

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

John Standing – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

24 October 2005

Actor John Standing on memories of working in weekly Rep; Performing in Peter Brook's 1951 production of Titus Andronicus; Working at Bristol Old Vic, Haymarket, Chichester, West End; Touring; John Osborne; Working in film and television; Working with Cary Grant; Watching Peter Brook's Midsummer Night's Dream; Working with Harold Pinter; Working on Broadway.

JOHN STANDING TRANSCRIPT

conducted by

KH: This is the 24th October and it's an interview with John Standing. Can I just confirm that I've got your permission to put this in the archive?

JS: Yes of course you can! [Laughs]

KH: Excellent I'd just like to start by asking you about the beginning of your career, because you come from such a theatrical family was it a natural decision for you to become an actor?

JS: No I can't think of anything worse, the last thing that I wanted to be was an actor. I had to do the army, I had to go into the army for my national service and I was an art student after that and I wanted to be a painter but my mother who was also an actress said no she didn't want to finance my being an art student anymore, would I go and get a job and I thought Christ! What in God's name am I going to do and then I thought well I suppose I could try and be an actor not really having thought about it much before except that I used to behave so badly and I was thrown out of almost every school I went to for showing off and being ridiculous and not paying attention and certainly being bored blind by anything that I was being taught, so that I suppose, and most actors are and I was I suppose I don't know what. Anyway I went and did an audition to carry a spear at Stratford. So I went and did an audition. I luckily got the job

understudying and carrying a spear. I understudied Michael Blakemoor who became a director and his line was [In Australian accent] 'Romans make way' because he was an Australian and I used to go to the understudy rehearsals and say [In Australian accent] 'Romans make way' and that was it, that was my job. That was my line and I used to make everybody laugh because I behaved so badly and then I went into weekly Rep at Worthing where I think I was the only straight man there. Everybody was gay. Weekly Rep in Worthing where I found it deeply frightening but quite fun and I realised that I had something, and I must have inherited this from my mother who was a very funny comedienne that I could make people laugh and because I could make people laugh I used to enjoy the plays and try and inject as much humour as possible at every possible, I mean regardless of the play

KH: What kind of...?

JS: ...We did everything. from The Importance of being Earnest, I played one of the Butlers in it I think I played Lane or whichever the other one, Merryman or Lane. Where were we now?

KH: We were talking about Weekly Rep

JS: We did everything. We did really savagely bad plays and good plays and never slept is all I remember was getting really really tired because one would be up. Digs were four pounds a week, pay was eight quid a week, so four quid was for eating and somehow one managed to do it I don't know how really and being up all night with black coffee learning the lines for the following day and then rehearsing all day and then playing that night the play that you'd done the week before obviously and it was an amazing experience and I did that for about nine months including the pantomime and I was a chorus boy in the pantomime in yellow jeans and a tyrolean hat I remember and again I was the only straight bloke in it but I was the only one who could tap dance because I'd gone to tap dance. When I was at school I saw a film called Blue Skies with Fred Astaire and Fred Astaire got the girl and I thought this is the secret weapon

KH: Tapdancing [laughs]

JS: Yes so I asked my mother and she very sweetly said yes so in my school holidays I used to go to tap dancing classes and I never stopped and I drive my children nuts because I do it in shops and things. Because I can do it I can't resist doing it. Anyway then I went from there to Birmingham and I went fortnightly rep at Birmingham Alexandra Theatre which is the commercial theatre there and then I was asked to go from there to the Birmingham Rep. I went to the Birmingham Rep and while I was at the Birmingham Rep I was asked to do a play in London called The Darling Buds of May and so I went to do that and from that I was then asked to go to play the leading parts at the Bristol Old Vic. So it was much more serious theatre there finishing up by going and doing Mercutio and Romeo and Antipholus of Ephesus in The Comedy of Errors at the [Balbeck] festival in the Lebanon which was wonderful to do and that was 1960.

KH: So were you part of the resident company at the Bristol Old Vic

JS: Yes I was and it was Annette Crosby was Juliet and Leonard Rossiter was Friar Lawrence and Robin Philips who eventually went to Canada to direct and produce in Canada was Romeo... I can't remember who else was in it, but it was immensely, it was wonderful fun to do I have to say and the temples in Balbeck were quite fantastic where we did it and then after that and then from kind of 1960 onwards except for doing Three Sisters at the Oxford playhouse and also I did at the Oxford playhouse I did, I played the Dauphin in St Joan

KH: Was that consecutively or was that...

JS: No I did a play of Arbuzov's after Three Sisters called the twelfth hour and then the rest have been in London I think and then in, and then I went to Hollywood and did King Rat and then when I was doing King Rat I came back and then they rang me up and I was in Ireland with my Ex Wife and I was asked to do the film with Cary Grant which was called Walk Don't Run and I did that for three months which meant going to Tokyo and back to Los Angeles and then I did a season at the Chichester Festival Theatre

KH: What year was that?

JS: That was 66 I think

KH: What kind of plays did you put on there?

JS: I did 'Aimez vous Glames' by Shakespeare which is obviously The Scottish Play. I did that. I did The Farmer's Wife. A play of Anouilh's called The Fighting Cock and The Clandestine Marriage with Alistair Sim and Margaret Rutherford. Alistair Sim was, well they both were absolutely wonderful in it and then I did another season there...I've done so much theatre and I can't remember the plays I did. Frightfully difficult.

KH: Did you mention on the phone that you were in Titus Andronicus?

JS: Oh that was my first job carrying a spear!

KH: That was the spear carrying one!

JS: Yes that was the spear carrying one!

KH: And who directed that?

JS: Peter Brook

KH: So was that the 1955 one with Laurence Olivier?

JS: Yes

KH: Have you got good memories of that production?

JS: Yes I have because it was terribly funny and I was called Potato face because I had a completely round face and they used to make me laugh because I didn't have anything to say- charging around with this spear and I just thought it was all wonderful fun. We went to Paris, Venice, Vienna, Belgrade, Zagreb, Warsaw, London, on my first job so it was kind of amazing really.

KH: What were your impressions of Olivier when you worked with him?

JS: Was I what?

KH: How did you find him to work with?

JS: He was very sweet to me because he knew my mum of course and my stepfather and he was very, both of them were they were lovely. I used to watch him every single night. I'd go and stand in the wings. A lot of the other spear carriers were up in the dressing room but I watched this master at work and he used to mesmerise the audience. He used to frighten them which was wonderful and then he could make them laugh, , he could do what he wanted with them and it was quite extraordinary because Anthony Quayle as Aaron the Moor, playing a scene and coming off and getting an enormous round of applause and then Olivier would come on and play a scene and by nature the audience didn't clap because it wasn't a particularly interesting scene and he used come off the stage and start the round himself by clapping in the wings and the audience used to automatically clap and it was terribly funny [8.52]. It was things like that that I do remember very clearly. I remember Vivien Leigh used to stand on Maxine [Alderley's] train as she was taking her curtain calls because she didn't like her. She just used to stamp [Stamps foot] on her train like that which used to bring her back with a jolt, it was completely shocking I couldn't believe it [Puts on a woman's voice] 'she's so boring' she used to say to us and poor old Maxine [Alderley] was adorable, adorable.

KH: What was Peter Brook like as a director?

JS: Peter Brook was wonderful. He was very, very strict with the Oliviers. Terribly brilliant and very...he's a very politically conscious man and he was very articulate and very... He was a kind man I remember. I liked Peter Brook hugely and he's a kind of genius and there very few and far between you know.

KH: That production- people have since said that, that was a particularly gruesome modern production

JS: It was

KH: Did that strike you at the time?

JS: Well, no because when you're on the stage all you do at some level or another is to enjoy the play that you're in, to relish, and the Olivier speeches and everything and it was shocking was happened when his hand was cut off. He'd watched a cat being run over in the street and the agonies that the cat went through, the gyrations and the way the cat moved and he imitated that when Aaron the Moor, Tony Quayle, cut his hand off and you'd see his hand cut off on stage and then you'd see his back start to go and people in the audience were horrified by it and then in the end they killed all the children and you had to eat the children and Vivien Leigh used to put, she used to put Charbonnell and Walker chocolates into this huge bowl thing, in which we were supposed to be eating their children and she used to put these wonderful chocolates in. All the spear carriers used to go for this great big bowl

KH: So you used to be really excited eating!

JS: Really excited by eating their children! [laughs] I mean this is the truth of what goes on when the audience is going Uhhh like that- 'they're eating flesh!' and whatever it was that they'd been told we were eating and actually we were eating the most expensive chocolates in the world

KH: Fantastic

JS: Which was wonderful!

JS: And I remember them having a cataclysmically awful row on stage in Balbeck and no what am I talking about- In Belgrade one day and I was kind of shocked and I thought- my God to have a public row but you know that was life and the theatre is a wild medium it's not Mr Norm's life at all you know and back stage and making love to people in dressing rooms and things like that was you know the norm really which everybody frequently did. It was just thoroughly enjoyable and that's the truth, it's the truth of the matter.

KH: How did you end up going to Worthing? Was that through someone that you knew at Worthing?

JS: No absolutely not. I went and did an audition for it.

KH: And was that a resident company at Worthing?

JS: That was a resident company at Worthing and then from then on it was all auditions. When I left there I went and auditioned for the Salzburgs. No my mother said to me 'you must be prepared to starve in this rather than succeed in anything else', when I went into the theatre and she said 'It's yours, you just do what you - I'm not going to help you at all' and she didn't and I remember thinking but the Redgraves are getting terrific help, they're being helped hugely and you're not prepared to help me one iota and they didn't and it was probably quite good that they didn't so I had to bloody well do it myself. I remember Vanessa being shoved into plays and things with her father in London thinking why can't I be, you know whatever but I didn't and so whatever I've done you know I managed to do myself and when I got the jobs at the Haymarket I was very lucky and got very good press for doing *The Importance*.

KH: When were you working at the Haymarket?

JS: That was with *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Ring Round the Moon* were at the Haymarket

KH: Was that in the 70's?

JS: No no that was in the 60's- 68 I think. 68-69.

KH: Did you find it very different moving to the West End?

JS: No because I'd already done it once in 59. I'd done *The Darling Buds of May*. Then I'd done, Oh I'd done lots of plays before I did those and I can't remember them all now. I did *See How They Run*, which is a farce. Cary Grant said to me 'You'll never win an award- You're a funny man' he said to me, and I thought well maybe you're right. I think, because he never won anything you know, except for they gave him an oscar at the end just because of longevity really apart from anything else.[13.34] But I did get nominated when I was at the National for an Olivier, I got nominated, but he's right I didn't win the award and I don't particularly care about things like that. You know I don't give a stuff.

KH: You've still got time!

JS: Yeah well I don't think I have- not anymore. No. Things like that don't come into any horizon at any level.

KH: During the 50's and 60's did you have a favourite piece of new writing that you were in?

JS: Yes. Well no 50's and 60's I didn't. I did a play of John Osborne's which I loved doing in the early 70's which was called A Sense of Detachment. Which was at the Royal Court and I loved doing that and I played the lead in that and that was good sport and then I went from there to do Private Lives after that, which about as far removed as you could get but I suppose I'd got a reputation of some sort as being I don't know funny or something or urbane and funny.

KH: Was that with Maggie Smith?

JS: Yes and I've done another play recently with Maggie- a play of Edward Albee's called... I can't remember what the hell it was called it's up there somewhere (gestures to wall). I did it for about seven months. With Maggie and Eileen Atkins.

KH: Is she fun to work with? [14.53]

JS: Who? Eileen- she's lovely.

KH: Either of them

JS: Maggie? Yeah she can be I think she can be. Maggie was wonderful when I first went into Private Lives- she's a very complicated girl though Maggie but I'm fond of her but I adore Aileen Atkins. I think she's amazing and wonderful and she was in it as well. The three of us were starring in it. I can't remember what the hell it was...Oh Christ it's too frightful isn't it? I'll remember it's written on the wall somewhere.

KH: It'll come back to you

JS: Anyway that was the last play I did and then I thought I don't really want to do the theatre anymore and that was about four years ago [15.57].

KH: Why did you not want to do the theatre anymore?

JS: Because I'd done enough I just thought I don't want to do it anymore and I find filming wonderful and rewarding and different, really different and I've done a fair amount of that God knows. I love it, I suppose if I was fortunate enough to be offered something amazing in the theatre...I was asked to do the last Shakespeare play with Judi, Judi Dench, whatever it was called, I can't remember again. It's his least done play and it was done in London recently. Anyway I turned it down. I didn't do it but if I get something, if I get an amazing offer I might..

KH: You might reconsider...

JS: Well I might. I only might though. I ask my contemporaries if they would ever do it again and they all say no absolutely not.

KH: Why do you think that is?

JS: Because you can't remember the bloody thing apart from anything else. You know I'm 71 years old. You just think I don't think I can get that into my head. You know and I think all my contemporaries... I said to O'Toole the other day, who's a great friend of mine, I said would you and he said 'Don't be crazy I wouldn't think of it no. No.' You just think when you get older wow it's amazing that one remember anything really, to be perfectly honest. I can't even remember the damn plays I've been in! [17.29]

KH: When you were at the Bristol Old Vic who was directing you there?

JS: John Hale

KH: What was he like to work with?

JS: He was nice, he was a naval man- He was a sailor, he was tremendously bouncy and enthusiastic and then wrote several books and I don't really know what they were about. I think he wrote a biography, a naval biography or something like that and I don't know but that's what he went into. I know he gave the theatre up completely and wouldn't have anymore to do with it and just wrote these strange books. I can remember the plays I did.

KH: Was there much new writing at Bristol?

JS: There was one new play called, yes there was a new play at Bristol called The Carver and it was somebody who carved statues and I remember that and the rest were...She Stoops to Conquer I did there, Comedy of Errors, Romeo and Juliet, The Edwardians which I think was a new play then by Vita Sackville West.

KH: Did you find yourself being cast in similar kinds of roles?

JS: I used to get cast...Well I played the Dauphin in St Joan and I played Algie in The Importance and everything in between so you know...yes they tended to cast one in more kind of, what can I say? Sophisticated roles? Yes but equally the last thing I did was...I went to Hollywood and did an NYPD Blue, and I played a London, cockney detective in it, so you know

KH: You've done the full range

JS: Yes I think I have but obviously because of ones background you're more likely to get cast- Ed Fox and I we've just done a film together playing a couple of old fools who talk about cricket all the time and I think that yes I do, yes of course to a degree and certainly in films and television. Then in the 70's I did Rogue Male, O'Toole and I did that together and then we went to...in the theatre we went to do a thing called Dead Eye Dicks, which we toured England in and it was cataclysmically bad and then we took it to Australia where we managed to empty the theatre nightly but we had the best time that any two actors have had and behaved disgracefully all over the state and had a wonderful, wonderful time. For five weeks, it was dreadful. [17.46]

KH: Why was it so dreadful?

JS: It was just badly written, badly written. I know I can remember- this will help I've got various little pictures here which will help me.

KH: Just for the recorder John's getting a photo album out

JS: I'm getting it out so that I can see what I did. That was the very first job I did in 1958 and I've (1.11) completely forgotten about that. I remember that was when I dropped everything all over the stage. You can tell how bad that was!...[looking at album] Darling Buds Of May,

KH: Where did you do The Darling Buds of May

JS: Saville Theatre in London

KH: And was that the first time you'd worked in London

JS: Yes

KH: Did it strike you- when you got there was it a completely different experience to where you'd been working?

JS: No, it's just the theatre is the theatre is the theatre wherever you are really to be honest

[At this point JS and KH look through JS album of theatre and film photographs. JS involved in production including, Irregular Verb to Love at Criterion Theatre, the film The Wild and The Willing, film, A Pair of Briefs, A revue at The Establishment Club, film King Rat, Three Sisters, Oxford Playhouse, 1964, film- Walk Don't Run

JS: Then I did Walk Don't Run

KH: [pointing to photographs] These photos are fabulous

JS: Yes they are quite fun aren't they? He [Cary Grant] used to say 'You're a funny man' and the two of us were quite funny I have to say. It's a bad film a remake of a film called The More the Merrier

KH: What was Cary Grant like?

JS: Fabulous, very generous. I loved him I mean I had three months solidly with him and he was just absolutely delightful and in the end I used to go back in his Rolls at night. He had a battered old Rolls, I used to go back and have sandwiches and sit and watch the television because he couldn't bear being out because he loathed being recognised all the time, it drove him nuts. He said, 'real fame is as awful as anything, the claustrophobia is spectacular that wherever you go people stare at you' and I've truthfully never wanted it and it was a great lesson. He said, 'you know I can't go to a beach I can't go anywhere where someone isn't going to spring out of the bushes and go 'Oh Sir Cary Grant'. So he just used to go shuffling off to his house and sit up there in isolation in Beverley Hills and go out as little as possible because he couldn't bear the recognition factor

[At this point continue looking through JS photo album. Theatre and Film work photographed includes, Chichester Theatre, Macbeth, The Cherry Orchard, The Beaux Stratagem, film The Psychopath, The Importance of Being Earnest, Ring Round the Moon (Christopher Fry Translation), television drama- The First Churchills

KH: What did you think of a lot of the new writing that was coming through in the 50's and 60's

JS: I loved it. (Indicates photograph of John Osborne Sense of Detachment) and I really liked him and then I did another play of his on television called Jill and Jack

KH: Did you go and see his plays- things like Look Back in Anger?

JS: Oh yes. I used to go to the theatre a huge amount then. I never set foot in it now

KH: Do you always read the reviews of your work

JS: No, never

KH: So the critics have never had any influence over you?

JS: No not an iota- sometimes if they put things outside the theatre- you see quotes- but otherwise I've never never never done it. I'm a great believer in it because whatever they say it's going to influence you at some level or another

KH: Did you read reviews of other plays, plays that you might have gone to see?

JS: Oh yes I read reviews of other plays but I never read anything, and I don't read anything after it's over and I don't keep them and I don't save them. If they're bad it does that to you and if they're good and they mention a moment you can never repeat it because you become self conscious of it so I just don't read them.

KH: Were you a fan of people like Kenneth Tynan's reviews?

JS: Yes I thought he was very very very clever. Yes brilliant, brilliant.

[At this point continue looking at further photographs in album, photographs of Jingo- at RSC directed by Richard Eyre, film- The Eagle had Landed, The Legacy, on television- Tartuffe, Close of Play at National for which JS was nominated for an award, Tonight at Eight-thirty at the Lyric theatre]

KH: Did you feel your work in theatre helped you when you came to work in television?

JS: Difficult to say. I don't know actors are just actors. They pick up what they can when they can. The sad thing is that in England we're not taught anything about the screen at all. Not that I went to a drama school but drama schools tend not to teach you anything about television, acting on television, or acting with a camera and I think it's an appalling arrogance to assume that people are only going to act on the stage. It's the foremost, it's what we're best at I think. Well what we're good at, I don't know that we're best at... German theatre is amazing and American theatre certainly is so you know it would be arrogant to say that we're best at it but we're best trained at it God knows. We have it shovelled at us all the time and I think it's ridiculous that drama schools don't if they're going to teach drama, get people to work with a camera because it's as different as it can humanly get. I mean you just don't do the same responses to playing a scene that you would in the theatre. It's just very different and very few English actors, stage actors, are very good on the screen, very few.

KH: Can I ask you about some of the theatre that you went to see?

JS: Yes of course you can

KH: In the 50's and 60's- are there any particular plays or productions that stick in your mind?

JS: Yes Vanessa Redgrave in *As You Like It*. Yes Vanessa Redgrave in *As you Like it* I thought was as exciting as anything I'd seen and Peter Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I thought was staggering at Stratford.

KH: What was staggering about it?

JS: Well, the way, his whole production was set in a huge white tent, the interior of a white tent and people were on swings and it was Japonica and it was white umbrellas and white swings and the lovers I remember were amazingly funny much funnier than the mechanicals in that particular production, they were absolutely spell binding. They chased each other all over the stage, right up into, they had stairs. It was almost like, whatever it is, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. It was absolutely wonderful. It was the most exciting Shakespeare production that I'd ever seen except for the one that I was lucky enough to be in which was *Titus Andronicus* because I saw that and that was absolutely mesmeric because I did the tour and I saw it in Stratford in '55. I did the tour in '57 so I'd seen it and I thought it was electrifying but I think Peter Brook is quite extraordinary. I loved working for Harold Pinter when I did Simon Gray's play at the National. Pinter's very sweet and very kind of... he doesn't, because he's an actor himself he doesn't interfere very much. He doesn't interfere a lot, he's very knowledgeable and succinct and he says what he thinks you ought to be doing when you're at the very end of a rehearsal so that you're confident enough to be able to do it. He was marvellous. He has a great enthusiasm and an admiration for Simon Gray's work anyway.

KH: Did you say you were friends with John Osborne

JS: Yes I was. I adored John and I was going to do his last play *Déjà vu* and he wouldn't cut it and I said well it's a four and a half hour play and I'd worked on it and T.P McKenna and I were to play the two leads in it. I was to play Jimmy Porter thirty years on was the idea and I was in America and it was wonderful because it would mean I could come back from Los Angeles and stay at home and I came back to do it and it was a reason to leave LA which I didn't really like very much to be honest with you. I mean I don't like the town, I don't like the scene there. I've got a lot of very, very, very good friends there who I adore but the actual place I find ugly and remote and the fact that you never touch anybody and you can't because you're in a car all the time and you're confined to your capsule where you whiz around in this capsule and then you get out of the capsule and you go to some vast great kind of pink area. Somebody once asked why there was no theatre in Los Angeles and Tyrone Guthrie said, 'No theatre can possibly survive in this peach fed, sun drenched, pink and silver vacuity' that was how he described Los Angeles and he's right, it is. There are some brilliantly talented people there obviously but it's not my bag. I don't like the place at all.

KH: Did Osborne ever say that he felt he was not typecast but by *Look Back In Anger*- people always referred to that as his most successful play?

JS: Well I think that whoever you are ...in whatever form of the arts you're in you get...Peter O'toole was known for Laurence of Arabia that's what set his career going! If you get something that sets you up and you get remembered for it they feel secure in putting, I think that's what- people push you in that direction because they feel secure in putting you in that suit of pajamas, you know I think that how it works whatever we do really

KH: Do you think that your acting style has changed a lot?

JS: I've learnt a lot. I think you learn a lot I've learnt a lot. The point of being in a long run or a film or anything is that you learn all the time. I've learnt to try and do less and less and less and less on the screen because the more you do the worse it is and screen acting is something Americans do to perfection. They just become and the secret is to become and not, you know, do all fancy tricks. I was watching Laurence Olivier, for whom I was lost in admiration as a stage actor, being appalling as Nelson. I mean just ridiculous, theatrical and rolling his eyes and you think- what's he doing? You know? It looked ridiculous, last night, just a tiny clip of Nelson dieing and I thought I don't believe you're dieing at all, you're putting on theatrical effects darling and he thought so. He realised that Vivien Leigh was better than him on the screen. She was a much better screen actress. She was very natural on the screen and it's very difficult to be very natural on the screen.

KH: What did you think of her performances on the stage? Did you think she came across as well?

JS: I thought she was OK. I thought she was OK. She had enormous style Vivien and she was an immensely funny woman. She had a wonderful sense of humour. The two funniest women of that sort who you wouldn't suspect would be were Judy Garland and Vivien Leigh and Judy Garland was outrageously funny- terribly, terribly funny girl.

KH: When did you meet Judy Garland?

JS: I saw her quite a lot when I was in Los Angeles doing Walk Don't Run and then I was on holiday in Acapulco and she was staying at the same hotel and so I saw quite a lot of her there, you know because I'd known her in LA and because we were all staying at the same hotel, you know, she was just very friendly, very normal and I'd see her because Dirk Bogarde was a great friend of my Ex-Wife's and we used to go down there an awful lot and he was a good friend of Judy Garland's and she used to go there quite often- so I used to see quite a lot of her. She was funny as hell, she really was, she had a wonderful, cryptic sense of humour and a very wondrous talent I mean breathtaking I think.

KH: I was going to ask you about when you first went to Broadway and what your first experiences were like?

JS: I loved it. It was absolutely wonderful. Also you felt, because we'd done a tour of America, this was with *Private Lives*, and we'd done it in England, we'd done it in Los Angeles and in Denver and in Toronto and Boston and god knows where and finished up on Broadway and it did get spectacular press...I only know because it was punched outside the theatre and Maggie and I were recipients of stunning notices so it was jolly nice. I mean from that point of view and to be a success on Broadway is a lovely feeling, to be a flop on Broadway and you're off in three days or overnight you know. You come of the following day, literally, it's a very commercial game there. It was exciting but I never wanted to go again, I never wanted to. I adore being with my family. I adore my children more than anything in the world, to be with my family is something that I really love, I wouldn't want to go back there and do a play. My friend Eileen Atkins is just going to hop over there and do a play for six months and I suppose the answer is it's very, very, very remunerative, it can be very well paid. We weren't frightfully well paid for that, and it goes up and down you know. Your salary goes up and down and sometimes you're very well paid and sometimes you're not.

KH: Have I asked you who your favourite director was that you enjoyed working with?

JS: Two people really Bill Brydon and Harold Pinter I loved working for

KH: What is it that makes them so good as directors do you think?

JS: Well they're as disparate as you can get Brydon and Pinter. Brydon is filled with amazing ideas and wonderful kind of production scenario and the way he started *Son of Man* was quite extraordinary, making everybody, make the stage, a woodcutters shed in a black hole at the RSC, that tiny little place at the Barbican and we made the stage in the shape of an enormous cross

KH: How long did it take you?

JS: It took as about five minutes to put it all together- there were how many? 20 Roman soldiers, I was playing Pontius Pilate and but we all came in as carpenters and we made, it was electrifying. It was a wonderful start to it, and when Jo Fiennes who was playing Christ, was crucified at the end, people were sobbing. You could hear the audience (Crying) because it was so awful and effective, Jo was wonderful in it, he was breathtaking, he was wonderful in it, he's an amazingly sweet man but he was absolutely amazing and the production value and the sound, was terrifying. It doesn't feel very long ago. None of it feels long ago that's the awful thing about life as it goes by every 20minutes it's Christmas! I mean what are we doing this Christmas? You think well fuck it we've only just had Christmas!

KH: That's great thank you

JS: Well it's a pleasure it's been lovely to meet you.