Prince of Wales for was the touring opera companies and operetta companies. Again, whatever you thought of them, and I think in 'proper' musical circles the attitude was fairly to

snooty to them, the touring company called the Carl Rosa Opera Company which lasted I think into the fifties and I don't know what happened to it, I suppose Carl Rosa eventually died. He was the leading figure, you know. They'd come every year with, again, a number of mostly light operas or operettas rather like *Die Fledermaus*, *The Vagabond King*, *Rose Marie*, *White Horse Inn* which is technically a musical comedy but has some operatic-style singing in it. And I had gone to see a few of their shows and realised that there was such a thing as musical comedy, or operetta, and I wanted to see more of it, I was interested. So when I read in the press about the huge success of *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*, I thought I must go and see these. And we have a friend of a relation who lived in Hayes, Middlesex, just outside London. My mother arranged for me to stay with them for the best part of a week and I made my first visits to the West End, I went every day from Hayes, caught the train to Paddington. Then the underground to various parts of London, seeing never fewer than two shows a day. Once, I remember, three! I mixed films with stage shows as well. I managed to see - and was bowled over by - *Annie Get Your Gun* with Betty Hutton as Annie Oakley, and *Oklahoma!*. I don't remember who was then singing in *Oklahoma!* because they went through various changes of cast, I can't remember who I saw. *Bless the Bride* which was a homegrown musical by Vivian Ellis. A.P Herbert and Vivian Ellis who collaborated on quite a few musical comedies, in the thirties and forties, and this one was hugely successful and held its own against the American might of both *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. I saw... they all opened in the summer of '47, so they were still fresh, and it had opened that summer... I don't remember the leading girl unfortunately but the leading male singer, the star, was a Frenchman by the name of George Guetary, who played in it, almost throughout its London run. Yes, I remember that as distinctly as well, and *Starlight Roof*, as I said, a revue with Vic Oliver. I must have seen other shows as well, but I'm afraid I don't remember what they were. I tried to get into as many of the West End theatres I'd heard of. I'd get them all them during that one week. I also saw films. The film I remember most clearly, that I saw one morning before going to a matinee in the afternoon was a film called *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Fredric March, about ex-servicemen coming back to their homes just after the war. And trying to pick up their lives again with wives and children who had completely changed out of all recognition in the interim. I think it was William Wyler, the director. I keep confusing it with a farce called *The Happiest Days of Your Life* which was an English farce.

EJ: Can I just what struck you in particular about productions such as *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*, as they have been seen as landmarks in the rise of the musical.

DR: Well, I'd say I've never seen anything which was so smoothly... in which the dialogue and the songs were so smoothly interrelated. The sort of operettas I'd seen before had quite distinct arias. Distinct songs. Musical comedies were like that, there was dialogue and there was a very definite break for the song. In shows like *Oklahoma!*, of course there was dialogue but the stage was somehow always active with a lot of music, a lot of dancing. The dialogue led naturally into the numbers. The other thing was, of course, the sheer vitality of these American musical stars... I mean, musical comedy was a shot in the arm, there's no question, by Broadway - the old English style of musical comedy had become a little long in the tooth and comparatively senile, compared with the brazen vitality, and athletic dancing of these American imports. That applied both to *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. It's a bit like... what I remember about them was like these old Music Hall artists was the sheer energy they displayed. The way they commanded the whole stage and the auditorium by sheer force of personality, but of course also physical dominance. They were on top of the audience, held the audience in

the palm of their hand. I had the same feeling of confident vitality in these American shows.

EJ: That's very interesting. One thing I did want to ask was about the mid-fifties.

DR: I was lucky again in that after I did my first lot of research in Paris - for which I deferred my call-up for National Service, I was called-up in '54 and did my statutory two years as an education officer in the RAF. My first posting... about which the less said the better: it ended in ignominious transfer because I had got on the wrong side [interview pauses] I saw the original cast [of *Look Back in Anger*] and what I remember is... it's not quite energy but a sort of demotic directness... If you look at the play now... and of course it appears quite conventional in structure, you know, the three-act structure and it's got curtain lines, and neatly plotted climaxes and so on, and you can see that it's written by a man who had been brought up on conventional dramatic fare, which Osborne was of course. But what was new was the sheer irreverence, I suppose, of much of the dialogue and the attitudes, certainly from Jimmy Porter who was the whole centre, the kingpin of the whole thing. I mean a man who is suffering deeply, I suppose more out of frustration and impotence than anything else. Impotence to do anything about a society which has changed so little, notwithstanding two world wars and the Spanish Civil War. Society is still relatively unchanged, the establishment is still there and Jimmy Porter is railing at the hypocrisy and the injustice which is still prevalent and which he can do nothing about. It comes out in this rhetorical bile of his which is, of course, brilliantly written, it's almost operatic, it's certainly far more eloquent and more cogent than anybody could be in real life, in that sense it stretches credibility far too much! But the sheer energy of it, the sheer vitriol of his performance and the way in which he subverted politeness, polite forms of address was so refreshing, more than refreshing - inspiring. It seemed to echo what was in the air of the time, I know it's a very vague phrase, but you do get the feeling that there is something in the air of the time. It was feeling - not of rebelliousness, that's going too far - but discontent with how little things had changed. An irreverence towards the status quo. That came across very clearly and it chimed with what so many younger people in the audience were feeling at that time. Certainly myself. I felt like standing on the seat and cheering afterwards, it was that kind of inspiration. The other thing of course, was unlike any average cup-and-saucer comedy, well, in some ways it was a cup-and-saucer comedy, but most English comedies before that had been set in middle-class interiors, middle-class dining rooms or sitting rooms or salons or whatever and they all had servants one got the feeling that the people speaking the lines had never actually dusted the furniture or lit the fire, it'd all been done by servants, there was no sort of umbilical connection between the characters and the dialogue they were speaking and the environment in which they purported to live, you got the feeling that in *Look Back in Anger* this was a real 'lived-in' environment. It wasn't just that Alison was ironing on stage for most of the first act, you got the feeling that she actually did iron all the time. And that they did sit in two armchairs every Sunday morning and read the Sunday papers. And they lived in a state of permanent clutter, and you were somehow, it made what happened so much more plausible, it was the sort of interior that I recognised, not that I'd ever lived in a garrett, quite such an untidy place. But it wasn't an upper-class interior. It was a kind of drawing-room or sitting-room in which most genteel comedies used to take place. When I began to teach drama, later, I came across a comment by Shaw, when he was still a theatre critic on Robertson's *Caste*. You know the play, Robertson's *Caste*. Shaw saw a revival of the play in the 1890s and wrote a review defending the play, defending the *Nature* in that play and he said 'young people today will scoff at the word 'Nature' in that play, but

they will demand 'Where is Nature?' And I say it is in the windows, in the doors, in the ceiling, in the carpet, in the fireplace in the kettle, in the cups and saucers, in the ham, in the basinette, and so on'. The sort of items that people in the play touched and used throughout the action and they were the items that people in real life touched and used. Constantly. And it was a kind of guarantee of authenticity. Of course you look at Robertson's plays now and they are quaint. But they were very new at that time. Just as *Look Back In Anger* was - or appeared to be - very new in the 1950s. For very similar reasons, that authenticity of set, which lent a kind of authenticity to what happens. A guarantee, as I said, a guarantee of authenticity. Although it doesn't, of course, bear close critical scrutiny. You can see the nuts and bolts and the joins, if you look at it very carefully.

The other play I saw, I remember clearly, though I don't remember much about it because it mystified me at the time, I'm ashamed to say, although I enjoyed it, but I enjoyed it more for the acting than the play, was *Waiting for Godot*. I saw that, it had opened at the Arts Theatre, of course, Peter Hall's production, and it had transferred into the West End, to that little theatre in Picadilly Circus, called the Criterion. That sort of subterranean theatre where you can hear the underground trains going past every so often! I saw it there and I was again bowled over by it, but more by the acting than by anything else. I remember Peter Bull in particular as Pozzo. Peter Woodthorpe was Estragon and Hugh Burton was Vladimir and I can't remember the fourth member of the cast. I can't remember who played Lucky. This wasn't the original cast, because I think the original cast had Paul Daneman as Vladimir, he'd opened in the play at the Arts Theatre but had pulled out, thinking it was going to be a failure, I imagine he kicked himself subsequently, because it ran and ran, despite some of the early reviews. I remember Gielgud saying, or reported as having said he couldn't stand it or understand it. And it was panned pretty well universally, apart from Harold Hobson who defended it, and again Tynan of course. So on Tynan's recommendation I had to go and see it. And as I said, I didn't understand it very much, but I was impressed by the... to some extent the echoes of Music Hall, I suppose, in the play, and the fact that it was so brilliantly acted. They were all star turns, performance roles. What else?

EJ: Did you see *The Entertainer* ?

DR: Yes, yes I did. But I saw... I'm a bit confused because I saw the film as well. I saw Olivier in the film, but I can't remember who was playing Archie Rice when I saw the stage performance, or when I saw the stage performance. I can't remember whether I saw it during its original run... that was a few years later, of course, about '61. By which time... I went back to Paris to do some more research and then I went to teach at St Andrews first and then in Glasgow, '60-'61. I had to make a much longer journey to get down to see shows in London. But I did manage to. I remember seeing one of the early performances of *West Side Story* at Her Majesty's, I think it was. I stood at the back. You were allowed, before Health and Safety Regulations, you could actually stand at the back, behind the pit. I stood there all night, watching *West Side Story* and I've never forgotten it. The other show I remember from the fifties, I was in London for one day, en route to Sweden as it happens during the Festival of Britain in late summer of '51. I was very much interested in those days, more than interested, by Christopher Fry. He's faded into virtual... he's never done now, no. Which probably means he's ripe for re-appraisal [laughs] but he was highly-successful in the late forties and early fifties and then began to fade already. But I saw a play of his called *A Sleep of Prisoners*. Which is

interesting, because the term didn't exist then, but it was an early example of what is now called 'site specific' writing. It was written for performance in a church and it concerns four British prisoners of war who are billeted because the prison they're in... it isn't specific where, somewhere in Germany?

EJ: Is this the play where they dream?

DR: Yes, they sleep and they dream Biblical stories, like Cain and Abel, for instance. All their names are suggestive of Biblical characters. The sergeant is called David King, for instance, but not King David, David King. Corporal Adams... who was played by Stanley Baker I remember. I remember being very impressed by Stanley Baker in that, but I don't remember who else was in it. But I saw it in a church. I think it had first been done in a church in Oxford. And then London performance, a London season was arranged to coincide with the Festival of Britain. And I saw it in a church just off Regent Street called St Thomas's.

[tape turned off and switched on again]

DR: The one thing I wanted to mention, one little quaint aspect of theatre-going in the forties even in - as I sort of... slightly in inverted commas... what I referred to as 'the provinces' people used to take tea in the interval, which was brought in - this was for matinee performances of course, I often used to go to matinees. Waitresses would circulate in the stalls with trays of - no doubt they were ordered beforehand - but they were brought to your seat. A pot of tea and cups and biscuits and the denizens of the stalls would sit there imbibing tea and chatting about the play or about life in general, or about the next door neighbour or whatever - gossip gossip gossip, natter natter natter - throughout the interval, being entertained by a three-piece band. This was straight theatre, but it had a vestige of the days of genteel theatre-going, and it sort of had a vestigial band! three people - pianist, violinist and cellist (rather than a viola player)...

EJ: Would they be on stage?

DR: No, in the pit - most of the pit was curtained off, leaving a mini pit - a pitlet! - in the middle occupied by three ladies in black evening dress - although it was mid-afternoon - providing music as if for a tea dance - you know? find all the usual songs from musical comedies - you can guess what they were. Most of the ladies in the audience were of a certain age - in their fifties and sixties - and so remembered musicals from between the wars and even before the first world war I suppose, and that was their repertoire throughout. And they sat there - invariably two intervals, so tea was served in both intervals, and that's just a little image that has stayed with me and suddenly came to mind while we were talking and it's almost unthinkable now! And of course the same people were there at the end to play the National Anthem, that was de rigeur after any live performance.

EJ: Thank you.