

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Jeremy Young – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

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KH: I'd just like to start by asking about your early career, how you began acting?

JY: Well that's way back in 1954 or fifty-five, fifty-five. I'd been in the army. We all had to go in the army in those days, when I was eighteen obviously, eighteen to twenty you did National Service and while I was in the army I directed plays and put plays on and then I met somebody there, he was a friend of mine who was in the army and he got out before I did, and he was a reporter on a local newspaper in Peterborough and he wrote to me and sort of said, 'Look you know, I know you're sort of wanting to be in the theatre and an actor etc, there's a good local company here called the Harry Hanson Court Players and he was on the local newspaper and he used to do the write-ups for them you see, for each play, 'so why don't you come up here when you get out, you know get together again and probably get a job in there.' So I did, I went up to Peterborough after I got out of the army and presented myself at The Prince's Theatre. Was it The Prince's Theatre? Anyway at Peterborough Theatre and the guy said, the producer said, 'yes well I see what professional experience have you had?' and I said 'well I've put plays on in the army' and he said, 'This is a professional company, what professional?'...and I said, 'well I suppose none really' so he said, 'I'm very sorry, you must go away and get [mutters] some experience first.' And what it was, Harry Hanson was a regional impresario who used to have theatres in quite a few towns all over the country and he did twice nightly, weekly rep. I mean not a bad standard, but it wasn't the best standard in the world and so you did a play a week and it was twice nightly. So I went away with my tail between my legs and thought oh alright have to get some experience from somewhere. So I stuck around in Peterborough, I had to, to earn money and I became a furniture salesman. I was all of twenty, at the local store, and then I got to know one of the young actresses at the Rep and she said, 'look there is a newspaper called The Stage newspaper and they advertise for actors in there, why don't you sort of.' So I thought alright, Stage Newspaper and so I got it and there was an advert in it saying 'young actor wanted.' What they called juvenile lead in those days, to play all the young sort of blade about town and also do ASM, assistant stage management duties, oh and can you actually enclose a recent photograph, and it's usually a ten by eight glossy picture you have to send but I was green and I sort of thought to myself, ah a recent photograph, and it was a passport photograph, was my most recent, so I sent this tiny little passport photograph, brown sepia and well anyway he replied and I got the

job. He sort of said yes for some reason, god knows why it was, it was quite tough to get work in those days, although it's tougher now but it was still very, very tough- that's luck- and he said you know can you start in whatever it is, three weeks time, weekly rep you know and you'll be playing these sort of parts and you'll be expected of course to ASM and that's what I did. I went down to Tunbridge, it was very bad weather at the time, it was February '55 and the theatre was underwater, the stalls and so they postponed it for a couple of weeks. Anyway I did start there for the princely sum of four pounds a week and yes you could get digs in those days for two pounds, it would be two pounds fifty now, two pounds ten shillings and that was food all in and your laundry, so that was two pounds ten, then you'd have ten shillings, fifty pence, stamp, you know your national insurance stamp and then you had about a pound left over and from that you had to supply all your own modern clothes and an evening dress you know but if they did any costume plays well they supplied the costume plays. And so you did a play a week.

KH: And what kind of plays were you doing?

JY: All sorts of plays, obviously Agatha Christie plays, farces, occasionally they'd throw in, I remember we did, ghastly production it was, but, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, those sort of plays, popular plays you know and what you did, you actually had the dress rehearsal of your play on the Monday morning and Monday afternoon and then that would be your first night on Monday. Tuesday you'd go for rehearsal in the morning, Tuesday morning, and then you'd have a completely new play given to you, you'd take that, you'd what you call block it, go through and work out all the moves etc and then in the afternoon, on the Tuesday afternoon, you'd learn your part, plus going round the local town returning props that you'd borrowed because you were ASM ing as well and borrowing more props. Then obviously do the play that's on in the evening, the current play and then after that you'd go home have your supper and you're learning the first act, whatever part you had in the first act you learnt for the next day, and so the same thing happened obviously on the Wednesday. You'd obviously rehearse the part you'd learnt the first act on a Wednesday and then you'd obviously do the current play in the evening, you'd obviously learn the second act in the afternoon etc and the same thing went on and then Saturday morning you'd do a sort of run through of the play, the whole play. I mean these are full length plays and then on Saturday night you'd have to take down the set and they were big sort of heavy sets in those days. They built rooms you know, vicar's tea rooms or whatever it is, French windows up centre, all that sort of thing you know, and then on the Sunday you'd go in and put the new set-up for the play the following week. You had really... Sunday evening was the only time you had time off. I remember the guy who was an actor in the company. He's still a great friend of mine actually, Donald Sartain, we met there, fifty years ago isn't it? And we had enough money for half a pint of bitter, that's it and nothing else but we were happy, very happy, happy, happy, happy, marvellous.

KH: How long did you stay there for?

JY: He left to work with Joan Littlewood after a couple of months and I stayed with that company down in Tunbridge and then the company moved because the audiences weren't, you know were pretty awful and so we decided to move the company. The guy who ran it, Jack Bradley, Jack Bradley's Players, and we went to Sheerness and it

was pretty bad business there as well, and finally we ended up, later on in the year, doing a summer season at Bognor Regis on the Pier, Bognor Regis, there was a little theatre there, next door to the Variety theatre.

KH: And were you doing Rep still there?

JY: Oh yes, we were doing the same thing every week, weekly rep, a play a week and I stayed with him for just under a year and did a play every week. Every week we did a different play.

KH: Did you find it difficult getting into the roles because it was such a short rehearsal space? How did you try and...

JY: Yes I mean obviously when you start, when I started anyway, I was green and as I say, I'd done work in the army but it's not the same, you either learnt your lines and did your work and acted well or you got the elbow you know. There were plenty of other actors around who could take your job. I don't know, you're young and you sort of cope with the pressure.

KH: How long did people tend to stay in weekly Rep? Were there people who'd been doing it for years and years?

JY: Yes there was one guy in that company. A guy he's obviously gone now, Charlie Bolt. Lovely guy but he'd been in Rep, weekly Rep all his working life. Oh god yes, there was one famous night [laughs] we were doing a play called Black Limelight, which was a vehicle for quite a well known actress at that time called Margaret Rawlings. Anyway, Jack had sort of, Jack Bradley who ran our company, he'd decided to do this play and what he used to do of course, because they were quite rogue, a bit of a rogue these actor managers, he used to sometimes change the title of the play, so you didn't have to pay Royalties on it you see and Black Limelight became The Night Has Eyes and when he with his company in Aberystwyth in Wales he put on a play called Granite but called it [Inaudible...] an old Welsh Fable. So anyway this night we were doing this play and Charlie Bolt had been quite a solid, dependable actor and he'd been in Rep for, as I say, all his life, and he had this part as the detective, that's right and he suddenly went, his mind went, that was it, it was overload and because he used to learn his lines absolutely dead letter perfect you know, because when you were actually rehearsing with him during the week, if a word went it used to throw him completely, because you didn't have prompters in those days. Oh no you had to get out of it, just make lines up but anyway he seemed to have a mental breakdown really and he was the detective, opening the play, interrogating this wife whose husband was on the run because he was supposed to be the killer who could see in the dark, you know, the Dorset killer or something, so anyway he suddenly went, that was it, he dived and obviously forgot his lines completely and kept going 'Da, Duh, Uh', all over the stage and Jack, who was actually playing the part of the Dorset Killer, Jack Bradley was behind stage going 'God dammit he'll never work for me again!' whispering. And we were sort of ASMs, young actors, and I had a part in the second act as a reporter, sort of coming you know to get the story sort of thing and Jack was sort of trying to get the...he'd sort of got the book

from the stage management side and was backstage trying to follow Charlie who was wandering all over the stage, trying to give him the line you know. Of course Charlie had gone, couldn't take it. So in the end Jack sort of said [loud stage whisper] 'Get on!' Well I said 'I don't go on until the second act', [In Jack's Voice] 'Never mind, never mind, get on and do the scene now, do the scene with the woman now' [In JY voice] 'Alright' so I went on in the first act and did my scene with the poor actress who was sort of you know thinking my god! My mate Don Sartain, he had a part that was in the second act too, he went on and did his part and then anyway Charlie had the time off during the second act and he was sort in his dressing room with his head in his hands and Jack was saying, 'You'll never work again' and all this sort of thing you see, so when it came time for us to go on properly in the second act we said, 'well what are we going to do' and Jack said, 'Oh get on again, they won't notice, they won't notice, they won't notice.'

KH: And do the same scene again!

JY: So I said alright so we went on and did the same parts again you see... this is true honestly it's no exaggeration.

KH: How did the audience react?

JY: Well the audience were bemused of course [laughs] because the whole plot line had been dropped because of Charlie not sort of remembering his lines anyway, you know. So come the third act, he recovered enough to get back on stage to continue with his part you see and there was another old actor, who was Jack Bradley, who ran the company, his partner, [Morris Neville], who was his uncle in some towns and his father in other towns [laughs] anyway we won't go into that. And he was playing the old family lawyer in it, he was about sort of seventy by this time, or sixty or seventy, so he comes in and finally sort of says [in gruff old voice] 'yes well you're, well quite right, I, although I've been a family friend, I have to confess, I am the Killer! [laughs] And I can see in the dark so I will turn out the lights!' and he puts his hand on the light switch, 'I will turn out the lights....Lights! I am going to turn out the lights now', and we were obviously doing stage management backstage as well, and there was a tatty old lighting board and of course we kicked it in the end and the lights went off and of course during all that kerfuffle on stage, because he was famed for stabbing his victims, he'd dropped the knife and he couldn't see because he was about sixty-five, seventy and the stage was in practically near blackout. So he said 'And I'm going to kill you and stab you... when I find the knife... and when I've got the knife here I'll stab you' and he was wandering about and then Jack who was backstage, suddenly his voice came out [in Jack's voice], 'Strangle her you bloody fool!' [laughs] honestly, and the curtain came down and the audience were sort of [starts slow clapping in imitation of the audience, KH and JY laughing] Is that the end of the play? That's no exaggeration that, there were a few nights like that of course, it used to happen in weekly Rep.

KH: So what did you do after you left there?

JY: Oh after I left there, well we decided it was tatty you see and Donald Sartain, he had a mate he'd met at university and they decided to start a company down at Lyme Regis called The Renaissance Theatre Company and in fact we gave the name to Ken Branagh later on because Ken Branagh ran a company called Renaissance but he got the name obviously from our company. And he Donald Sartain asked me to join him down there but six months before that I worked at the Greenham common airbase, to earn money to finance starting up.

KH: So you were financing the company?

JY: Yes, yes as well as Donald and Austin Rosser was his partner, but they were the main, they were slightly older, they'd been to University and he was about twenty five, twenty six. So anyway there's a theatre down in Lyme Regis, a little theatre down on the cliff top and it had been closed for about two or three years and so we went down there, Enid Blyton time, sort of painted the theatre ourselves for the summer season. We started actually early, in April and I decided, Donald did all the business side because he was very good at that and I decided, we all acted and directed and things everyone who was in the company, but I decided to do the backstage, take charge of all the backstage work and getting the scenery because we still had scenery in those days and I remember on the being on the famous Lyme Regis cob painting the scenery and cutting it down to size and everything. Anyway we ran that, we did a repertoire system of four plays, instead of doing a play a week you know, we decided to do a repertoire system and do slightly better plays. We did Candida I remember by George Bernard Shaw and what else did we do? We did a melodrama, Sweeney Todd, our own version of that, a French farce and An Inspector Calls, J.B Priestley.

KH: So were you quite a small company?

JY: Oh god there were only seven of us and they were obviously small cast plays and what we did, we put a play on for two days, then changed it with the next play for two days and changed it with the next play because it was obviously a holiday audience coming down so they could see if they wanted to, three plays, usually they used to come for a week to ten days in those days and so they could see four play in ten days, we did a children's play in the morning as well and that was great, it was nice we had some good actors, a good standard. Donald continued with that company the next year but I left because I wanted to stretch myself even further and there was a company further down the coast, a three weekly company The West of England, theatre company, quite a well known company. Joan Plowright worked there at one time. Anyway I went down there, they had two companies there and one company would play in Exmouth which was the home base town and the other company would be touring round Devon and they'd come in and we'd go out to take the play on tour and that's how they could sort of do it three weekly and we did damn good plays there.

KH: What kind of plays were you doing?

JY: Shaw, funnily enough we did Bernard Shaw again, Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare things like that. Contemporary plays as well.

KH: What kind of contemporary plays were you doing?

JY: Well in those days just around about then there was a complete revolution in the theatre with *Look Back in Anger*, 1956 this was, that's when the Royal Court in London, you know obviously put that play on and also television had started and I think, I'm pretty certain that the commercial television had also started and so you were getting plays again up to date plays, contemporary plays had started to be put on and an audience demanded more realism of course as well.

KH: Did you see *Look Back in Anger* as kind of a play that changed...

JY: Yes, oh yes, yes, because when I first... I come from Liverpool originally. I mean I wanted to be in the school plays you see, at the Liverpool Institute where a couple of the Beatles went funnily enough. I was in their first movie actually with the Beatles, so we had a bit of a chat, there was George and Paul went to The Institute. Anyway I wanted to be in the school play and I was told [in Liverpool accent], 'No you can't be in the school play' I said [in a strong Liverpool accent], 'why can't I be in the school play then sir?' and he said 'because you don't talk right, you don't talk properly' you know because he had rather a posh Liverpool accent and I thought what do you mean I don't talk right? So I thought right if I want to be an actor and we all, in those days of course you had to talk like [in RP accent] Richard Todd and like that you know, very much so and those sort of plays and so I decided right I'd sort of listen and listen and watch and in the end you had to change your voice. Then of course 1956, suddenly *Look Back in Anger* came and all the contemporary work started to come in, we started to rediscover our roots, [in Liverpool accent] 'Oh well yeah as a matter of fact I come from Liverpool like' you know because they are all sort of working class plays. John Arden, people like that were writing for the theatre. *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*, in which I played *Sergeant Musgrave* up at Dundee later on. So there was a complete change around.

KH: Did you find that liberating as an actor?

JY: Yes oh yes because in the end you know doing Agatha Christie and even period plays and also they were contemporary plays which were dealing with contemporary problems and the audiences were attracted to them as well. Although people still like, I'm afraid, your Agatha Christie plays and your farces, there's nothing wrong with them, they entertain people, but of course the repertory movement has dwindled and dwindled. There used to be a repertory theatre in practically every town in England you know. But from the West of England, I was there about a year. I graduated finally to Birmingham, because the Mecca for regional actors in those years was Birmingham Rep.

KH: Why do you think that was?

JY: Well it had a very, very good standard and it was three weekly as opposed to mostly weekly or even fortnightly but it was three weeks, you had three weeks to rehearse and

put on a play. Fantastic. It really was a very good standard and a very famous repertory as well.

KH: Do you have good memories of working there?

JY: Yes, well the first time I went up there, because you know you audition in London etc, and I went up there and they were doing Hamlet and I was thinking ooh I wonder if, you know, I'll get a decent part in this? And I got this dreadful part of Fortinbras right at the end of Hamlet, he comes on and sorts everybody out, you sort of wait around for about three and a half hours getting more and more nervous as you're waiting for your first night. But it was Ian Richardson's Hamlet, he was a young actor then and he played Hamlet and then it was just for that season, but a few years later I went back, there was a director called Ronnie [inaudible] and I'd been doing telly and things and I'd been I suppose made a little bit of a name for myself on telly playing these popular telly things. So he asked me if I'd like to go to Birmingham Rep again and what would I like to play? And he was doing The Quare Fellow and that's when I met Derek Smith in fact, was in The Quare Fellow.

KH: What were your impressions of that production?

JY: Excellent, marvellous production, very good and some jolly good actors in it as well.

KH: What did you like about the play?

JY: About the play? Well first of all if you've got practically the lead part in it it's easier to like the play. I like the style in which he directed it, it was a very open, free wheeling style and the fact that you had three weeks, you know luxury, to learn lines, because line learning can be...women actually, that's a generalisation isn't it, women tend to learn lines quicker than guys funnily enough. It can be quite a hard slog but you get used to it you know. Anyway from Birmingham what happened? Oh yes just before Birmingham I did a terrible tour, a play written by a guy called [David Kerr] who was Hilda Baker's stooge, remember there was a variety performer, quite famous called Hilda Baker and she used to have this great tall sort of gormless looking guy standing, the guy never used to speak, she used to go, [impression of Hilda Baker] 'Ooh she knows you know' about this, 'I told her to come back soon, I said to her' anyway all this sort of Variety stuff. But anyway he had this play called Vice Takes a Holiday and I was cast as Ed, the lead in it [impression of Ed] who sort of runs all the rackets, the girls, you know and all that sort of thing and sort of get all the people, local dignitaries sometimes and then blackmailing them because I'd put them in these rooms in the dark with these girls and infra red cameras, because I could see in the dark and all that sort of nonsense. And it's funny I can remember, and there are lots of parts you forget, but I can remember lines from that, when you're sort of saying, one of the girls came to me and said, 'I can't go out anymore, I can't do this work anymore' and I was saying, 'listen you're going out now and you're going out on the beat where the oldest and filthiest men go and you're going to stand in the shadows in case the lamplight puts the punters off and you're going to go with these filthy men and you're going to bring them back here and dammit Danny's gonna be right behind you...' It was a terrible bloody play. We got the bird in

Reading, the students got in, I remember there's a theatre in Reading we played and they got in and quite rightly sent the damn thing stamping and cheering and everything and I remember sitting on the sofa and saying 'listen I know it's a terrible play' you know, at the noise, I said 'but you know, the pubs shut at ten thirty, lets finish the play, let's go down the pub' [laughs] and I died in a pool of blood at the end and they threw split peas. It was a great night. Marvellous night, you never forget those sort of nights.

KH: How long were you touring for?

JY: We toured that for a couple of months I think, at least a couple of months.

KH: Did you enjoy touring?

JY: No, no, I hated touring really, it's all that travelling and on a Sunday you had to find digs every Sunday, you had to go round knocking on doors.

KH: So you had to do that yourself? It wasn't organised?

JY: Oh no, no you had to find your own digs yes. I mean landladies were quite funny at times. There was one landlady when I was down in Bognor, there used to be theatrical landladies and they used to pack their houses with as many people as they could get into the house. And this house she had, there was a bay window on the first floor of the stairs and she'd put a double bed in there and pulled a curtain across, you know enough to get two more people in. And she had her own bed in the kitchen [laughs] and she used to be cooking this sort of full English breakfast for everybody and we'd be down there, all the theatricals and the variety people as well and her husband would be in his pyjamas sitting up in bed sort of having his porridge or whatever it was. Those were funny days. But then oh that's right, I had an interview, I'm chopping and changing now, it was before Birmingham, I had an interview with Harry Hanson again.

KH: This is the person who'd refused you?

JY: This is the guy who'd refused me originally you see, or his manager refused me up at Peterborough. But I went to see Harry, did my audition piece for him and everything and the phone was going a bit and he was a bit agitated so he said, [in Harry's voice] 'Oh I'm sorry about the phone, it's my leading man in Bradford, he's collapsed' he said, 'well you're a bit young aren't you?', because I was about twenty two, twenty three, 'but you're a big strong boy get up there and see what you can do' [laughs] so of I went playing these leading men parts, aged twenty-two, up in Bradford, but he was a funny guy. An actor used to work for him called Leonard Pearce, now Leonard became quite famous later on in his life as granddad in Only Fools and Horses, he was a lovely guy Leonard, but in those days he was a young leading man for Harry and Harry was rather fond of him, and Harry had a habit of going round his company unannounced just to see if they were being run alright because he had these companies in various towns. And Leonard was messing around, I'm afraid, at the Matinee, one matinee and suddenly

heard through the prompt corner [in Harry's voice], 'Leonard Pearce you're a naughty boy' and it was Harry and he thought, 'Oh god Harry's here.' Yes Harry used to have a couple of wigs, he used to have one wig for needing a haircut and a wig for having had a haircut...oh dear, they were characters, real characters in Rep actually. Somebody wrote a book once Exit through the Fireplace.

KH: Yes I've come across that.

JY: And that's correct, doors not opening because the scenery was so old and the only place to exit was through the fireplace. In that first company I was in, because the door had been screwed in and screwed out in the same holes, just different paint on it, the old actor came in and the door just fell off its hinges, flat, straight down bang onto the stage, and he comes in and afterwards [pretending to be this actor], 'Do you think the audience noticed, do you think they noticed?' [in his own voice] 'Yes I think they noticed Morris, I think they would notice.' And so one obviously did summer seasons and winter seasons and I was never out of work though, I was lucky, never out of work, just moving from one particular theatre to another, one town to another you know, sometimes staying with a company for six months, nine months whatever, sometimes just for three months. The West of England Theatre Company which used to tour Devon in Winter time, and there was a stormy really stormy night, wind blowing a gale and we were in Brixham a little fishing place down in Devon and we had to take the whole theatre in, lights everything when we were touring and in those days of course you had these huge flats, as part of the scenery which were like huge, canvas on wood, like an artist would use except six, maybe six feet wide, four feet to six feet wide and about twelve feet high. And the only place into this, it was a town hall, but the hall we were using was actually at the top of the building and the only way in was up the fire escape up the outside and so we had to start carting all this scenery up there and there were two or three of us on this quite large flat and the wind was howling so much that suddenly it started to take off you know and it disappeared over the bay, we never saw it again, it took off like a kite. Great days.

KH: When you finished at Birmingham Rep what did you go on to do then?

JY: Birmingham, yes I remember Guildford, I was down at Guildford Rep, where I stayed for about a year, playing very good parts, we did Hamlet again, I played the King this time which was a bit of an advance from playing bloody Fortinbras and then I suddenly decided, I'd been in theatre then around about six years.

KH: What year was that?

JY: We're talking now about 1961. So yes around about six years I'd been running round the theatre, so I decided that was it I wanted to get into television which was obviously very up and coming at this time. So I gave my notice in, deliberately put myself out of work and came into town, we got a flat, I'd just got married as well, to my first wife, I've had two, and we waited and we were pretty poor, and it was opposite Holloway prison and I remember going down to the Labour Exchange thinking Oh god was this a good idea to put myself out of work, having not really been out of work at

that time, and I remember Coral sort of sticking her head out of the top floor. We had these two rooms right at the top of this building, and I remember I was coming back from the Labour Exchange feeling a bit sort of fed up with myself and I'd been for an interview for a television show called Deadline Midnight which was ATV, were actually starting a new series about newspaper men and the stories they go out on and all that sort of thing and she was saying, 'You've got the part! You've got the part' and I was thinking oh my god. And that was luck because the casting director, Monty [inaudible] he used to travel round the country in those days and he'd just seen me in particular Reps that I'd been in and that particular week he'd caught me I was playing not a bad part and he thought I was ok and so he remembered. About three times he'd sort of seen me over the two or three years before and so I had that extra I suppose from the other actors who'd gone up for the part.

KH: Did you find that your work in the theatre, working in Rep under such tight conditions. Did you find that helped you when you went into television and you were doing a performance live and things?

JY: Yes it did, I mean you were used to, because there was no recording you see, this was 1961, just before they'd started recording so they were doing it live. So in a way because you'd never known about recording you didn't miss it or didn't feel the pressures quite as much as you would now. So we used to do the programme live and if you were say doing Play for Today and you were doing it live, and the television wanted to repeat it say on the Thursday, you'd done it on the Sunday, or the Sunday night play, if they repeated it on the Thursday you'd have to go in and do it again. There was an actor died once on television, it was quite a famous thing, unfortunately for the guy, well more than unfortunate. But yes he was playing the scene and suddenly he slipped out of camera and he was dead and it was for commercial television and there was obviously a break, advertising break, and during that break the director came down and re-organised his shooting, he said I'll sort of stay on the floor and direct the cameras from down here and you make that up as an actor, you do that as an actor, and they got through it.

KH: You did work at the Edinburgh festival. When was that?

JY: That was in the 60's.

KH: What were you doing there?

JY: They put on, I'll be very theatrical now, The Scottish Play, Macbeth and they wanted me to play Macduff and so I obviously went up there and played Macduff up there and funnily enough whilst I was up there, Dr Who, I was the, I'd started Dr Who, the very first adventure, my claim to fame in Dr Who because the people that write to you, you know the sort of Dr Who anoraks, sort of say, 'you were the first villain, you were the very first villain in Dr Who you know' I still get letters these days.. and go to these conventions and things...they're all mad, they're very nice, they're very sweet but they're all mad as hatters [laughs]. Anyway so I managed because Macduff has time off during the play, I managed to get down and they wanted me to do another episode of

Dr Who with the Daleks so I went down and shot that in a week and then came back and picked up the part of Macduff and then about three months later somebody had seen me in the festival playing Macduff and decided I'd be very good as Macbeth and so when they did Macbeth three months later I was Macbeth at Dundee. And then went back there and played Sergeant Musgrave as well. So I enjoyed it, obviously enjoyed it, very hard work I mean doing major Shakespearean parts, it does, you have to sort of live eat, sleep and dream that part you know. You've no time or energy to do anything else. But again marvellous, it beats going down the mines you know, life is tough but it's not that tough. I think actors are sometimes a bit precious about what a very tough time they had and all that sort of nonsense. You're mostly doing stuff you want to do, funnily enough it is television because I did a tremendous amount of television after 1961, I didn't go back into the theatre for quite some time and it's in television, because it pays good money, some of the parts, the writing can be rubbish you know, but you do get good parts.

KH: Do you think acting styles have changed over the period?

JY: Yes I think so I mean luckily nobody filmed oneself when one was starting out because I'm sure one would be dreadful. I mean sometimes old telly's come on because you know I did the avengers, I did a few of The Avengers, you sort of occasionally think oh I'll have a look when it comes on, you know it's repeated and you think oh my god the way we used to act.

KH: What do you think the main differences were?

JY: Oh style. What is acceptable as truth. I mean no acting is truthful it's always enhanced you know. It's a story. But we act what contemporary audiences think or will accept and that is real life, it's like EastEnders or something which I was in for a bit. It's not real but it looks as if it's real, and The Street, I did a running character in The Street, Coronation Street and it's an essence, it's a sort of a distillation of what passes for reality and I mean styles change, people change, the youth of today because I obviously direct and teach these days and my students today, these days are different from when I first started teaching about twenty years ago. There's a different attitude and different styles that's all.

KH: So when you say styles changed do you mean it's more naturalistic?

JY: I suppose yes, when people call it naturalistic, yes it's just the same as style changed from the 40's or the 50's or even way back to the 19th century I mean styles do change.

KH: Did censorship have a big impact on your work? Was it something that you were aware of?

JY: No not really, the only censorship was that terrible sex tour. Well it wasn't a sex tour, Vice Takes a Holiday, very mild play it was really when you think. But we used to

go round the third rate Variety Shows in those days and the shows they used to have on there were censored because they used to have what they called nude shows. The women, the nude women were actually not supposed to move they had to just be tableau. One director producer got round it by, it was in all the newspapers, where she suddenly screamed and ran offstage and she said, 'well it's a mouse, a mouse, I'm frightened of, a mouse came on stage and I was frightened'. A load of rubbish of course but censorship, not really, not really because most of the plays especially in Rep they'd been done anyway in the West End and therefore if they'd been any censorship happening they'd have been censored before you know. Occasionally you'd get censorship of contemporary plays that the Royal Court were doing but I never really, not really. Language, yes you had to be very careful about language in a play, you know using four letter words but now it's totally, thank god, censorship suddenly disappeared. Well not suddenly, but finally disappeared with The Lady Chatterley case, you know. So no I can't say that it really did affect me, I can't remember anyway.

KH: I was going to ask you, I'm not sure when it was, your agent sent me your CV, you played Jimmy Porter in Look Back in Anger didn't you?

JY: Yes that was ages ago... it was after it had come out. I mean I did both, there's a part called Cliff in it as well, so I played both those parts.

KH: When was that?

JY: We're talking now about 1957, '58. It came out in 56 didn't it yes, and obviously it had run at The Court and then they release plays for Rep so probably round about 57, 58 59 maybe, no it wasn't 59 must have been 58.

KH: Do you have good memories of that production?

JY: Hell of a part to try and learn, tremendously difficult, because it's so long, but not really, it was fun.

KH: Such a lot of fuss has been made of Look Back in Anger. Did you feel it was a very exciting part to be playing?

JY: Oh yes, yes it was marvellous part to get your teeth into. Both the parts were actually in the play but yes, yes very much so. When something happens like that, like it is when you're in a film or a play that suddenly starts to get notoriety, you don't really know at the time it's only in retrospect that you think ah yes that was the time theatre changed. There was a wind of change as Harold Macmillan says, blowing through the Arts.

KH: What kind of audience reactions were you getting to that play do you remember?

JY: For Look Back? A lot of tuts, tut tutting, depending where you were playing, which part of the country you were playing, and if you were playing at a matinee because obviously the older people used to come to matinees. They used to serve tea and biscuits for matinees in the interval, it was quite a done thing, even in the West End they used to serve tea and biscuits.

KH: Was that disruptive to your performance?

JY: Well yes because of course they'd get the tea and biscuits in the interval and they'd be sipping their tea and then they'd still be sipping their tea and rattling their or they'd be coming and taking out the trays you were sort of starting the second act or the third act. Yes I suppose it can be. Yes, yes. I remember when we were doing The Renaissance theatre company down at Lyme Regis, it was on the cliff edge and again it was a stormy, stormy night and the audience started to get a bit fidgety and we thought what the hell's going on and of course the waves were lashing against the and going up the drains and the sand hoppers were coming up the aisle and people were sort of wondering what they were and then we had a black out, total blackout, electric storm and we were doing Candida and we thought well, and we actually carried on, rummaging around in the pitch black for candles and making our entrance. I made an exit and an entrance without the audience seeing me, it was pitch black and the lights suddenly came back on again after twenty minutes or thirty minutes and we got a round of applause and all that sort of nonsense. I mean there are so many memories it's difficult to remember them and put them in chronological order you know.

KH: Do you think that the loss of Rep... do you think that's a loss to actors today, do you think that formed a crucial part of your training and other people's training?

JR: Yes I suppose you, every generation thinks oh well it's a pity that the newer generation didn't...but it was tremendous experience, it is a shame that they can't learn their craft in theatre, in weekly rep you know. It does enable you to sort of, it gets you ready for anything that might happen because even in television when your doing recording, for an actor it's still live inside your head, because you don't want to make a mistake so there's still quite a lot of pressure there, the actor's the last person you want to make a mistake.

KH: At the time did it strike you that there was a big difference between regional theatre and London theatre?

JY: Yes you seemed to think so, because they had longer rehearsal periods at the start and that was your aim to become a West End actor, I mean I finally made it round about '61 I think it was and I did about a year in play called, quite a successful play at the time, called [inaudible] and I was playing a leading part in that and I must say I did think at the time, well that's it, like when you got to Birmingham, three weekly Rep, wow made that and you know damn good standard and finally you arrive and you're in the West End, and that, [in Liverpool accent] 'when you consider I couldn't be in the school play when I was a young lad' you know and suddenly there I am in the West End you think well that's good, it's an achievement I suppose really for a working class lad to finally realise

your ambition, you know. But then you move on, you want to do other things. I started directing in the 70's round about 1970 which I prefer to do, and then teaching started about twenty years ago, which I like doing. I still do radio which I like, no lines to learn you see, you just go in and do it which is good, and again harking back to those Liverpool days, I was selling my voice which I was told, [in Liverpool accent] 'I didn't have a good voice like' I couldn't be in show business. You have the satisfaction of saying yes well I'm selling my voice now. It's good, you know, which is nice.

KH: Thank you.