

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Frances Gray – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Dorney

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Writer and theatre-goer, Senior Lecturer at Sheffield University. John Arden; Armstrong's Last Goodnight; Alan Ayckbourn; Brenton Bond; Michael Boyd; Bertold Brecht's plays; Brimstone and Treacle; Peter Brook; Chichester Festival Theatre; The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield; Steve Daldry; Peter Daubeny's international theatre seasons; Flourish; Marat/Sade; The National Theatre; Laurence Olivier; Othello; John Osborne; programmes; published plays; radio; Royal Hunt of the Sun; Royal Shakespeare Company; Shakespeare; Maggie Smith; theatre-going; Mary Ure; US; David Warner

KD: This is Kate Dorney interviewing Frances Gray for the British Library Theatre Archive. Frances, would you care to give your consent for this being deposited in the Sound Archive of the British Library?

FG: Yes.

KD: OK, I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about your general experience of theatre.

FG: I think it started when I was about eleven and we did *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and that got me hooked on Shakespeare and on theatre in general and I remember desperately wanting to be a director and not knowing how you did that from a girl's grammar school in Portsmouth. The only stuff to go and see - other than what we made ourselves - were the local amateurs on the pier, and our local amateurs were noted for doing every single play of Shakespeare - they were going for some sort of record and I hit *Titus Andronicus* year which was huge fun because they had obviously seen the Peter Brook one, the one where Brook brought Lavinia on with great swathes of red velvet on the wrists. They did it with crepe paper, which didn't have quite the same impact, and there were quite a lot of giggles in the production but it seemed to be a hugely worthwhile sort of thing, to put Shakespeare on.

KD: It is quite interesting that they should kind of pick on something like that so quickly and take it on board actually.

FG: Yes, I think they were all very clued up about seeing stuff and then they had to translate it into being the local dentist and the local teacher with a rather limited budget

and the same wardrobe that went through many, many productions - you got to recognise the clothes after a bit, but it did mean you got to see a lot of Shakespeare, which was nice.

KD: So when you were at school who were the main directors then? Who were you thinking of in terms of 'I would really like to be a director'?

FG: I guess you had just about started hearing about Peter Brook, and by the time I'd got to kind of sixth form level you went up to see the RSC and Peter Brook and Peter Hall and John Barton doing stuff and that was the... the sort of theatre trips we'd organise for ourselves were usually RSC - Barton, Hall, Brook - and then there was Chichester just down the road, the sort of National in embryo, just getting started.

KD: So could you tell me a bit more about the stuff at the Festival?

FG: Yes, well, Chichester Festival was... I think it cost about seven and six on the train to go up to Chichester for the day and see a play, and I'd go up with a crowd of friends and we started at about six in the morning and then we'd queue and there were something like twelve really cheap boxes - little box seats - the rest was incredibly expensive. It was very posh, middle class there... I think they wanted to be Glyndebourne, but you could get these cheap seats and we saw Armstrong's Last Goodnight that way and St Joan and quite a few earlier Arden's actually. Then there was the school trip to the Olivier Othello; I think mainly because they wanted to try out Royal Hunt of the Sun and it was a kind of, it was a double ticket.

KD: Buy one get one free.

FG: Buy one get one free.

KD: Early marketing. So what was it like? Because obviously the hype surrounding the Olivier Othello is enormous, and you quite often find that what actually happened was not the same thing. As a 16, 17 year old, what was it like to see the kind of matinée idol on the stage, up close?

FG: Parts of it really blew you away. I think we were all in love with him anyway, because we've been brought up on the Olivier Shakespeare films, which were shamelessly sexy really.

KD: How old is he at this point?

FG: He is ... he must be fifty something I would think. It was also the height of the Joan Plowright / divorcing Vivien bit.

KD: Oh yes, of course.

FG: So he was kind of glamorous in a rather louche sort of way, and we got to see them both although not in the same play. I saw Plowright do *St Joan* and she was fantastic.

KD: Who directed ... did he direct that?

FG: No, he didn't do much directing at that point. He was the big cheese in charge of the place, and it was clearly... it started off as the sort of practice run for the National, and then it became the National's try-out home before they did stuff at the Old Vic. I can remember in *Othello*...the bit I remember very well is him just walking on in this white robe and bare feet and holding a rose. He was very laid back and very urbane and not at all kind of stuffy or majestic - not one of those heavy 'noble Moor' type characters, this was a very laid back guy who had got out of bed and was still holding the rose that he had obviously sprinkled on the coverlets or whatever, and he made that joke about the Anthropophagi as a kind of lovely throw-away line, so this wasn't a guy who was... he wasn't a tragedy - he wasn't a tragic actor - so it was quite a thunderbolt when he started to disintegrate. And I can remember, actually, being quite impressed by Frank Finlay's *Iago*, despite all the chat about that *Iago* being Olivier's attempt to squash the second half of the double act and not allow him to make much of the character. I thought he was really interesting, because he was this kind of grey ghost and extremely sinister. There is that bit where...

KD: Is Frank Finlay a lot younger?

FG: Yes, a lot, a lot younger. And there was that bit where *Othello* has the epileptic fit and you could see him actually - *Iago* - being absolutely in charge of that and being almost deliberately kind of effacing himself and not showing anything and talking in this very thin, grey voice. I thought it was quite a remarkable performance, I liked it a lot.

KD: Presumably there wasn't anything at the time about the fact that Olivier had strategically arranged the role so that Finlay couldn't act him off the stage in the same way as he had tried to do to Ralph Richardson?

FG: No, there wasn't. I mean it was *Othello*'s play, but that didn't seem such a bad decision. It was also... there was a reaction from *Iago*, the great Machiavel and the character we're all supposed to be interested in and the guy is a nasty little racist, so I thought the balance wasn't unreasonable. The other figure who just blew you away was Maggie Smith as *Desdemona*, because she was so powerful. She had these huge, voluminous costumes and she did these great sweeping curtseys - and the Chichester stage is vast and she could dominate it, she really gave Olivier a run for his money I think.

KD: That's very interesting actually, because they remained friends didn't they? He always had a kind of soft spot for her.

FG: Although apparently she used to stand up to him quite a lot. I think they stopped being friends after all the reviews said she acted him off the stage in *The Master Builder*. I mean, as Desdemona, he does get to strangle you - it is difficult to... you can't upstage your Othello. But she was a very... she was a very gutsy one, a very powerful one, she didn't just lie back and mimsy about and take it. It was actually a very strong cast.

KD: And was there... did you have any kind of feeling when he turned up covered in 57 different layers of boot polish, highly polished up? Did anyone know that was going to happen, and was it kind of already known by the time you went to see it, or was it a shock?

FG: I think he had given out that he was going to play Othello as black rather than as an Arab, and I don't think any of the racist implications occurred to us at the time.

KD: But it didn't look kind of odd?

FG: It was phwoar really. It is very disappointing if you look at the film, because the make up doesn't translate, it looks very crude and very obvious; but on the stage it just looked very, very sexy, and I think the real surprise was the voice because he had trained himself to drop an octave so this great bass rumble comes out of somebody who you are used to thinking of as a tenor and it is like suddenly listening to a trombone instead of a French horn or something, the different depth that he is doing with it.

KD: Was that the first time that you saw him on stage?

FG: Yes. I think it was the only time I saw him on stage.

KD: Was he still in the programme selling... were Olivier cigarettes still something you could buy in the foyer?

FG: I don't think so. I do remember he was the voice - his was the recorded voice that told you you had two minutes to get back to your seat in the middle of the interval, so he did kind of pervade the building anyway, Olivier cigarettes or no.

KD: So what was the actual theatre like? I mean, how much were the tickets relative to now, how much were you paying as kind of schoolgirls in the cheap seats?

FG: I think they were about five shillings, I can't remember exactly but they were way cheaper than anything else. They were up in some rather uncomfortable little boxes, so the view was very good but there was no leg room and the seats were, I think they were quite expensive. It was more that the ambience of Chichester was very expensive.

KD: I presume you're all still dressing up to go the theatre at this point?

FG: Not that much, because of having to sit on the pavement for a couple of hours to get your ticket! But there were certainly some hats and frocks around.

KD: And suits for the gentlemen?

FG. Oh yes. Certainly if you went off to the tent where you could get your smorgasbord, there were some very fancy gear in there. We couldn't afford the smorgasbord - it took years before I could afford the smorgasbord - and apparently that was a feature and they got frightfully well-bred young ladies to serve you your Danish open sandwich. They were all called Daphne and things, they were rather posh.

KD: So they were consciously kind of developing the brand and that is, as you say, the Glyndebourne, the place to come?

FG: Yes, it did have a very upmarket feel. I can remember earwiggling somebody in the foyer saying, 'It makes my heart sing to see all these simple little people coming to the theatre'. And we thought, 'Bloody hell, I think she means us!' [Laughter]

KD: So how old were they?

FG: There was a good raft of middle aged, you know, retired colonels and... because I think Chichester itself took it quite seriously, and that was a posh retirement/commuter kind of town. You had to be reasonably well off to live in Chichester.

KD: The cathedral ladies.

FG: Yes, there were quite a lot of those going I think.

KD: Were there also lots of people your age there also going to take advantage of the cheap seats, or lots of Larry's friends from Brighton?

FG: I don't remember any Larry's friends from Brighton. I don't ever remember seeing anybody famous in the foyer, although there probably were some. And there were certainly always queues for those cheap seats. You had to get there early to get them, so I think there was... there was a youngish clientele, I think, but of course you could always pick up the National stuff later at the Vic - when it became The National showcase as it was by the time of Othello -so you got chances to see stuff up in London. I think they transferred stuff like Armstrong's Last Goodnight as well, it wasn't only...

I'm not sure if that was a National production now or not, but things certainly had later lives besides Chichester.

KD: What about Royal Hunt of the Sun then?

FG: The staging was amazing, because we had got no idea what the play was about. It was something you had to go to if you were going to see Othello.

KD: Did the teachers go as well?

FG: Yes. I think everybody was knocked out by a couple of moments. It starts off in this rather boring documentary vein but there's... Apparently the stage direction is 'They climb the Andes', and there was that extraordinary kind of mime they went into of staggering up mountains and you started to think, 'oh this is interesting', and then there's the bit where they actually stride into Peru and carry all before them and they just unrolled this gigantic blood-coloured cloth and it covered the whole of the Chichester stage (which was enormous) and it really did start you thinking, 'oh, that's what you can do with this kind of space' and then over that cloth this sun blossoms out and there is Robert Stephens wearing nothing but a crown and a loincloth and chanting all these extraordinary Peruvian vowels. It was quite an extraordinary physical use of the stage.

KD: And is Robert Stephens famous at this point?

FG: Not really. Well, he's a rising star I think.

KD: On stage as opposed to...

FG: Yes, he's one of those people that... Olivier brings in a lot of people who are still young. There was sort of Robert Stephens and Maggie Smith and Derek Jacobi that I can remember from those early seasons that nobody had heard of very much. And you started to think, 'oh, this is really something special'.

KD: What was the reaction of your class and your teachers?

FG: I think they were just knocked out by the theatricality of it. It took you a while to work out that actually it's a pretty bum play, because it was the sheer look of the thing and the way that they used masks at the end - their whole chorus of priests of Atahualpa wearing these kind of owl-like masks and just... There's a wait of about three minutes at the end while the rising sun is striking his body and you are waiting to see whether he's resurrected and the masks seem to go through this great range of expressions. So it was an extraordinary induction into a theatricality that we hadn't seen before and it was hugely exciting.

KD: I think one critic is quoted as saying that when he doesn't rise again the gasp of dismay from the audience is palpable, is that something you remember?

FG: Not quite as strong as that, but I think, yes, you almost expected it to happen. They had created a myth there and Stephens was just such an extraordinary kind of presence. There was this other world that you just hadn't known about and you really did feel the pain, I think, of the man who killed him, who really believed in the... Pizzaro really believes that he's going to be resurrected - in the teeth of all his own Catholicism and his own kind of experience of killing lots of people, he still seems to expect that resurrection moment. So it is an extraordinary kind of moment.

KD: I've always been interested in how the kind of rape of the sun, how that would look on stage, because Shaffer has these huge stage directions about exactly what the sun looked like and how it was constructed.

FG: I think he put them in afterwards actually.

KD: Oh really? So it wasn't such a great thing when you saw it?

FG: It was, it was and I think it was down to John Dexter rather than down to Shaffer. I think they created something amazing and they'd got this... In Chichester especially they had just got this brilliant stage, and I think that was the play in which they worked out what you could do with it and it was a wonderful moment. I think then we all believed that Shakespeare's theatre would have looked like that. That it was enormous and that you had to control this sort of vast area, and it's quite disillusioning to find out that Globe was really much smaller than that.

KD: Yes, I guess so.

FG: But actually I remember the whole thing did turn me into a militant of 'we must copy Shakespeare's Globe exactly when we're doing Shakespeare' for years.

KD: This was when you came to teach or...?

FG: I think early on, yes, until they'd actually shrunk the Globe dimensions, but it did... I think it did open up that notion that you could have a really fast flexible stage as well, that it did blow away that whole thing of having great yawning gaps between scenes while people grimly plodded on and off with props - that you could actually make the stage into a character and have it kind of blossom and do things.

KD: Oh, right. Was there anything else down there that you saw that really sticks in your memory?

FG: Yes, I saw the Stratford Ontario Company come down, because they'd actually got a clone of the Chichester Festival Theatre - in fact the Chichester Theatre was based on theirs - and they'd really got a grasp on how to use that stage. And I can remember that John Colicos doing Timon's banquet and running amok onstage and throwing water into everybody's faces and then just going up onto the upper level and saying goodbye to the city, this one figure kind of dominating the whole stage.

KD: And how were they received by your friends? I mean, did your friends have the same reactions as you, or was anyone completely sort of dumbfounded?

FG: I think everybody thought something really interesting was going on. There were two of us who were absolutely passionate about theatre, and about three or four more people who we could reliably drag off to anything we thought would be exciting and they genuinely did seem to have a very good time. I think on the whole we sort of picked well. I think the only one I liked a lot and not many people did was Armstrong's Last Goodnight which was... it was in its early stages and it was extremely dense, the dialect. I think they modified it a bit later but it was all in medieval Scots, plus at the beginning Albert Finney also had a speech impediment which he lost after being seduced by Geraldine McEwan part way through. [Laughter] But it was kind of difficult to spot that he'd got better, because it was all in this kind of medieval Scots and it took you a while to work out what the hell was going on, but the spectacle was wonderful. I think the thing about that big stage was that when you got an actor who could just dominate it by his presence, you got this really extraordinary moment. There was one bit where Finney is undressing for Robert Stephens - who is playing the King's Herald - very urbane, and Finney actually stripped down to britches and shirt and took off all his swords and buckles and fancy bits, and it was a very strong moment. He had this monologue in Scots that was not very clear what was going on, but it was a very powerful kind of 'hold the stage' kind of moment, and again it ends with the hanging of the hero, and you almost expected him to come back to life as well.

KD: Yes, a resurrection. So when you were talking to John Arden for the book, what did he think about the Armstrong's Last Goodnight, because he was very disappointed. He talked about, I'm not sure whether it's in To Present the Pretence or one of the prefaces, he talks about how he felt really out of place once it had got there. It's a kind of build up to the playwrights and play-writers' thing, isn't it? His play has been taken away from him. Do you know what in particular he had problems with?

FG: I don't think it was about the production, I think it was just about the fact that the author doesn't really belong once the thing is up and running, and I think it was... I think Arden never really wanted to be part of the professional theatre, where you did the play and somebody bought it and went off and did it. I think he would have even then probably preferred it if all the audience had been involved in the play in some way.

KD: Yes, though it still seems strange to me to think of him at the Festival Theatre at all - it doesn't seem like an Arden place to be.

FG: I think it was about size. I don't think you could have done anything like Armstrong, or they did Workhouse Donkey as well.

KD: Oh really?

FG: It was just the number of the characters, and I remember that Armstrong's Last Goodnight actually had medieval mansions on the stage so people would actually walk A to B and they'd be going 50 miles to the next castle or something. It was just the sheer weight of numbers and the size, they were kind of Shakespearean in scope, so I guess that's how he ended up there. From that point of view it seemed to fit really well.

KD: But no one else you were with really liked it?

FG: No that much, apart from the fact that Finney and Stephens were beautiful enough to kind of keep you going, I think.

KD: How long after Royal Hunt of the Sun is this?

FG: It might even have been before. I'm a bit hazy about the chronology, because it was... I know Chichester opened when we were in about the fifth form or so, and it became one of the regular things you did - going up to Chichester to see stuff - because it was cheaper. It was a lot closer than London and a lot less hassle.

KD: So it was cheaper than going to London even... OK, yes, because you were having the cheap tickets as well.

FG: Yes, and it was only half-way on the train, so it also meant you could go up and see a matinée and get back without losing very much time. When we started going up to London matinées it was always a bit of a scramble. You had to get your ticket in advance, you couldn't go up and queue for that, so that was a rather more expensive do. So you had to be committed to the play long enough in advance to have booked the... We got privileged tickets from the RSC, because my friend Jane and I turned into RSC groupies. We joined the Friends of the RSC and you got this extremely good newspaper called Flourish - which they stopped running - but the articles in Flourish were really good, they were all the... Arden's have all been published somewhere else since, but they were the places where people like Brook talked about *Midsummer Night's Dream* for the first time and Peter Hall talked about the Histories and there were interviews with the actors.

KD: And so this was a kind of preview, so you would know what you were booking for?

FG: Yes, and you got early booking - about six months in advance - and you got cheapish seats. It wasn't on the scale of Chichester cheap, but they were cheap and if you knew what you wanted to see you could go up without breaking the bank.

KD: So were you going to Stratford at this point, or to the Aldwych?

FG: To the Aldwych. There were some school trips to Stratford but if you went there... I think the first time I went there wasn't a school trip, was at the end of the sixth form before university and we stayed about a week in order to see stuff.

KD: Oh right.

FG: And I don't think we'd have done that without having gone to a lot of London trips first, because we knew what was on and what we wanted to see.

KD: And did the RSC have a definable house-style then at this point, so you could be fairly confident that you could go and see anything as long as it was by Brook, Barton or Hall?

FG: Pretty much. You expected to get something reasonable for the money. I think we'd all have liked to have gone the year before and seen the Kings - you know, they did it for the 400th anniversary thing, and we had a school trip to that and saw one bit of Henry VI which was... it was all right but on its own it didn't really move you that much and it wasn't until I saw the whole cycle on the television - I think they did it about a year later - that you could think, 'Oh, that's why she's like that there, because she going to do that there'. But we saw a lot of the same actors. I saw David Warner's Hamlet, that was a biggie. And Paul Scofield's Timon of Athens, that was a pretty good thing to go to and Eric Porter's King Lear, which was a bit of a disappointment. Everybody knew that Eric Porter was Soames Forsyth, he was a big star at that time.

KD: Oh he was already a kind of telly star.

FG: And we saw... In London you didn't see so much Shakespeare as the contemporary stuff, because the idea was that the Aldwych would be the home of the contemporary stuff and they were really fighting to do that. I remember there was an article in Flourish and it was called 'The Parable of the Potters', and it was all about people who had to produce these beautiful traditional pots and had to fight the bad authorities of the city to do contemporary pots alongside.

KD: Oh right.

FG: And there were lots of articles about 'how many schoolgirls has the Lord Chamberlain raped that he should presume to ban this play?!', and that kind of thing. [Laughter]

KD: So what was the David Warner Hamlet like? Because again, that is something that in theatre history is perceived as a huge turning point, Hamlet the student, not the kind of...

FG: Yes, he was very moving in that kind of rather lumbering, graceless, 'I'm 6ft and I don't know what to do with my big boots' kind of way. It was a very touching Hamlet, and I can remember Glenda Jackson's Ophelia actually storming down and shouting at him until you felt really sorry for him. She was a very feisty Ophelia.

KD: Yes, I can imagine!

FG: That was a very interesting confrontation - I think that was one of the most... that was one of the most lively bits of the play. I think he wasn't all that happy on his own, and I can't actually remember a single soliloquy, but he was obviously... he seemed to be a very good doubles player, and when he got somebody like Jackson to play off, or when he got his Gertrude or his Horatio, he was very engaged. The relationships were very exciting.

KD: Who was Gertrude?

FG: I can't remember who Gertrude was. I can remember her vomiting copiously when she'd been poisoned, which was considered very brave at the time. There was a little passage in the Daily Mirror about that, getting quite excited.

KD: In the Daily Mirror?

FG: Yes, 'Actress pukes on stage' - that was a big deal!

KD: At the Royal Shakespeare Company, I can imagine that would be a problem. So what else did you see at the Aldwych?

FG: At the Aldwych I saw... I'm trying to remember the order. Yes, I saw the Marat/Sade while I was still in the sixth form - I can remember talking about it at my UCAS interviews, so it must have been in the first year of the sixth form. And we'd read all about this in Flourish and Peter Brook going on about all the extraordinary things that the play does. And that was full of people who became stars - there was Ian Richardson as the Herald and I think Patrick Magee as Marat, I think, or was he Sade? I can't remember now because everybody took over everybody's roles at different points.

KD: And Glenda Jackson.

FG: And Glenda Jackson as Corday actually flogging de Sade with her hair.

KD: With her hair?

FG: Yes, it was another kind of stunningly theatrical moment. She played her as a kind of somnambulant character with almost no vitality of her own, but then there was this point where she was whipping Sade with this very long hair and all the characters were actually making the sound of the whip whistling through the air and cracking on his back. It was an extraordinary kind of image.

KD: How was it kind of received, because it is so not in the English kind of tradition for that kind of thing to go on? I can imagine loads of people just being completely horrified. And people were... or were people suspicious of Brook at this time anyway as a kind of gimmick man?

FG: I think there was a fair bit of controversy. Nobody walked out or anything, that I can remember. I can remember we were just very stunned by it, because it was just such a hugely powerful piece and it had this extraordinary music and the images were very extraordinary, very disturbing. The designs were quite brilliant.

KD: He's in the bath, isn't he, all the way through?

FG: He's in the bath all the way through, yes, because he's got this skin disease. And delivers enormously long monologues and has this great argument with Sade in the bath about things like the nature of... the nature of political interference, and where the ego begins and deciding political self begins - ends. I remember it being enormously complex and I don't think I understood it all at the time, and the ending where they all just sort of go completely bananas in the asylum. I don't... I'm not sure that worked, but it was a really, really interesting afternoon out. Coming out into the London sunshine and getting the train home afterwards was really, really weird.

KD: Is that what you did, you just got the train straight home?

FG: I think we had to at that point, because there weren't a lot of choices of trains back from London post-commuter. It was always a big day of it, we'd go up early and go to the Tate usually. One of the group was a big art freak and so she would instruct us on what we would go to in the morning. I think we might... I'm not sure, but I think we might have done it at the same moment as we saw the Guggenheim exhibition, which would have been an extraordinary set of images to take home with you.

KD: Wow! And what about food and drink and stuff, what did you do? Did you take stuff up so you could have enough for the train fare and the ticket?

FG: I think we took sandwiches. This was your pocket money, and there wasn't a whole bunch of it so there wasn't any sort of leaping off to restaurants and things.

KD: No, and the Aldwych is a very grand theatre isn't it?

FG: Yes, but it's also very poky, and the food in London theatres was always pretty awful at that point and we couldn't really afford to go anywhere extraordinarily posh afterwards.

KD: And what was the audience like?

FG: It was quite mixed. I think there were some nice day-trippers who were a bit puzzled about what they were doing there and I think there was a definite RSC constituency.

KD: So the RSC is already a kind of brand at this point and far more successful even than the National?

FG: Yes... Well, when I went up to university, there were National people and there were RSC people and you certainly would go to each thing, but you sort of identified as one or the other, I think, and I was very much an RSC person but there were certainly people who favoured the National. It was like being an Olivier person or a Gielgud person.

KD: So why would you... what's the difference then between the National and the RSC at this point in terms of who you identify with? The productions or the artistic director?

FG: I think there was a sort of chanciness about the RSC. They'd do more... they'd take more risks.

KD: Even then?

FG: This was in '65 or so, and certainly I couldn't see the National doing something like US. That's the first thing I can remember going to see as a proper student, with friends from university rather than just friends from home.

KD: That was at LAMDA was it?

FG: They were doing it in the Aldwych by then. It may well have started at LAMDA, it came out of that whole Theatre of Cruelty season, and being a small experimental place we couldn't really afford to go up with our matinée money in case you didn't get in or whatever.

KD: Oh right, I see, so it was...

FG: So I think we treated that as for Londoners. But when I was at Hull, I remember Adrian Mitchell, who had done the lyrics for the songs in US, came and talked to all the drama students. They used to have little lunch time meetings of all the drama people in the new workshop that we'd got which was basically a tatty old gym and Adrian Mitchell came on and read some of the lyrics and talked about some of the poetry, and we were all quite excited to go because we'd read about it in Flourish.

KD: So Flourish was the main source of information about these things?

FG: Yes, well, if you joined the RSC club you got it - you felt very much a little in-group. I don't think the National had all that. They weren't so set on justifying themselves and expressing themselves to ... I think it might have been that the RSC was aiming at a younger constituency, because the National always knew it would pull in people because they were the National.

KD: And because they had Olivier. And what was US like then?

FG: That was another of those afternoons again, in our case, where you came out thinking, 'Oh wow!', and the first half was full of that kind of stunning theatricality of people leaping about imitating Chinese dragons and performing bits of mythology. They did a kind of potted history of Vietnam, which... that half culminates in this gigantic puppet of a U.S soldier kind of descending from the flies, and it's all made out of rubbish. Very sort of big, strong theatrical images, and I can remember Glenda Jackson actually transforming herself into Madame Nu, who was the power behind the throne in Vietnam and the source of all the persecution of the Buddhists who were burning themselves.

KD: Oh right.

FG: And she was an absolute dead ringer - she must have worked incredibly hard on the make up because they don't really resemble... And I think the second half... There was that classic story about the American Ambassador being invited to this thing, and Whitehall says to Peter Brook, 'Will it be all right, do you think he'll walk out?' and he says, 'Well, no, not if he stays to the end!' And I think what he meant was the second half was about Brits drinking martinis on the lawn and Jackson in the middle saying 'I want it to come here, I want to see all these well-bred British ladies crawling about in their own sick'.

KD: Presumably there weren't many well-bred British ladies in the audience?

FG: I think there were a bit, but I don't think they quite realised what had hit them. And now, thinking about it, well, why? I think it tried to do that thing of questioning yourself for being such a wanky indulgent actor, presuming to act out this thing about Vietnam, but the 'I want it to come here' seemed a very...

KD: Pointless.

FG: A pointless kind of response to it really.

KD: And the burning of the butterfly? Convincing? Really a butterfly?

FG: Well, we were so far away that we couldn't actually work out what was going on. So we weren't in any position to do what Brook apparently wanted everybody to do, which was leap forward and say 'do not burn that helpless butterfly'.

KD: Oh really?

FG: And so by the time we'd clocked, 'What are they doing? Hang on, is that a real butterfly? No I think they're just miming it', the whole thing was over. I think it was an event for the stalls, not for the cheap seats in the balcony.

KD: Not for the fans.

FG: I was actually in the cheaper stalls - still not the very front ones, I was in the first row that Brook's fairies stopped shaking hands with in *Midsummer Night's Dream* a few years later! So I think all his rapport with the audience is with the best seats still. Nobody knocked themselves out for the crap seats in the Aldwych.

KD: And do you think that's because that's who he's trying to kind of shake up, or because that's where the most discerning punters are maybe?

FG: Maybe not consciously, and I think actually the discerning punters often are in the cheap seats, because they're the people who really want to go.

KD: And want to go to everything.

FG: And I did feel a bit miffed by the time I got to *Midsummer Night's Dream* not to have my hand shaken. Because we were in the row behind, and it was clearly 'well, we'll

stop here, we've done it, we've been through the motions, we've connected', but it was a bit like that. I can remember seeing a production of *The Insect Play*. I think that was when I was a student, and they did this mini-festival every year - Peter Daubney organised it - of international theatre and they hosted that, and we went to see *The Insect Play*. I think it was in Czech, and it had this set, in which there were very complicated arrangements of mirrors so that you could see the whole thing twice, and mostly where we were, we were dependent on the mirrors to see anything at all. So yes, I think the bad seats often got a fairly ropey deal.

KD: And if you go now, where do you sit?

FG: I usually bite the bullet and sit as close as I can to the stage and worry about the bill later!

KD: Right, so you haven't had any kind of interactive moments since then.

FG: Not really.

KD: And what was *Midsummer Night's Dream* like? Did that come to the Aldwych?

FG: No, that was at Stratford. That was in the seventies, and that was pretty amazing, because I booked it as part of a holiday with my ex and we had got the tickets ages before we knew what any of the productions were going to be like, and it was great to have tickets for *Midsummer Night's Dream* because by the time we actually went they were changing hands for hundreds!

KD: How much had you paid for them?

FG: I think we paid about... I think we might have paid about twenty quid a head by then, because we got them quite...

KD: Even in 1970 or '71 was it?

FG: It might even have been '74 or '75 - I can't remember the exact date. They were quite pricy, but we knew it was Brook and it would be worth getting a nice seat but it was... that was a really striking production and it was great for, not having expected too much about that in advance.

KD: So you weren't still getting *Flourish* at this point then? Had *Flourish* folded?

FG: I think I might have still been getting it, but I think the articles on that turned up rather later than the actual production, because I can remember John Kane - the guy who played Puck - actually talking quite a lot about where he had got the ideas from and what Brook was like in rehearsal. But I think at this stage things with Peter Brook in them tended to appear in articles and books and stuff and they weren't beating up the constituency any more, they were kind of explaining to people why we did this.

KD: So where were you working at this point?

FG: I was, I think, at the University of Keele at this point, living with my then-husband who was a sub-warden in a hall of residence and I was doing a bit of teaching at the University of Hull and commuting.

KD: Were other people going to see this stuff, or were you on your own?

FG: We were on our own at that point.

KD: Are people talking about it in the staff room or not?

FG: There didn't seem to be all that much theatrical energy at Keele among the university.

KD: But at Hull still?

FG: At Hull, I wasn't having all that much contact at that point because the commuting was just so knackered in itself, but just sort of feeling, 'yes, that production contains things that you can think about for ages and take from'.

KD: What are your kind of memories of 1968 and censorship - did you see any of the kind of dirty plays? Well apart from Marat/Sade. Did you see anything else that provoked debate about the role of censorship?

FG: I think read more than saw. I remember one of the plays that was supposed to have provoked great debate was Rudkin's *Afore Night Come*, which I didn't see but got the text of and thought was a really interesting play.

KD: RSC again.

FG: Yes. I think I read quite a lot of this stuff that was supposed to be banned. The big test case, I think, was *Saved*, which I didn't get to see. Part of the problem in going to see anything that the Lord Chamberlain had actually banned was that you had to go to

club performances, and I remember in the sixth form and as a first year undergraduate, thinking 'How do you get in? Is it going to be very difficult?'. It was a sort of not-living-in-London thing really.

KD: You don't realise that you go along, pay your membership the day before and then go in the next day.

FG: Yes, I remember it made it sound a lot more racy than the process actually is. I can remember the same sort of... it was all going on with films, of reading in the papers how shocking films were when I was actually too young to go and see them anyway and then seeing them a couple of years later and thinking 'oh, yeah, yeah, yeah!'.

KD: You were probably unshockable after Marat/Sade.

FG: I don't think I ever saw anything on stage that struck me as the sort of thing you shouldn't do on stage.

KD: Did you see anything at the Court or the National once they were at the Old Vic, or on the South Bank even?

FG: Not for ever such a long time. It was years before I got to the Court, I can't remember... The first thing I can remember seeing at the Court was Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine.

KD: That was '79 was it?

FG: Yes, I can't remember seeing anything before that.

KD: Does it feature - or did it feature - in your kind of mental map, because as a sixth former obviously...

FG: Yes a bit, in that you read your Arden and your Pinter and your Wesker and your Osborne. Most of those I didn't get at first hand, it was more sort of seeing amateur productions or working on them as a student or whatever.

KD: Did you see them on the telly?

FG: There was Look Back in Anger, but I don't remember seeing much else.

KD: I think The Birthday Party they did as well, didn't they?

FG: I don't recall seeing that. I remember reading it, and I remember seeing a rather good amateur production of *The Dumb Waiter* and getting quite interested in the play, but I don't remember getting to see much apart from the *Ardens* at Chichester, and I'm trying to remember where I saw the all male *As You Like It* and whether that was in the *New National* or whether it was in the *Vic*.

KD: Can you remember when it was?

FG: I can't offhand. It would be about '67 or something like that. I remember that again was with university friends... or it was... maybe it was at the *Vic*.

KD: Because Peter Hall took them into the South Bank, didn't he?

FG: So it must have been at the *Vic*. I can remember writing about it in finals so it would have been about '67, '68.

KD: How did you get to... oh and the Shakespeare plays. Wow!

FG: Yes, and they quoted reams of Jan Kotts in the programme notes.

KD: Oh, and that was the big influence for their *Hamlet*.

FG: Yes, that was the influence for all of those. I remember it came out and it was reviewed - there was an interview, and there was a talk with Brook and Jan Kotts in *Flourish*, and I can remember my mate Jane and I both bought that and we were the only people in our group at university who had read it, and somebody embarrassingly asked in a lecture once, 'who's read this?' and we stuck our hands up and felt, 'oh God, oh God!'. And got a bit of a grilling on account of it, which I felt was rather unfair.

KD: So it was viewed with suspicion at university then?

FG: I think some people didn't care very much for it. I mean it didn't strike me at the time that it wasn't something lots of people wouldn't be reading. I was surprised nobody else had read it, perhaps they just didn't admit to it.

KD: What about... Did you see any Coward - kind of late Coward? Because he carries on for a long while, and you were a fan.

FG: He does. I didn't see any of the late stuff. The did do a rather good season on TV in about '64/5 - something like that, or maybe even '67, I might have been at university.

I have a vague memory of actually working, coming home and watching Coward after a day in the hospital scrubbing bed pans and stuff. They did all the big comedies, they did Present Laughter and Hayfever and Private Lives and all those, and I remember being very, very taken with that...

KD: Is he still in them at this point?

FG: No.

KD: He'd given in by then.

FG: I think by then he was going to be in Summer Twilight still, which I didn't get to see... no, not Summer Twilight. Yes it was Summer Twilight, I didn't get to see that until about 1999 or thereabouts when it had Corin Redgrave in.

KD: It's a Somerset Maugham one isn't it?

FG: Well, Coward made himself up to look like Somerset Maugham.

KD: Who was safely dead, presumably, at this point! So you were always aware of the kind of traditional West End stuff going on alongside this experimental work?

FG: Well I sort of fell in love with Coward after that telly season, because the dialogue was just so funny and Coward and Rattigan were the only playwrights you could get in the local library. Well, there was a bit of Pinter I think, and there was Shaw but there weren't many of the new things, you had to buy those in those Penguins.

KD: Has Pinter always been published by Faber and Faber?

FG: He was Methuen. It was the blue, those blue Methuen texts and there were people like Wesker who came out in the Penguins three at a time, and Arden was Methuen I think. But if you wanted to borrow stuff from the library it was Rattigan, Shaw and Coward so I got to read most of them as being the only plays available. And Priestley they had.

KD: Oh, right.

FG: And there were a few biographies and bits and pieces like that, I worked my way through what there was, and they tended to be quite ancient.

KD: But you didn't go to see any?

FG: I didn't get to see any. I don't think there was much to see at that point, that was a one-off of Coward's, I don't think he did much between *Song at Twilight* and... *Wedding in the Wings* was this huge disaster in the sixties - I think it was about 1960 in fact - and I wouldn't have been up for going there on my own to London, I was only 12.

KD: Do you remember a kind of... the stuff when Coward wrote about the other playwrights? Because he was always very...

FG: Oh, those articles in the *Sunday Times*.

KD: Was that '63ish or something?

FG: Even earlier I think, because it was in reaction to the *Osbornes* and the *Pinters* and stuff.

KD: The old fashioned revolution.

FG: And I certainly hadn't been in a position to see any of that stuff and they were being... I remember reading an article in *Woman's Own* by John Osborne's then-wife called 'I married a rebel'.

KD: Oh, really?

FG: And it was all made to sound very dashing and a bit shocking, and I don't think texts appeared for quite a while.

KD: Was this Mary Ure?

FG: Mary Ure, I think it was her. I don't remember anything about the article except the title. And it was all considered very... it was all trailed in the *Daily Mirror* as 'shocking new plays', like the shocking new British films that were coming out, and I didn't really get access to them for another few years. I think I was in the sixth form before I actually started reading this stuff. We had a good teacher for the group doing the scholarship level exam which basically was about doing anything you liked, and they asked you some general questions that you could work in anything you happened to know and two of us were into the theatre and did sort of all our presentations and stuff on the *Osbornes* and the *Pinters* and all that and we were reading them pretty much new then I think.

KD: So when did you get to see some Brecht?

FG: Oh ages and ages later. I can't remember the first Brecht I saw, I have a feeling it was at the RSC but I am quite vague about what it was. I know they did Puntilla, but I didn't get to see that, but you got a kind of flavour of what the production was like.

KD: Was he being mentioned, kind of, you know, at this stage?

FG: I think the first time I really knew one end of Brecht from the other was doing a subsidiary drama course at university and Brecht was part of the package along with Pirandello and Becket and Ionesco and the whole lot. I think that's the first time I can actually remember reading Brecht as opposed to getting Brecht filtered into things like the RSC histories which used a lot of the imagery and the style of Brecht.

KD: I'm just trying to think... no, I can't remember now, but the Mother Courage, was that a National production or something?

FG: There was one at the Royal Court that John Arden was sort of very taken by in '59 and I know The Berliner came at one time. And yes, I didn't really clock any of that.

KD: I'm sure they do one on a huge stage, so it won't have been the Court - it must have been somewhere like the National and it would have been the South Bank I guess rather than the Old Vic as well.

FG: Maybe, yes.

KD: I have the sort of mental image but not the stuff to back it up. So any... so when, you know, you were talking about how you were either an RSC person or a National Theatre person - presumably when Peter Hall took over did you then become a National person as well? Or he was just part of the ensemble rather than the...?

FG: Yes, I think the thing had broken down a bit by then. I always think of the RSC as the people who gave me the education and they were the... it was the Aldwych that you went to to find out about stuff. I think the only time I can remember being at the National as opposed to Chichester was to see the all-male As You Like It, and that was a kind of a don't-miss, obviously, and nobody was doing anything quite like that. I think the rest... it may have been that Chichester was just there and it was quite easy to get blasé about somewhere that's that handy and so I went every summer just to see whatever was at Chichester and treated it very much as my backroom theatre.

KD: So when was the last time you went to Chichester then, what was the last thing you saw there, can you remember?

FG: The very last, I think that it was... I think it might be *The Country Wife*, it was Maggie Smith... no, it was *The Way of the World* and it had Maggie Smith in it and that was in 198... [slight break in recording].

KD: Had it changed by then, or was it still a force to be reckoned with?

FG: I know Patrick Lau took over for a while, and he was quite interesting. I can remember him very vaguely at Hull, in that he was an undergraduate just after I'd left and then I'd got sort of occasional accounts of what he'd been doing when I went back to do my Masters. And he had set up a production in Beverley Minster and done various other quite dynamic things and was obviously very promising as a director. And I probably would still go if I was in that vicinity again.

KD: Is it still posh?

FG: I think Chichester is still quite posh. The thing about that particular venue is that it has always been something people do in the summer, although they certainly had gone in a lot for musicals and things like that. I remember my mother ringing me up and saying she had seen a couple of musicals at Chichester and parties up from the Townswomen's Guild and things like that, and she'd seen a few things there. They went a lot more kind of populist. I think she said she'd seen *Robert and Elizabeth* there - that was the musical about the Brownings.

KD: Oh really?

FG: Yes, Keith Michel I think and somebody or other, and they had done a few things like, I have a vague fantasy there might have been a musical of *Gone With the Wind* in fact, but they certainly went in for spectaculars at Chichester.

KD: Do you ever go to Brighton, or is it too far, the theatre?

FG: I don't know if I have ever been to the theatre in Brighton, it's not that convenient to get to, you certainly couldn't do it... you could only do a matinée there and back in a day, and they didn't seem to be... Well all the big thespians were seen to be on the Brighton Belle going into London to do their stuff at the National, like Olivier.

KD: What about Southampton, anything at Southampton?

FG: I have been to the Nuffield. I think - again in the sixth form - I have a feeling I saw *Volpone* there - no, *The Alchemist*... I know it was a Jonson, and it had reputation as being an interesting space, but I can't remember them doing anything all that spectacular.

KD: I guess the Festival is a hard act to follow in that respect.

FG: Yes, the place that had that kind of up and coming reputation then was Nottingham, because there was a whole series of new playhouses going up like the Crucible and Nottingham Playhouse.

FG: It was all rather revolutionary that you had things like a restaurant built in the house and space to hang art and tried to make it more of a coherent thing, and I can remember going to Nottingham to see John Neville in *Death of a Salesman* and that was a fairly spectacular production.

KD: From Chichester?

FG: No, this was to Nottingham.

KD: But where were you living when you went, because that's an epic journey?

FG: Yes... That was from Hull, I think. We took a coach off to see that. There were a few expeditions, I think, because it was very much the up-and-coming playhouse and the one to watch.

KD: Is this pre-Richard Eyre or...?

FG: This was pre-Richard Eyre and I can remember... I think I was living in Loughborough when he was in Nottingham. I saw the Trevor Griffiths production of *Cherry Orchard* there, which I think would have been a Richard Eyre production, and I can remember seeing a couple of things from Stuart Birge pre-Richard Eyre as well. I can remember Birge coming to dinner. The Warden of the hall where my husband was a sub-warden in Loughborough had this notion that we would create a little oasis of refinement among all the kind of... Loughborough's full of engineers and people doing Phys.Ed at the time, and he tried to turn it into a kind of mini-Oxbridge, which is difficult because dinner had to be over by 6 o'clock so all the cleaners could get their last bus home and stuff! So it wasn't quite High Table, but he set up this thing where we had vaguely local luminaries to a meal and then the students would meet them over a glass of wine, and we invited Stuart Birge and Robin Midgley up from the Leicester Haymarket. They were quite interesting. Leicester had got quite lively by then as well.

KD: And what about Sheffield? Anything that sticks out in your mind about Sheffield?

FG: I remember when I came here there was... they did some Poliakoff, some rather early Poliakoff. I remember there was a really terrible one called *The Carnation Gang* just after he'd done things like *City Sugar* elsewhere. I'm trying to remember what else was spectacularly interesting at the time. I can remember some sort of straightforward

fun things. I can remember taking a whole bunch of friends over to see Dracula. And then there were...

KD: Anything spectacularly bad that sticks in your mind?

FG: I don't know about spectacularly bad, I remember sort of giving up on the banned Dennis Potter play, the title of which totally escapes me. It's the one about the kind of demonic character who visits the girl who's in a coma.

KD: Brimstone & Treacle?

FG: Brimstone & Treacle, that's it. I remember Philip Roberts walking out half way through with that.

KD: Really?

FG: Yes, I think we had given up on the audience as much as the play because there was a lot of tutting and shuffling and it didn't seem a terribly engaging atmosphere to be in.

KD: Oh, it was in the Crucible.

FG: Yes, it was in the Crucible.

KD: And is he already a kind of TV name at this stage?

FG: Yes. He hadn't done any of the... I don't think he'd done Pennies from Heaven. He might have been just about to. And Brimstone & Treacle was an old play and I remember seeing the televised version which they'd never shown before several years afterwards - I think it's actually very good TV. It wasn't brilliant theatre. I think it made the actors almost too vulnerable, especially if people are going to walk out and storm past them - within about two feet of them in order to get out.

KD: So is that one of the kind of productions where you really do remember people leaving in droves?

FG: Yes, very noisily. Not so much in droves, but you can't walk out of the Crucible studio without everybody noticing it.

KD: Oh, it was in the studio?

FG: Yes. Actually, the most interesting use of the space I can remember was Michael Boyd did a production by Myerkowski called *Mystero Buffo*.

KD: Yes, I think I've heard of that.

FG: And it was in the studio, which he had stripped out completely and the actors kind of performed all round you, including up the walls and stuff. I can remember Marcella Evaristibeing the voice of a liner among other things! I can't remember anything about the plot except that it was enormously physically inventive.

KD: Did anyone try and leave?

FG: No, nobody walked out of that. It was a very engaging kind of production. There was quite a lot of hard Left politics, but it was also just so remarkably physical. I remember my mother meeting Marcella in the bar afterwards and saying, 'I was so afraid you were going to fall off the wall!'. [Laughs] She was actually a bit battered, her knees were all bruised from hanging on by her toes from various bars and things on the walls.

KD: It sounds quite hair-raising actually. Wow!

FG: I remember quite a few Michael Boyd productions at Sheffield. That was a good season. They did a *Midsummer Night's Dream* that was rather beautiful and very unlike the *Midsummer Night's Dream* he did at Stratford a couple of years back...

KD: Which was...?

FG: The one he did a few years back I remember was modern dress and had very vibrant, erotic, kind of African music. This one was very Elizabethan but all the characters lost more and more clothes as they were sort of rambling through the woods, so they were very beaten up Elizabethans by the end of the play! But it was a very lovely use of the space. He certainly created an awful lot of energy out of people charging across that enormous open space.

KD: At the *Crucible*?

FG: Yes. It was Philip Whitehead, I think, as Bottom who's a very funny Liverpudlian actor.

KD: And who was Puck?

FG: I can't remember the Puck. I suppose the strongest memory I've got, I think, is of the lovers getting more and more mired and grubby and un-Elizabethan looking; and I think it was the year before he did Marcella Evaristi's play, *Commedia*, which was a beautiful production. That was in the small space and it was beautifully using the small space: it's a kind of chamber play about an Italian widow who has an affair with a man who's about fifteen years younger than her. And it was beautifully played, it was Collette O'Neil and an actor called Peter White.

KD: So when was this, about?

FG: This was about 1982, thereabouts?

KD: So it's still a kind of long time back.

FG: Yes.

KD: So when did the *Crucible* become this kind of vibrant...?

FG: It had patches. I remember just before I came here everybody was telling me about *Fan Shen* and that was...

KD: Did they do that here?

FG: Yes, and that was a big landmark production. John Bull will tell you all about that one. It was the one everybody was talking about when I came up here to teach the course, which was quite politically focussed. I remember *Fan Shen* being one of the set texts...

KD: But you didn't see it?

FG: I didn't see that. I did see the film they made of the production, but it was obviously one of those things that would have worked quite powerfully on the stage, much more so perhaps, and I think they'd had a... had they had a *Brenton* as well? No, there was some John McGrath stuff came up here. I remember 7:84 [Theatre Company] used to come up here. That was in one of their regular slots in those days, and I think they'd also done *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* that previous year as well.

KD: Actually in the *Crucible*?

FG: Yes. I think it was in the *Crucible*. They did do a lot of stuff in other spaces all over the place but I've a feeling they might have done it maybe in the *Crucible* studio. They

were the ones that everybody could remember. That would be about '74, the year before I got up here.

KD: What about the more recent stuff? Did you see Angels in America, for example, when that was... because they all previewed up here, didn't they?

FG: The revival, yes.

KD: Oh no, that was a revival, yes.

FG: That was a revival. They only did the first part, sadly. They did it for the Millennium, I think. It was actually a brilliant production. It was an extraordinary use of the Crucible space.

KD: Again, yes, a kind of brilliant space to do it.

FG: Yes, well they sliced it precisely in half, so it was a very odd shaped space and they had this huge wire fence going right across the Crucible stage and audience and everything so you got that kind of area of outer darkness and everything else happening in this rather odd kind of triangular shape that was left. So it was an extraordinary looking production. I think we were facing a completely different way, because what you normally think of as the front-facing seats in the Crucible were actually the side, and you saw the angel sort of in profile from there kind of looking out towards the wings, the side places.

KD: And did you still have the same kind of audiences because that's what fascinates me about the Crucible because of the kind of square circle deal you have the most unlikely people who will sit and go and see every single thing.

FG: Actually all the audience there seemed about eighteen. I felt absolutely geriatric!

[Laughter]

KD: What about Shopping and Fucking because that did, I'm sure that previewed up here?

FG: There were some explicit polaroids up here, I think.

KD: Oh OK.

FG: I can't remember if Shopping and Fucking turned up. I certainly didn't get to see it, and I can't remember why now but...

KD: Perhaps you were feeling too geriatric to go! You didn't want to have to be Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells! [Laughter] So is there anything you've ever left just thinking 'I can't...' - discounting the Howard Barker where the stage fell down!

FG: The thing I can remember walking out of fairly vividly was not at the Crucible, it was at... it was right out in the sticks, somewhere like Page Hall. I can't remember what the actual venue was, but it was a company called Pirate Jenny who had a very good reputation - people like Edgar worked with them - and I went with Philip Roberts and John Bull and Mustafa Matura who came up to give a chat and we sat through about half of this which was all about mill workers in Leicester and the point of issue was they were being made to change to the kind of loom on which they worked and therefore went on strike...

KD: From a spinning jenny to a pirate jenny or...?

FG: No, it wasn't Industrial Revolution, this was contemporary stuff...

KD: Oh, it wasn't anything to do with that, OK, right.

FG: I remember there was a thing called a dobcroft loom that was very much an issue, and we sat through this until the interval and then said - I think it was Philip Roberts said - 'would anybody rather go for a pint?' and everybody brightened up enormously!

[Laughter]

KD: And what about the Brenton Bond stuff that went on in the university drama studio? When did all this take the place, when was the kind of artistic flowering of the theatre workshop?

FG: I remember about a year or two years after I came we had the space for...

KD: So when did you come?

FG: I came in '75 and quite early on - I can't remember if it was that year or the year after - we got the workshop space for a week, largely because John was going to do a production in it and it didn't happen and so we just had the space and we started doing workshops, mainly around some of the very early plays of Howard Brenton. There was one called Gum and Goo that's all about what it's like being inside a schizophrenic child, and I remember doing some workshops on that and thinking 'oh wow! This is

really interesting stuff'. Then a couple of years later when Mick Mangan joined us he wanted to do a production, and somebody gave him the script of Brenton's Hitler Dances that nobody had done since its inception, and I think Brenton actually came up to see that and eventually we got given what was going to be called Ditch the Bitch until the feminists found that offensive and it became A Short Sharp Shock, and he gave us the rights to open that at the same time as they opened it at Stratford East. That was hugely interesting to do. We were all in that...

KD: Oh, you all acted?

FG: Yes.

KD: Who directed then?

FG: John Bull and Louise Paige – very odd double act - kind of divvied it up between them, and we hadn't got very much time so it was very much about 'throw it together and see what you get'. I can remember we did it in the middle of the Steel Strike which was really very bitter, almost as bitter as the Miners' Strike, and we were in one... we played one night to an audience almost entirely of the Steel Union men...

KD: In the workshop?

FG: This was in the drama studio.

KD: OK. So where did you advertise and that they...?

FG: I can't remember where they picked up on it. I think we just stuck up posters in pubs, the way you do. And I can remember one of the first things that happens in it is the ghost of Airie Neave meeting the ghost of Louis Mountbatten and they're picking up bits of bodies and putting them in a bucket marked "Unknown Soldier". I think Airie Neave actually reached out one of these things and Mick shook it and said "Oh, I'm Louis Mountbatten. How are you?" - and he'd only just been blown up - there was this great intake of breath: "Oh, oh God, they're going to do that!"...

KD: Ah!

FG: ...and I think it took people a while to decide whether they were OK with that. We sweated pounds off, doing it, because it was all very angry stuff.

KD: What was Brenton like as a kind of...?

FG: Oh, he was really nice, enormously generous and helpful. He did lots for us. He did a workshop of the play that became the genius. He came down and did some early readings of it because he was doing this translation of Galileo for The National and he had started this play which was tentatively called Galileo's Goose and I remember he did a sort of rehearsal of it with Steve Daldry playing the scientist...

KD: The Steve Daldry?

FG: That Steve Daldry, who did, I think, the worst amateur production I have ever seen of Everyman. [Laughs]

KD: He's come a long way since then!

FG: He was clearly... he was a very very interesting actor. I saw him play in The White Devil, Bracciano, I think. Very, very powerful performance in that. And he did some really interesting stuff. He did a reading with Daldry and another student of just the little opening bit where he meets the girl genius and works out the same formulae, and he was enormously painstaking about what he was trying to do and how they might get there. It was a very good workshop - one of the best rehearsals I've seen.

KD: Oh right, but he's never been back since?

FG: I don't think he's been back since the Short Sharp Shock production.

KD: Has anybody got a copy of the script?

FG: I don't know. Lurking about in piles. There is a printed version, I think, but I don't know if anybody's got their crumbling version of it. I have some photographs somewhere that I will occasionally admit to! [Laughter] The look was kind of interesting. All of us playing Cabinet ministers had these little under-shorts made of copies of The Financial Times ironed on to fabric and sock-suspenders. Well, I got excused sock-suspenders because I decided Norman St. John-Stevas would wear legwarmers and ballet shoes, so I did that!

[Laughter]

KD: Oh! There was something else I was going to ask you. Oh yes, as a kind of author...

FG: A kind? I like the "kind of"! [Laughs]

KD: I didn't mean a kind of author. I was thinking of the, have you done stuff that's gone on stage?

FG: Yes.

KD: So have you deposited your statutory copy with the British Library?

FG: I don't think... I haven't personally. Whether somebody else has on my behalf, they might have done. I did it all after censorship was over so I didn't have to go through the Lord Chamberlain bit. I've no idea if the Soho Poly did it or Liverpool Playhouse did it or anything.

KD: So have much of your stuff is stage then?

FG: I've had two on the stage...

KD: Oh, I do apologise for the "kind of"!

FG: ...other than [Laughs]... plus the radio play in Sheffield that I tried out here, became the stage production here. Yes, I've no idea what happened to the script in terms of being lodged with places.

KD: That'll be interesting then, when they find out. And I wanted to ask about radio, how that fed into your formative, dramatic experience. Were you listening to stuff on the radio, pre-going to the theatre, were going to the theatre?

FG: About the same time. I think we all fell for Round the Horne. [Laughter] It used to be what you did on a Sunday, sort of Sunday dinner and then take homework upstairs but you'd always have a break and listen to Round the Horne. There was a great wad of comedy, Sorry, I'll Read That Again and stuff like that.

KD: I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again? Is that any relation to I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue?

FG: It was the same stable. It was Tim Brooke-Taylor and that lot, it was a kind of forerunner. I don't think it was as good as Round the Horne but...

KD: Round the Horne is, this is Julian and my friend Sandy, yes.

FG: Julian and Sandy, yes. They were what you might call formative in that I think that's why I was really interested in getting the job in radio. It was more down to them than,

radio drama was, I listened to the radio because sometimes you could hear things on the radio that were out of your reach financially on the stage. I remember Peter Brook did this enormous Schoenberg opera Moses and Aaron and I got to hear that on the radio because I would never have got to Covent Garden. But I can remember radio comedy being huge, and it took a while for it to meld into drama, I think.

KD: So was, are you too young for Martin Esslin to have been in charge? The Third - was it the Third Programme?

FG: Well, I was alive. I don't know if it... I don't think it really registered [Laughter] I don't think I was very aware of him. I didn't get that aware until, well I worked in radio for a bit and was disastrous at the engineering bit. I'm just physically incapable of doing things like editing tapes with bits of razor blade and recording people in the studio and getting all their levels right. Meanwhile apparently I had this sort of poker face when I was working "Arrgh!", like that! I was so scared of screwing up I was probably desperately kind of chilly to all the people I was supposed to say, 'Do give us a bit of level, darling.'. So I didn't last very long with them, but I got very excited about the medium. I got to be the person who made the end of term revue for my training group. I ended up doing that and either calling in sketches from people or writing them and you've got the whole of the BBC archives to plunder for your sound effects and stuff so we had guest appearances by John Gielgud and The Goons and...

KD: Was this at Bush House?

FG: Yes. Bush House, Broadcasting House and The Langham were the kind of, you did a bit at each.

KD: So where were you living at this point?

FG: I was living just off Oxford Circus in what had been a knocking shop and had been taken over by an actress called Barbara Bamell who rented me a bedsit. We didn't have a doorbell because of the sort of people who rang it, so if you wanted to come in you would knock on the door with your umbrella past the railings.

KD: So did that increase your theatre-going at all?

FG: Oh, a lot. Being in London then was...

KD: So when is this, roughly?

FG: This was in 1970. I had quite a short period with the BBC.

KD: I'm sure they're mourning you to this day!

FG: [Laughs] and I didn't get to see a lot of the very Avant-Garde stuff. I can remember seeing... I remember Hadrian VII in the West End, and I can remember seeing Boys in the Band - that was the first really extrovert gay piece of mainstream theatre.

KD: Where was that?

FG: Somewhere like Wyndhams, I think. It really was mainstream. I can't remember much else about the theatre but I did get to a fair bit. It was mainly the expense that made it difficult.

KD: Were you at the open sandwich stage yet or not?

FG: Oh no. I remember the salary at the BBC was something like nine hundred a year which did not exactly sparkle, especially if you were living in the West End, but I can remember having that nice West End ambience of being able to do your shopping in Soho, but it didn't last very long. But I did get very turned on to radio as a medium to play with, so when I got married I had to go and live at the University of Keele which was a fate worse than death and it seemed like writing a thesis on radio would be a good idea so I toted about to do a thesis on Giles Cooper and ending up getting a scholarship to Hull to do it and I just obsessively read radio plays for about five years.

KD: Read rather than...

FG: Mostly read...

KD: ... because presumably you couldn't listen.

FG: ...because they, they have a few recorded at the British Institute of Recorded Sound, but they didn't seem to record everything so you went and read the script, being supervised by some sort of grim lady in the BBC archives or I went to Giles Cooper's house where his widow fed me pink gin and I worked my way through this great big filing cabinet of scripts - there wasn't very much published. But I read all his stuff and he'd written 70-odd and I just read every published radio play I could get my hands on.

KD: So you don't remember listening to the kind of Becket stuff or anything like that?

FG: Not new. I heard some of those again in the archives and they'll always bring back Beckett every so often - when the Third Programme wants to have a memorial day or something they'll play All That Fall or... but I don't remember hearing any of the originals at the time.

KD: So did Pinter do radio?

FG: Yes, he did one called A Slight Ache which has got this character who never speaks.

KD: Oh, the match seller?

FG: Yes.

KD: Yes. Is there anything else you want to, anything a-brewing?

FG: [Laughs]

KD: Great performances? Storming out of?

FG: What, from that period or..?

KD: Well, post that period really as well, I guess.

FG: I think one of the recentish ones that sticks is Michael Gambon's Lear, which was sensational.

KD: Where was that?

FG: That was at Stratford, and unfortunately I went on the day that Anthony Sher bust a tendon so it was done with the understudy. It would have worked better with somebody that he'd worked with endlessly because it was a double act between Lear and his Fool and it was absolutely brilliant, even with somebody who wasn't as experienced. It was a brilliant piece of... just taking that kind of Morecambe & Wise relationship and placing it into a tragedy - it was a stunning piece of production.

KD: When was this? Can you remember?

FG: That was in, I think in about 1980-ish. I tend to date things by the difficulty of actually getting there and the arrangements one had to make to get there and I don't remember having to find a baby-sitter. I can remember taking the baby-sitter to Mark Rylance's Hamlet. That's another absolutely dazzling production.

KD: Oh, where was that?

FG: That was his first Hamlet and that was in Stratford in about... I don't know '86, '87, '88?

KD: I didn't realise he was going that early.

FG: Yes. He was a very young Hamlet, and I think the one he did at the Globe was a kind of ten years on Hamlet-revisited kind of thing. It might have been a bit later. I think it was the first thing I... I remember taking my mate Meg - who used to look after Tallyn - to Stratford to see both that and Juliet Stephenson in *As You Like It* and they were both absolutely superb productions. The Hamlet was really interesting. He was one of the funniest Hamlet's I'd ever seen. He was very, very witty and he kind of shambled around in these pyjamas with vomit on them [Laughs] and I can remember he carried the skull of Yorick quite obsessively, all the time after the graveyard scene, gave him a place to watch the fencing match and set him up on his own little shelf. But it was one of those Hamlets that really kind of communicates to the audience and speaks to the audience and we were right in the front and I can remember Meg bursting into great noisy howls when he died [Laughter] cashing into a little flicker of gratification! [Laughter]

KD: That's amazing. I remember the Michael Gambon/Simon Russell Beale *Volpone* and *Mosca*. That was obviously a kind of refinement of the double act you're talking about in *Lear*, because they were just amazing - to the extent that I can't remember anybody else in it at all.

FG: Yes, I suspect it comes from... because Michael Gambon was this light comedy actor for years and years and years.

KD: Oh really?

FG: He did loads of *Ayckbourn* and stuff like that.

KD: Oh yes, with his moustache.

FG: Yes, and I think *Lear* might have been his big shift. It was either that or doing the Dennis Potter play, I can't remember which came first.

KD: Oh, it was a play first? Or a telly play?

FG: The telly one on...

KD: *The Singing Detective*.

FG: The Singing Detective. I think Lear might have come first. I can't remember the order in which they happened.

KD: Yes, because I remember The Singing Detective being on so it must have been mid-eighties.

FG: Yes.

KD: So what about the kind of Ayckbourn's and Simon Gray and people like that? Did you ever take to them or not?

FG: Didn't really get to see much of that stuff for a while.

KD: You've never done the Scarborough thing?

FG: No. You also have to book about a million years in advance for the Scarborough thing. It's a big thing. I always quite enjoyed reading Ayckbourn, and I've always desperately avoided amateur productions of Round and Round the Garden and stuff but I can remember finding The Norman Conquests a very funny read. I was in hospital reading those, getting a lot of giggles out of those - which is a bit unfortunate because it was for a tonsillectomy, so you didn't really want to laugh very much but people kept telling me jokes and I was reading The Norman Conquests so... I can't remember seeing a live Ayckbourn until House and Garden actually - I might have done but - and just being very impressed by how clever that is.

KD: Is that the two plays?

FG: Yes, simultaneous plays with the cast kind of zooming between theatres and that was just such a splendidly clever thing to do.

KD: Well, he is very clever, isn't he?

FG: Yes. Some of it was enormously touching. I remember The Morris Dance was really moving. You have this man who's just suddenly realised - everybody else in the play knows his wife is being unfaithful with the main character in the other play and it suddenly dawns on him and none of his Morris team have turned up and so he does this dance just for this black au pair girl who's have her own kind of traumas and he just does this dance for her and she joins in and it's quite heart-breaking, a beautifully clever use of the stage because they don't even speak very much. He just stands there in his bells looking so sad then gradually gets into the dancing and for the moment of dancing it's fine.

KD: So which would you say... have you got a favourite memory that we could round off with?

FG: Oh Lord! [Laughs]

KD: ...if it's not [inaudible] and his loin cloth!

FG: I don't think so. I wouldn't want to pick a Desert Island one really.

KD: No? Not even a couple?

FG: [Laughs] I think I would probably take Mark Rylance's Hamlet a long way, a feeling enormously kind of moved by that. And there was something about the RSC back in the sixties. I don't know if I'd want to be in the audience again watching Marasa, but I'd quite like to be in the queue and thinking 'oh wow, this is great!'. It's that sort of overawe sense of being part of all that.

KD: Is it just a moment?

FG: Yes, I think I'd like to be back at the King's in a better seat.

KD: So when did this enter into anything you were doing musically? Were you queuing for gigs in the same way as you'd queued for theatre tickets?

FG: No, not really. I think it was because the Portsmouth Guildhall was such a kind of forbidding place. There didn't seem to be, I know I could have got Beatle tickets if I'd queued...

KD: Really?

FG: Yes. This was back in the kind of I Want to Hold your Hand period and didn't get round to it, but I know quite a few people who tried and failed to get them. I rather regret... well, I wasn't, there was a rhythm 'n' blues club going on that I knew the people who went to and they never invited me and I was very peeved about that, and being fourteen it didn't occur to me that if I'd asked they'd probably have said Yes, so I missed out on the early Manfred Mann.

KD: Not that upsetting then.

FG: Not that upsetting. Come to think of it, I did see Paul Jones as an actor later and that's a good memory as well. He did Mack Heath at the National – he did that very well, actually.

KD: Oh, you didn't see the Charles Marowitz Macbeth, did you?

FG: No.

KD: Whatever it was, was it still called Macbeth?

FG: There was one that was, do you mean the one about Lyndon B. Johnson? McBird?

KD: McBird, yes.

FG: No, I didn't. There was a project that produced that at Hull but it didn't take off. And I think it seemed a bit crude actually, next to US as an idea really. I think we were all taken with the complexity of us as a response to the War and all that. But yes it took me ages to take on concerts in the way that I'd go through all sorts of things to get to see the RSC or whatever.

KD: It's quite interesting though that they were so sussed. I used to have a kind of magazine and a kind of fan club. That's a remarkable kind of nouse. Would that have been John Goodwin or Peter...?

FG: I don't know who originated the whole thing.

KD: Goodwin was the administrator, wasn't he?

FG: I can't even remember quite how we got into, where you saw the first ad or whatever, probably in a programme or something but I can remember signing up for this at about 17 and feeling very in-the-swing.

KD: Well yes you would be, wouldn't you? Particularly in that period. I can't imagine Fifth Formers signing up for it now, actually, in the same...

FG: There's nothing quite to sign up to. It's all very official now, isn't it? I think you feel boringly mainstream but, no they weren't mainstream, that was pretty fringe really. The fringe was really exciting, but you'd got that sort of sense of people trying to lodge something before the fringe came on the scene they seemed worth doing and...

KD: Very clever idea really.

FG: Yes, I wish I knew who'd thought of it. It was a very nice little paper. They were sort of serious articles as opposed to...

KD: Have you kept them?

FG: I might have them lurking around somewhere because they pioneered doing proper programmes as well with articles and pictures of rehearsals and somebody reasonably learned producing a discussion of the play and maybe a word from the Director and stuff. Before that theatre programmes were all 'cigarettes by Abdullah'. [Laughs]

KD: or Olivier! I'm sure it must be in an Old Vic programme, but there's a picture in the book somewhere of the kind of Olivier cigarettes. It's probably in one of his books, actually, isn't it, given his kind of...

FG: I can just about remember commercials for Olivier. There was actually a, I think it was a Tony Hancock send-up of it where he gets hold of some really filthy cheap tobacco and tried to get someone else to front it. I think it was someone like Cecil Parker, who wasn't as well known as Olivier but it was clearly a 'let's manufacture a cigarette and we can charge 9d for twenty!'. 'No, we can't, dear boy.'. [Laughter]

KD: You kind of imagine the rip-off for the very Sanderson, very big tall thing! OK. Well, thank you very much for that. That was great.