

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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David Rose – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

21 October 2005

David Rose, former head of Channel Four Drama. Memories of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama; West End Theatre in the late forties; Stage Managing in weekly rep; Stage Managing at the Watergate Theatre Club; Stage Managing for Kurt Jooss; Stage Managing at Sadler's Wells Theatre Company; relationship between theatre and early television; live drama documentaries; work with television and theatre in the seventies.

KH: This is 21 October 2005 and it's an interview with David Rose. Can I just confirm that I have your permission to put the interview in the archive?

DR: You have my permission to put anything in the archive.

KH: That's great. Could I start off with a question about how you first became interested in working in the theatre?

DR: Well I suppose that really goes back to my toy theatre in my childhood! [laughs] One of those toy theatres that... I was not so interested in stories, I was more interested in the scenery. All I would do all the time was to try and make things in-depth, looking through this proscenium and using light, but I never really got around to stories. Didn't get very far in terms of theatre, so I suppose the... then I... at school I wasn't really involved in the dramatic society either, it was more music there at Kingswood School in Bath and I don't remember any theatre-going at that time. My first theatre experience - and this I have to find out very quickly, because I've forgotten the name of the theatre, it was about 1935 and it was called Going Greek which was a musical show with a man called Fred Emney, a great big fat man and a man called Reginald [Hern] and it was in a theatre, it was at The Aldwych which has now been pulled down and made into a block of offices, I will later tell you the name of that theatre that I'm anxious to know myself! [ed. The Gaiety Theatre] And I suppose I also was fascinated by the Novello musicals which was absolutely across the road. The Strand Theatre, immediately across the road from the Aldwych, quite often housed the Novello musicals, The Dancing Years and things like that and Novello lived in the very top flat in that theatre, over the theatre itself, and they're now going to change the name from The Strand Theatre to The Novello Theatre - it's about to be renovated and given his name. I saw him myself one Sunday afternoon, because down The Strand at The Adelphi there was a special performance of The Dancing Years in which he played the lead in... leather... lederhosen or whatever it was. And we were all servicemen in the audience and he came on the stage at the beginning and put the curtain up and he said, 'We want to take your

photograph' so they put a tripod up and took the photograph of all these people, which is not really relevant to me in the theatre, but there we are. I went into the Air Force and after having done my business with the bombers I had about another year killing time in the Air Force and during that time I joined, in one station in Norfolk, a little drama group with a man called Wren, who was the director, only he wasn't the director, because the director's name - as you will know - didn't come in, in the theatre for quite a while. All directors were called producers and we did a couple of potboilers, a thriller and a comedy I think.

KH: Were these just for the other troops?

DR: These were for the other troops, in Entertainment and for the other troops. And we were... I directed one and I got fired from the station, because we were working in the operations room where they have, all those women in the Air Force were pushing things around, aeroplanes across the table, showing where things were, that was no longer in use, so I was directing, I was lying like a Roman in a toga on one of these desks and in came the commanding officer! He took one look, and the next thing I learnt was that I had been moved on to another station. He thought it was extremely inappropriate that the theatre should be played out in such an important place as an operations room. And when I left the Air Force I was asked, 'What was I going to do before the war?' and I really hadn't made up my mind but I said 'well I wanted to do something in theatre, stage management, something behind the scenes and hopefully perhaps produce one day' - direct but what was then produce - and of course at that time there were no schools for directors. I don't know whether there are many now. This is very important to the whole business of theatre, there are acting schools but then, there were certainly none for directors and none for the technical side of things. I suppose costume comes into a different category but none for stage management, for sound, for lighting. You couldn't learn that trade at all, you had to sort of pick it up from tradition, which I think is sort of interesting, in that the actor was the thing. So I went to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and did the acting course, which of course involved stage management and things along the line because we had to do our own business of the backstage department, so that's the way I learnt my trade. My girlfriend at the Guildhall, Sonya, left in July and got a job immediately in Preston Repertory Company, run by Reginald Salberg in Preston at the Royal Hippodrome Theatre, and I went up to see her in August and I spent a few days there and saw what they were doing, weekly rep and I was asked by the producer, 'Would I like to stay and be on stage management?.' So I immediately walked out of the Guildhall into a job.

KH: Would you be able to tell me about your training at the Guildhall? What you did on an average day.

KH: Well I was mostly learning scenes and acting them out in small groups. We each had 2 tutors who looked after us and so it was as I say learning scenes. I mean, I auditioned to get in, and I had to go and audition for the Principal and I had to do a poem... I had to say a poem and I had to play a scene which... I played a scene from Night Must Fall, a thriller by Emyln Williams and I went into the Principal's office. And I was trained to do this by an elocutionist down in Bournemouth, which was quite the wrong thing I'm sure, but no, I elocuted. It's just as well that the Principal was a musician and knew nothing about drama, but he was the only one auditioning me so he said, 'That's alright, you can

go in! So I joined, and mainly it was as I say individual work. Stanislavsky's Life in Art was our bible and it was... And then we did scenes, we worked through scenes and then occasionally we were involved in full blown productions which were seen by our friends and the public at our theatre in John Carpenter Street off Fleet Street, quite a nice little theatre.

KH: What kind of productions did you do?

DR: We did Johnson over Jordan by J.B Priestley and we had a very good student who directed it, and chose some Holst music which I remember well. It was Holst wasn't it? Not The Planets, but something like that. Johnson over Jordan which Ralph Richardson had been in, in the West End and played Johnson. I liked the play very much. It was about this man and his whole family and relationships and they're sort of dying [laughs] not unusual things really, and I know we did the other thing, that American play, Our Town and King Lear in which I played France for that very brief scene in the first act - first scene of Act One, which was good to get on and off quickly! [laughs] I learnt to do that, which was good experience for rep because in rep I had to play lots of very small parts whilst in stage management. So those were the sort of plays, from Shakespeare through to contemporary plays.

KH: How many people were there studying at the Guildhall then?

DR: I expect that there were about 25 in our year, and we were there for 3 years, so there were 75 at any one moment I would think. We had makeup classes, we had dancing classes, all sorts of different dance movements. I don't know how seriously I took it all. But during that time I saw quite a lot of plays in the West End, we used to go to the gallery. We used to buy a stool, did I tell you this before? [KH shakes head] Well, to get a seat in the theatre at that time after the war, there was a man or a woman who at 10 o'clock in the morning would be at the gallery entrance at the side of the theatre, generally with lots of little tiny stools, and you went and you bought a stool for sixpence or whatever it was. So you got your place in the queue - your stool was queuing for you - and you came half an hour before and occupied your stool and we picked them up and walked in and handed them back to the person we'd hired them from. That was common with all West End theatres. And so we would be in the gallery and I think we were probably, students, and rather noisy and rather tiresome for the actors sometimes.

KH: Are there any particular productions that you remember seeing?

DR: Yes I remember seeing St Joan and the man who wrote... I can't remember his name. It's the man, or Chamberlain or someone in a later act. At her trial he has an extremely long speech and we were sitting in the front row of the gallery and I remember that one rather bubbly girl, one of the students, shouted out, 'Oh this is much too long!' which [caused] a certain sort of ruffle. [laughs] I saw several productions at the Old Vic, but the New Theatre at that time in Charing Cross Road or St Martin's Lane and Coriolanus I saw there. And I can't remember. I saw a most boring production with one of our knights, not our famous knights, he went to America and was more of a film actor... I can't remember. If I remember I'll come back to that. But I particularly visited

the Arts Theatre where Godot was first done but it wasn't the Godot which drew me there it was the theatre in Great Newport Street, near Leicester Square. I saw the very first outing of The Lady's Not for Burning there before Gielgud took over in the West End.

KH: What did you think of it?

DR: I think I remember enjoying it very much. I can always remember the line of the priest chap who said, 'Well that's all Greek to me, but of course I understand Greek!', [laughs] that line stood out. Moon over Yellow River... I think I've lost all those programmes, so I'm not being helpful there. At the end we can go through the programmes I have got of that period and make some comment perhaps.

KH: When you went to work in rep. What was your job in rep? What were you doing?

DR: My job was Stage Manager

KH: And what did that involve?

DR: That involved... we were weekly rep, so were performing a new production every Monday night. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday at five-thirty and eight, and what it meant was that having got a new production out of the way on Monday night, Tuesday morning we sat down and read the next play and then we blocked Act 1. Wednesday we blocked Act 2, Thursday we blocked... Do you understand what blocking is?

KH: Yes

DR: I don't think we used the term then, but anyway we set it. Blocked Act 3 because generally you could break it into three, most plays at that time were three acts, and on Friday we would run the whole play and on Saturday morning we would run it again I think and then we would have Saturday afternoon off until five o'clock. And because most plays run... they were running on an average two and a quarter hours and having a five-thirty matinee, the second audience would be coming in at seven-thirty, so you only had two hours to do the play, so you had to make cuts. So the producer or the director of the play would give to me his suggested cuts and - I'm taking it at the wrong end of things but... the suggested cuts - and I would go round at the half - the half hours, you know the half hour and the quarter, you know the half hour's at five to seven. Knock on everyone's door then and say 'these are your cuts' and they would have to memorise them. Without rehearsal. They'd just have to make the cuts.

KH: And did that often work or...?

DR: Well as I was saying, I learnt a lesson for film editing! I think it worked very well and improved the play quite a lot sometimes. [laughs] I think there were hang-ups you know, things went wrong, but you know, by Saturday you knew the play pretty well so you somehow got round it. I think that if you knew that it was you who... you didn't have to make every cut because someone else was to lead it in or make the cut that was a bit throwing sometimes if people had forgotten. But no, one bumbled through and got it on, but that was my job as Stage Manager. My job as Stage Manager was on Tuesday we did the read through and blocked Act 1 and by end of Tuesday afternoon I would have had to list all the props we needed - that's furniture - in conjunction with the designer: list all the furniture we needed and the props we needed and any moment I had during the rest of the week I would be going round the shops and places, and people's houses and saying, 'Can we borrow a carpet, a table, a chair, we want some flowers...?'. Whatever was needed.

KH: Was there a budget for that, or did you have to borrow it all?

DR: No, no. We gave everyone complementary tickets. Anyone who leant something got a comp, a pair of comps. And some of them were absolute regulars and we had a... I think we had a horse and cart, who on Sunday morning would go round and collect all these things and bring them in so that we could get the scenery up and dress for a dress rehearsal on Monday afternoon, and sometimes we were still dress rehearsing at twenty-nine minutes past seven before the audience were... 'Hold the audience, don't let them in yet!' You know, we weren't quite ready. So that was it, Monday blocking Act 1 and prop list and then having to go round and say 'have you got a this that and the other?', and they were all very friendly and they liked to come.

KH: Did you find the same people were coming week after week?

DR: Oh absolutely. They were a very regular audience. I mean this, this will give you... I'm giving you a... Reginald Salberg who ran the company.

KH: Just for the record of the tape it's a programme

DR: It's a note for the audience for the whole year that is... At the beginning of the year, suggesting what he's hoping to do, and with some notes on the previous year and some of the favourite plays that were on and asking the audience to name their favourite play out of the list he was suggesting they were going to do. Embracing them in that way. And telling us any plays you don't like, he said he would take notice of that as well there.

KH: So the audience had a direct impact on the programming?

DR: Yes, they did up to a point. I think Reggie knew what he wanted to do but it was his way of being friendly and I'm sure he listened sometimes. So Monday was the first act, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday the whole play. This was in the bar at the back of the

dress circle, and Monday was of course the really hectic day, to get the dress rehearsal going at 2 o'clock and the stage in good condition and be prepared at the first night.

KH: Was this a regular resident company - all the same people every week?

DR: It was the same. We had guests, there were people on the circuit of reps throughout the country who specialised, reading in there [the programme] you'll see there was someone who came every year to do a farce. He was terribly good at farces but generally speaking we had... the director was John Maxwell when I went and all he did was direct, then John [Barren] joined and he acted and directed so that's why more people like me were asked to do some direction, to give him some relief. But it was pretty regular yes. I mean, I had to order all the costumes from London, and wigs, they had wig sizes of all the people we had.

KH: So you were ordering costumes every week for different productions?

DR: Yes, for some contemporary plays we got away with the actors own clothes. But generally speaking, obviously with a costume piece all the hampers would arrive and the little wig boxes. That was the... the stage manager (which was me) and one or two assistant stage managers had to deal with all of that. I don't know how we did it, I really don't know. There was no time off. I used to try and play golf on Tuesday afternoon with John [Barren] and there were two stumbling blocks, I hadn't got my prop list finished and secondly it was ladies day and they were much better players than us and it was very embarrassing. Having to let them through all the time but that was a slight relief, but there was really no time to do anything else, just learn the lines and get it on. God knows how we did it.

KH: And did you move into directing as well whilst you were there?

DR: I did, Reggie... now, Salbergs were quite a famous theatre name. Derek Salberg ran The Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham which was weekly rep and The Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton, he had two theatres running. Reginald Salberg, his brother, had the Preston Royal Hippodrome where I was and at one time he was running The Penge down in South London, that repertory theatre there. But... then Reginald Salberg, it was his company, he decided what the programme would be and in collusion with the current - John Maxwell or John Barren - they would cast it together from the regulars and look ahead to see what they were doing and when they wanted to hire someone to come in and augment the company with bigger productions and Reggie went on from Preston to Salisbury where he rejuvenated Salisbury theatre and they made a little theatre there in his name. He only died last, well two years ago.

KH: What kind of work was being put on? What kind of plays were being put on?

DR: Well, the current farces that were being done at places like The Whitehall in London I mean there were forty-eight or forty - it gives numbers again there [the programme], it

was about forty-something a year, generally a Shakespeare, he [in the programme] names the most, those writers who were seen more than once. J. B. Priestley, there were five I think, over a number of years, Shakespeare, we did Macbeth when I was there and we did As You Like It... Death of a Salesman, as he says, was one of the outstanding successes. Street Car Named Desire, lots of Terence Rattigan's and lots of popular pot-boilers, but you'll see in that book that I've given you there, quite a long list of titles.

KH: What did you think of Terence Rattigan's plays? Did you like them?

DR: I don't remember them terribly well. They didn't have any great impact on me. The first thing, when I was asked to direct. I think this goes back to my childhood. Reggie asked me if I would direct Mary Rose by... oh God... he wrote Peter Pan.

KH: J. M. Barrie

DR: Barrie, J. M. Barrie - about this strange island up in Scotland, so I was much more interested in working with the designer and getting a fountain working on the stage of this island but that was my first... Mary Rose, and then for my second I directed The Importance of Being Earnest, which was great. I suggested the way we should design it, which was to have the garden and the front of the house and then remove the front of the house for the second act and then move back into the main room. So I did that and a Bernard Shaw, which is here, Candida, so you know we were doing plays of substance as well as things that really were very empty. Lady Windermere's Fan... some things were a huge challenge to do it in a week, just to get it on the stage. The amount of scenes and props and things... Shakespeare... but nothing's impossible.

KH: Were the newer plays more popular, or do you think it was depending on the production, depending on the performance?

DR: Well I think we have to cheat and look at this here [programme] just draw our attention to this which you might not in the future.

KH: This is a programme

DR: This is telling us. It tells the four most popular ones in the year which aren't necessarily, [reading from the programme] the biggest box office successes of the year have been When we are Married, Private Lives, and Fools Rush In and another Rebecca, The Merchant of Venice and Pygmalion .

KH: What year is that one from?

DR: It's from '48. On page 17 - have you got the same thing?

KH: Oh yes, I do have here

DR: So you've got that there for reference [continues reading] Deeper the Roots, Life of[?], Pride and Prejudice, Next Best Thing, A Christmas Carol so it wasn't the rubbish that was the most popular, it was things of relative substance, the plays of that time.

KH: In general were you playing to full houses or did it really vary depending on the night or the play?

DR: Well, on the Friday and Saturday we could have pretty well full houses, things like Happiest Days of Our Lives and you know and it could be pretty thin but that was the entertainment there was no television. That was their regular, and it was a very regular loyal audience.

KH: Did you find that the audience ever used to shout out or anything?

DR: No I don't remember that happening at all. I think they were well behaved. There was that and the other theatre in the town which was the Variety Theatre, which would do at 6.15 and 8.15, was the Variety Performance, so that was people's entertainment at that time with no television, and of course when television came in it was an absolute killer because they stayed in and theatre folded except for the subsidised theatres and one or two others. But I was there for fifteen months I think it was, getting on for two years and I married, I met Valerie Edwards who came... she'd been at the London Acting School and she came to join the company as assistant floor manager and playing certain parts and we got married before we left there and John Barren was my best man in Fornby, near Liverpool and I think we just thought it would be nice to get to London and you know, try and settle down in London and get work that might be possible from there. We just took the risk and left and came to London and wrote round to just about everyone in sight and got a few interviews, got an interview at the Old Vic for Stage Management and one or two of the major managements, and the first thing that came up was the Watergate Theatre Club.

KH: Was this a Members Only club?

DR: The new Watergate Theatre Club, which I'm handing you there.

KH: This is another notice from the theatre

DR: It was a little review theatre. Tiny. Seating about thirty people or forty people. The show I was involved in, Valerie was hired to look after the box office and I was a Stage Director/Stage Manager and it was a spin-off from... After the war there'd been a lot of... quite a number of successful revues in the major West End Theatres. I can't remember the titles of them people like Joyce Grenfell and a lot of light revue type of artists, but actors were also sort of involved in them and Norman Marshall was one of

the best directors of these plays, of these revues and the people writing the sketches and the lyrics for the songs were of, I think, quite a high standard - there's another programme - but the intelligentsia were our audience, very much so, I mean, it wasn't a popular... it was a middle class and sort of academic sort of audience who'd come.

KH: Was that because of the kind of material that was being put on?

DR: It was, it was. It was the level of the satire and the political references and things that I think attracted that audience

KH: What kind of things were in the revues then? Could you give me some examples?

DR: Well it was just song and dance and sketches like you'd see on a television show you know. In these so-called comedy shows now: just sketches one after another.

KH: Was it a club theatre to avoid censorship?

DR: I think it was. I think you had to sort of do a 24 hour membership. You were let in, but you had to pay something extra to call yourself... that's quite right it did avoid the censorship. It was very necessary at that time I think.

KH: Did you personally ever have any problems with censorship in any of the productions you were involved in?

DR: No, no, I don't think I can say I did. No I don't think I was in a controversial sort of area. If I'd persisted in this area [revues] I may have been caught up in it and been aware of it and other people probably dealing with it. But the man who was behind us was Stephen [Arland], general administrator of the Sadler's Wells Theatre. So through him knowing the Watergate he asked me whether I would take on stage directing and managing a tour of a German Ballet company Kurt Jooss of twenty six dancers - there were about twenty nationalities in the company but it was a company that had been formed before the war. Always supported by a German City and they still had ties, after the war they had got ties with Essen and Dusseldorf, but during the war he came to England and he was based in Cambridge with a number of his company who were not fighting the war, and the latter part of the war he was at Dartington Hall, again with the company down there. So I joined just through... they needed someone English dealing with the day-to-day problems, travel and so forth, and I was with them for a three month tour. Valerie went along and she operated a terrible old highly dangerous electrical follow spot, almost burnt her arms to death every night. And we opened in Dublin for two weeks and then toured the number one dates round the country, what was called the number one tour in big theatres like the Sheffield Lyceum - is that still running, I don't know? - and Liverpool, all the major theatres, the sizeable ones, that would also have Variety shows.

KH: Was there a number two circuit then as well?

DR: No, no, it was known as the number one circuit. It was Harold and Wyndham who ran most of the big theatres in the country, like the Bournemouth Pavilion, most important theatres in most towns were run by Harold and Wyndham and the only place we went to which was not a number one was Dartington Hall where they've got a little theatre called The Barn which is quite tiny, and Kurt Jooss had made his name internationally with a ballet called The Green Table, which was to do with... today it would be the United Nations but then it was The League of Nations which were based in Geneva, and it was a table - a huge table - set in the middle of the stage, capable of being danced upon as well as around and it was narrowed down in perspective, and the dancers had masks of politician, it was a political piece. Much of his work was political and this table did actually fold up. But it was still very big and in The Barn theatre there was nowhere to hide it. You just had to let it stick out from one of the wings - the audience could see it [laughs] but that was just it, we were there for old times' sake because he'd spent the war there.

KH: What did your job involve when you were with Sadler's Wells? What kind of things were you doing?

DR: At Sadlers Wells? [it was later established that DR's job with Kurt Jooss was before DR became the stage director at Sadler's Wells Theatre]

KH: Day to day when you were working with Kurt Jooss

DR: Well I was stage director and had a stage manager and I had to put on a dinner jacket at night. Not at the Wells, but when we were touring I had to show my face at the front of house as part of the management representing the Sadler's Wells. But I also had to be... I mean, when we got into the theatre I had to arrange to get the scenery, I had to arrange the travel, the train or however we were travelling and arrange for a special coach with the train for all the scenery, which would then be picked up at the station, quite often by a horse and cart in those days, and taken to the theatre. And then all the scenery had to be put in, in its rightful position and tied. And we would go right through each day and have to re-arrange things but I as stage director would have to approve the lighting as I knew it. That had been re-produced, and the scenery and make sure it was working and then be responsible for running the show at night. I had to be in the corner, I had to send the conductor down at the right moment for the overture or the beginning and actually work the corner and do cues from the corner, like in Pineapple Poll when there's a [maroon] in a dustbin offstage when they fire the gun, you had to cue that and the fun then was to be peeping out at the audience because when that [maroon] went off the whole audience would be up like that in their seats and just to make sure that the stage was completely in order. There are not many props involved in ballet, but the scenery itself had to be set correctly, so that was the job and during the day I had to make sure that their rehearsal room, which was generally somewhere other than the theatre, was in good order and they could do their practice for the day there, and I had to pay them. When I joined Sadler's Wells, I joined on Monday, I think, before the company was going, the following Monday to the Edinburgh Festival and [Arland] had engaged me but hadn't told me what he was going

to pay me and he was going off on holiday cycling so the Friday before I joined on the Monday I got a letter saying 'This is to engage you at twelve pounds a week, fifteen pounds when you're touring, to make up for your lodgings and your first job will be to ensure that you're taking with you not the thirty six piece orchestra but the fifty-six piece orchestra from Covent Garden and make sure that the rail tickets for the whole company, the dancers, the orchestra, everyone, to get to Edinburgh'. So I had to arrange for those sort of things, and on Friday I had to go to the bank and get money for - on that occasion - ninety people. So there I was walking the streets of Edinburgh with I don't know how many thousands of pounds on me and I had to go round to all the dressing rooms and into the orchestral room and hand out all their little pay packets. So that was part of the job, paying the buggers [laughs] as well as just making sure that everything was in order on the stage and running the show, getting the curtain up and down at the right moment.

KH: What kind of hours were you working then - per week how many hours would you say you were working?

DR: I don't know, I only sort of added up... in rep it was just absurd as you can see, you know, you had to be there ten o'clock on Tuesday morning for the read through, which meant you had to be there for half past nine, and you were then making up your prop list and things and you got home to the digs who always gave you an evening meal, before the show and then you were back there, so you were virtually working ten hours a day, six days a week which is sixty-plus, and then Sundays, if the set was difficult one got in there and started working with the designer and getting some of the furniture in on Sunday and that sort of thing. Sadler's Wells, well it was just a long day... I don't know, I haven't added them up, as you can tell. It was... you had to be in from let's say, a seven o'clock performance, you had to be in by six really to see that things were moving. Six that took you round to seven, eight, nine, ten, so that's four and then everything else had to be dealt with, so you were working certainly minimum eight hours a day, generally ten or more.

KH: Where did you go when you finished working with Kurt Jooss? Did you go back to Sadler's Wells

DR: No the Kurt Jooss came before. I went from Kurt Jooss to Sadler's Wells. Did I do anything else in the interim? No I had eighteen months, nearly two years with Sadler's Wells. We had about eight weeks of the year we were playing in Sadler's Wells Theatre, the rest we were touring. It was a touring company which was called the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet as opposed to the Royal Ballet, Royal Sadler's Wells at Covent Garden and it is now of course at Birmingham, now the Birmingham branch and the opera was at Sadler's Wells which was the English National Opera who then moved to the Coliseum, but they did everything in English, so we had the full orchestra, a fuller orchestra in the pit when we were playing in London than we would have had on tour, which was about thirty-six musicians, so I had to pay them as well. They're, you know, not easy people. I mean, my deep regret about that is that Coppelia, for instance, is a short ballet. It's a three act ballet and have to... well, nowadays they seem to go for twenty minute intervals, but I certainly had to stretch it to fifteen minutes at least each of the two intervals and people like to get back in you know, to make sure they felt they'd been in the theatre for two hours. Now, the orchestra would have arrived at seven, or seven-

thirty and the orchestra were doing a two and a half hour day and Coppelia, as I say, it was 90 minutes dancing and another thirty minutes interval and they were playing for 90 minutes a day, and what I really regretted was that I didn't... I've done this in other things, I've thought up ideas and I haven't seen them through, and you have to plan and you have to get a plan and a business plan and put it to someone like the Arts Council. But I thought that that orchestra was such a waste of those musicians. They should have been doing lunch time concerts in towns over England, they should have been split up into groups of quartets, brass sections... in Stratford we did a season, two weeks at Stratford in the summer and they should have been playing Strauss waltzes and things out on the green at lunchtime. They should have been occupied, certainly into schools. You know, if I'd put forward a good enough plan and persuaded the orchestra that they could have made a bit of extra money which I'm sure they would... I mean what were they doing? 90 minutes playing in a day, the rest of the time they were sitting around. Well, I don't know what they were doing... some of them must have been really bored. I just feel that musically it was a terrible, terrible waste. But there we are, there was plenty of work for us to be doing. So I was with Sadler's Wells for I suppose nearly two years, then we decided - I decided - that it would be nice to be resident in London, so I applied to BBC for the job of an Assistant Floor Manager, which was the lowest of the low.

KH: Why did you want to leave the theatre?

DR: Well it didn't seem to me... I hadn't got that strong an attachment to 'theatre' as such. It was performing, performing ballets, performing plays yes, performing revues, but I'd been in a mixture of things and I didn't think that television drama would be any different: it was rehearsing a play and putting it on, albeit for one night. It's actors, and I think that we achieved quite a lot in television. I think the level of performance in television has got quite a lot to do with the theatre and weekly rep. Not weekly necessarily, obviously preferably three weekly or whatever it was, but the fact that those actors could turn it on, you know, for one performance on television, they could sustain performance, that it was a sustained performance exactly as the theatre is. An hour long play, live theatre, it was absolutely live, no retreat, the light went on and you were on for ninety minutes in front of a mix bigger audience than any rep... it didn't compare. But I think... You know, the other day we went to BAFTA to commemorate the head of drama, Sean Sutton, who had died and there were loads and loads of clips from things like I Claudius and a whole range of drama, single plays and series and this film editor from Colombo, Benji, [Benji Gerstein] who did something for my party, edited some Z Cars, I said, 'We're going to use that'. I'd offered it because it was a different thing for the clips, just to see all the policeman's faces go through quickly and he came to BAFTA to see this and he said to Karin afterwards [DR's wife] 'I just have never experienced anything quite like this in my life before, those actors giving these performances, it wasn't cinema it was theatre performances, tempered for the screen but they were so compelling because there was continuity about it'. He was just bowled over by the level of acting and I think that had to come from somewhere, and it came from the experience of doing all sorts of different plays and the confidence that you gain. Terrible bad habits, tricks of the trade, things that come out of weekly rep are not a good thing at all, but you know the better actors I think always overcame that and were able to give performances worthy of the play and worthy of their own craft. But there's no doubt about it, there were an awful lot of short cuts, you can't give anything serious consideration.

KH: Did you find that the work that you'd done in theatre helped you in your job when you moved to the BBC?

DR: Oh yes it didn't worry me too much. It was prop list, it was rehearsals and it was looking after actors and making them comfortable, helping them and liaising with, particularly with the designer more in television somehow because the design and the routes and things around the studio. It was very important to... for the whole studio to be designed in a way that, first of all you could get the design in if there was an awful lot of it - fit it in. It had to work with the cameras. The additional thing of course was working with cameras, and the sound and the consideration of having to plan with your director as a Floor Manager, which was the same as Assistant Stage Manager, in respect of prompting and helping them through rehearsal and dealing with all the props, hand props and everything to do with the actors, checking them before a performance... But as I say, the additional thing was the cameras and the routing of all the cables. It's like knitting, you have to work it out literally on a big chart, a big ground plan and put your cameras and move them around so you don't get tangled up. It's quite a challenge, I can tell you! You can't have cables crossing cables, they've got to work and they've got to move quickly out to get another one and all that sort of thing. So that was an additional thing that you hadn't been faced with in the theatre and I found it interesting. But prompting, I mean you had the prompt - you've heard of the cut key?

KH: No what was the cut key?

DR: Well the cut key was the thing, throughout a television drama you carried with you and if someone needed a prompt you pressed the cut key and all the sound was immediately cut. The cut key was simply you pressed it and you could then speak and give the actor a cue, give them the line without it being heard at people's homes, and then release it again. And I think there was, when you cut it, there was some sort of atmosphere so it didn't go completely dead. I hardly ever used it, I can't remember using it. I used it once with a famous actress who was livid with me afterwards, she said, 'I didn't need a cue' but she had paused so long I thought she was never going to speak! [laughs]

KH: What kind of things were you putting on when you were working at the BBC in terms of...?

DR: Quite a lot of contemporary new plays. The first thing I was involved in was a production of Romeo and Juliet with Anthony... I can't remember the name, famous film star actor who did a thing with lions and lionesses. Virginia McKenna was Juliet and the other chap I can't remember. He's still around and occasionally appears as an old man - hasn't gone into a theatre home yet! [Flea off Pepee] which was about bubonic plague and a ship and the reason I remember that is that it was an original play. It was because... it was a wonderful actor producer, he was, I had to look after him, he would drink rather a lot - doesn't matter. What else? I... very quickly, I mean 1984 this was in production when I joined it was on the air in the first week. Orwell's 1984 with Peter Cushing and then it was seen twice. It was done on Sunday night live and then it was

repeated live again on the Thursday because there was no recording, so they had to come back and do it again. So that was there and Rudolph Cartier, a famous German film director who'd come into British television, he directed that. He directed some [Minotti] operas. He directed some operas for the first time on television, the orchestra playing live in the next studio. He did *Mother Courage*, big production of that with horses and things in the studio.

KH: When was that? What year was that?

DR: Probably '56. But very quickly, I mean, I worked a lot with a director, an Irish woman called Chloe Gibson and she did an historical serial called... Oh it's the name of a castle near Coventry... I can't remember what it is. Historical costume drama, and as I say it was all live, happening at the moment except for occasionally film inserts which were cued in, which were pre-recorded - pre-filmed and pre-recorded - which we'd do at Ealing Film Studios and they would be running on a ten second cue. But very quickly I moved into the dramatised documentary, a small wing of the drama department.

KH: Could you just explain what they were? The dramatised documentaries?

DR: Yes I will. I like to think it was the best form of documentary drama. We called it dramatised documentary. There'd been all sorts of kinds over the last fifty years, forty years and I like to think it was the best kind. Writers would do thorough research of a subject or a way of life or a work place, and the writers were people like [John Elliott], who was keen on reality and the authenticity of drama, who had been a British film officer in the United Nations for awhile. But he wrote and directed and produced. And Robert [Barr] and Duncan Ross who both came, who had both I think been war reporters but had both done a lot of work in radio features and radio features did much the same sort of work, research of a subject and then dramatised it. Not naming names but dramatising it and making up their own characters and the first one that I was asked to directed was [Black Furrow] which was about Open Cast coalmining and was written by a woman who lived in South Wales near [...]. right beside an Open Cast coalmine. So it was about the life of the miners and the problems that came up with open cast mining for the local community of [...]. So that was called [Black Furrow] then I did a... Robert Barr wrote a thing called *Medico* which, in the fifties there were doctors in places like Penzance, who had access to the radio stations that talked to ships around the world, Rugby was one, but Penzance radio he was linked with that. There was a doctor in Penzance who worked ships - if there was a problem on a ship he would go and try and diagnose it. And so Robert Barr researched this and he wrote his own story, he made up his own doctor and I directed it and it was to do with a New Zealand ship coming up the Channel and the man fell into the hold and broke his leg or something, and so the lifeboat had to go out with the doctor on board and to treat him on the ship. So we had to do filming using the lifeboat and we joined the ship and I remember we went out from [Brixton]. Brixton, I think it's near Torquay, on a pilot boat, a very rough night and my assistant Joan Clark was there and we had to actually do what the doctor did later in the studio which was to jump and get on a rope ladder at the side of the ship, and she slipped and I saved her life I think. Anyway we got on and our purpose of going on board was that we had this huge [Mitchell] camera but in the studio we were going to have the ship and portholes and looking through we would see a rough sea which had to be projected, so we wanted to go and shoot a rough sea. So when we woke up the

next morning after the night we got on board, it was as calm as anything, so we didn't get our rough sea but we came all the way up the coast and into London but that was about that story. It was called *Medico* and we did some filming. I did some filming with the doctor going about his normal business in Penzance and showing that he was just a local GP but he also did this with the lifeboat.

KH: What other kind of topics did these films cover?

DR: We dealt with advertising, a thing called *Who Plays the Piper...* no, no, I can't remember what it was called. But John Elliott wrote it and produced it and I directed and it depicted the story of creating a new coffee with its milk in already. Powdered coffee and it was all to do with the marketing, the choosing it, marketing, marketing research, the factory work on it. We went to Oxford to research. There was a place just outside Oxford that does National Research and questionnaires, we went there to film their methods.

KH: But this was within a fictional story?

DR: It was entirely fictional, every character was fictional but it showed the way people worked. *Who Plays The Piper* was the life of a provincial symphony orchestra dealing with the Arts Council, the management, the orchestral musicians themselves and just trying to give an impression of what it was like to be in a provincial symphony orchestra. We used the BBC Northern Orchestra, which is now the Philharmonic in Manchester but we called them by something else and we filmed them in Parr Hall in Warrington. This was the first time, I like to think, this was the first drama in the world in which we had an outside broadcast element. We did it in the studio, live on the night but to see the musicians living, coming out, travelling on trams and taking instruments to their rehearsal, I filmed in Bradford and with an outside broadcast unit who normally did events and football and things like that. We covered it in rehearsal situation in the Parr Hall in Warrington with the BBC Orchestra but not announced as the BBC Orchestra but as an anonymous orchestra. And we had an audience there for sections of the concert which were all part of the story. So that was about the orchestras. There was a very famous pair [Gilchrist Caulder] and Colin [Morris]. Colin Morris was a writer and Gilchrist Caulder was a director and they had a strong partnership together. They did one about alcoholism about an alcoholic which absolutely stunned the audience at home in 1958 - you know, they didn't think that people talked about that sort of thing, let alone being shown on television. But again it was purely fictional and that was the strength of it I think, because you weren't distracted by the reality of 'this is this particular mine', and you know thinking where you were. You created your own sense of place and own characters. I think you get muddled up - when you introduce reality into drama then there is a confusion and I think there's a dishonesty about it because the audience don't know quite what is real and what is not. We were saying 'this is a play, we are recreating something for you, so forget about worrying about this, that or the other we're telling a story which is based in reality and on thorough research', making it a story, the authorship is providing a good storyline through the characterisation hopefully but there were no distractions. We did a thing called *Skipper's Ticket* about deep sea fishing, I was a production assistant on that, with John Elliott, writing and directing. It was about deep sea fishing in Hull and the life of men who went to sea and their wives at home and when the ship came in, the captain, the skipper went home and he sat down and had a

bit of a cuddle with his wife on the sofa and there was a complete uproar from the people of Hull, saying, 'We don't behave like that!', and all they'd done was kiss on the sofa! Nothing more!

KH: What year was that?

DR: That was 1955 or 56

KH: So these drama documentaries were going on at the same time as things like Look Back in Anger and social realism that was coming into the theatre?

DR: They were yes. But we didn't, we billed them as, we called them dramatised documentaries and we didn't name the actors in the Radio Times. And Gilchrist Caulder and Colin Morris, Colin researched with the help of a policeman [Prendergarst], Detective sergeant Prendergarst in Liverpool, and he was a very colourful character, he had a very smart suit and so he created a, Colin created a character of this man who was a good working detective. Saturday night, well they bring in three criminals, three supposed criminals, alleged criminals, put them in three different rooms and play them off against the other without telling, moving around the rooms and that was a fifty minute I think called Who me? I think. This was very successful and the police liked it a lot and they said can we borrow this, can we use it for training. So they used it in Halifax at the National Detective Training College and it was through that contact with the police that our head of department, [Erwin] Jones went up to Lancashire, to Hutton, outside the constabulary headquarters and they talked about the new crime cars that they'd got which they were calling Z cars. So Z Cars came out of a dramatised documentary and the billing for the very first Z Cars didn't mention Stratford, or Frank Windsor or anyone in it. It was only by sort of popular demand after about week three that people were saying who are these actors? So we started billing them in the Radio Times and telling people before that they were actors, because previously they'd phoned up and said 'that was terribly good we were so surprised at the end to see that they were actors in Black Furrow' because they had believed it. Well we wanted them to believe it but not believe. So that was the range of subject matter.

KH: Do you have any recollection of the kind of audience numbers who were watching these?

DR: I wish I had the audience numbers, I've got lots of little pictures of them because the only record we could have was a man down at Shephard's Bush who photographed all the television shows and sold them as little prints because we weren't doing, the BBC wasn't, that was the only record we had, these little tiny pictures that we put on the programmed budget and bought them. The audience well all I can say in 1962 the average audience for Z Cars was ten million perhaps twelve million in the first two or three years and for the hundredth edition it had seventeen and a half million. I would imagine on the first night of Z Cars because it wasn't known until it got on the screen, somehow about eight million people turned up. But of course there was no opposition, well there was ITV and BBC2 was just round the corner. But it was those luxurious days when it was ITV enough. I don't understand why the single play has, I know it's been

eroded over the years. We were seeing one if not two television dramas a week from the BBC alone as well as the short thirty minute theatres, a week and you know to find a single play that lasts ninety minutes these days is hard to come by. They talk with glee that they got an audience of three million or something. Alan Plater last year did a ninety minute play called *Belonging* about caring for old people. It was for ITV and they said, I know the chap who is head of drama there, he said to Alan, it would be wonderful if you got five million and they got six and a half million viewers. I mean that's a huge audience these days when there are a hundred channels to choose from. I think they're so blind.

KH: Do you think that television took away from the theatre, or do you think it actually helped in terms of the fact that you were doing a lot social realism, drama documentaries and that fed back into the theatre and the kind of new writing that was emerging?

DR: I would have thought that, I have no evidence for this. I would have thought that television helped the theatre in as much as it must have awakened a lot of people's minds, perhaps young people or perhaps people right across the board. That there was such a thing as drama and theatre and they would be tempted to go into a theatre for one reason to see that actor who he'd seen on telly and who was actually in town, you know see him on the stage. Awful playbills have as seen in but nevertheless they use it because it works it does draw some people in, but that's not a good reason. Cross fertilisation of both and they benefit from each other.

KH: Later in your career, was it in the 70's when you worked in Birmingham?

DR: '71

KH: You tried to create a relationship between regional theatre and television. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

DR: Well you know I felt that the regional theatres were rich, and there must be something to be gained from a relationship but I did not want to, in any way put plays, theatre on television. I wanted to find other ways to collaborate. One simple way was that Michael [Waring] a theatre director, had adapted *The Diary of a Madman* for a one man show and I saw this played in Sheffield I think it was or something and I asked if I could put the cameras on it and turn it into a visually, a television piece and Michael Waring agreed and I re-directed this one man show for television. That is one answer to the question. Secondly was to visit Michael Elliott in Manchester when he was preparing to open the Royal Exchange and he told me that he was going to open the theatre with a version of Alan Garner's novel *The Red Shift* which he had commissioned as a theatre play and I said well I'd love to read it and what is in my mind is that if we can get a screen play written. If Alan Garner will adapt it as a screen play to make a film of it, lets look at your actors and see if any of your actors, after the production in the theatre, will be suitable for the television production because they'll know the part so much better and know the character so much better. So we embarked on that and I commissioned Alan Garner to write a screen play which he did and Michael Elliott told me that he had

given up the idea and wasn't going to do it at the Exchange so out of nothing came good for me because we still had a good script and [...] made a very good job of it as a film and another kind of relationship with the theatre which I think was beneficial was that Alan Plater wanted to write six episodes, six fifty minute episodes of something called Trinity Tales which was really about rugby league fans coming down from somewhere in the North to Wembley for the Rugby league final and in the minibus this group of fans would tell the stories as told by Chaucer on their way to Canterbury and have six contemporary stories re-enacted by the group in the van. And I said to Michael Simpson at the Birmingham Rep, Michael why don't you put it on, if Alan will adapt it, why don't you put it on the stage so Alan adapted three stories for the first act, three stories for the second act exactly as told, word for word in television and it broke all records at the Birmingham Rep for a two week run there and they finished on Saturday night and they started location filming for Trinity Tales on Monday and they were an ensemble of actors who you could not have got up to that level in a weeks rehearsal for television so we benefited there and I think the viewers didn't know it but I think the whole television production benefited through its life in the theatre. So those are different ways of using the theatre and of having a partnership with the theatre without actually putting it on the screen

KH: I think that was all the questions I had, have you got anything you'd like to add?

DR: No, only to say the work that we were doing at Birmingham derived so often from theatre experience, Willy Russell, Alan Bleasdale, David Hare, David Hare particularly you know saying 'I have a play, I have a screen play called Licking Hitler would you produce it and if I allowed you to produce it at Birmingham may I direct it? And he'd never directed before in his life and he stood on the shoot the first day and he said 'I didn't tell anyone but I've never been behind a camera before in my life.' But I was entirely confident because I knew his theatre direction, how precise it was, he was completely in control of the theatre and I thought there's no question he'll be in control of the thing. And the other thing, the connection with theatre was I felt when I went to Birmingham that as always Birmingham and the same applied to channel four, that what mattered in a production is the writing and the direction, any decision that's made to go ahead with a production should be made on those two factors alone, never the cast. The cast should come later and the best actors should be cast for the part and not thought of at an earlier stage and to go beyond that because I wanted my one and only first assistant in Birmingham, a script editor, I wanted to come from the theatre. I didn't want anyone from television, who'd been working in television before. I wanted them from the theatre and Barry Hanson, had worked, had run the Hull theatre, and he'd worked at the Royal Court so he knew writers inside out and Peter Ansorge who had written, edited a theatre magazine, he came as a script editor. [Tyra Prem]...I don't know where she came from. Later Karin Bamborough came from the literary department at the National Theatre into television and Walter [Donoghue], also came to channel four from the theatre, he had some connection with the Royal Court so my concern was the script, that is the most important thing at the start and finish of everything and so I didn't want anyone coming with preconceptions of film or anything else. Also I wanted them to come with fresh ideas so that was the other side of the theatre connection.