

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Michael Allen – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Tom Dymond**

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Theatre-goer. Peggy Ashcroft; Richard Burton; Jean-Louis Barrault; French plays; Christopher Fry; John Gielgud; Vivien Leigh; Moscow Arts Theatre; Laurence Olivier; John Osborne; programmes; Anthony Quayle; Royal Shakespeare Company; Shakespeare performance; George Bernard Shaw; The Shaw Festival; theatre-going; translated plays; Kenneth Tynan; verse-speaking The Wandering Jew; Orson Welles; Donald Wolfit.

TD: We're just talking about Peter Quayle, briefly...

MA: Anthony Quayle.

TD: Anthony Quayle, sorry, and how he did or did not form the Royal Shakespeare Company.

MA: No, I was saying I can never understand why Peter Hall claims to be the founder of the company when he took over an existing company. What he did was to change it from being a lengthy summer season, to an all year round activity, which it still is today, of course, but it's quite wrong to think that there wasn't a very flourishing company at Stratford before Peter Hall came along. In fact personally, I think that what went on in the ten years before Peter Hall came along – this is a purely personal view – I thought were amongst the greatest things I've ever seen on the stage.

TD: Which productions would those have been?

MA: Well, I brought the programmes. You see, I was a schoolboy at a grammar school in North London and I started going to the theatre regularly from early forties onwards, my mother used to take me and then when I was a teenager I used to go under my own steam, and one day I went to see Love's Labour's Lost - that's when the Old Vic was at the New Theatre, before the Old Vic had been refurbished - and I was much struck by the fact that because I had no idea what was going to happen, the famous coup de theatre right at the end when Marcade comes in and says – I can't remember the exact words, I should do! - I had no idea that that was going to happen; right at the height of the jollifications you suddenly get this terrible black despair coming in and I thought, 'It just shows that Shakespeare works on the stage and if I'm going to Oxford to read

English...’ - which I was intending to do and which in fact I did – ‘...I think it would be a good idea to see all of Shakespeare’s plays before I have to read them, because I’ll have to read at least half of them at Oxford’. So I tried very hard to see all of Shakespeare’s plays and this would be between 1949 and 1953 when I went up to Oxford. And I saw something like 35 out of 37.

TD: Goodness! In Stratford and in London?

MA: In Stratford and in London. In one or two cases I had to dash about a bit. I saw Pericles, Prince of Tyre by hitchhiking to the Meadow Market Theatre, and of course it was then a semi-amateur company, and I used to hitchhike down to Stratford and stay in the youth hostel, costing one and ninepence a night or something like that and buy tickets for the gallery, and I kept all the programmes and as I say, I saw all of them and I saw them with absolute top casts because... For example, in 1950 in successive nights I saw John Gielgud as Lear, Gielgud as Benedick with Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice and the following night I saw him - Gielgud - as Cassius with Anthony Quayle as Brutus, and a very distinguished cast, and the next night I saw him in Peter Brook’s production of Measure for Measure in which Gielgud played Angelo and the night after that... Julius Caesar, King Lear - sorry I’m saying them in the wrong order but anyway, so it was King Lear, Much Ado, Julius Caesar and Measure for Measure. I’ve got them all here, actually, so here is the 1950 Festival, Measure for Measure, produced by Peter Brook: Harry Andrews, John Gielgud, Leon Quartermaine, Robert Hardy, Robert Shaw, George Rose, Adam Badell, Barbara Jefford...

TD: Star-studded!

MA: Oh absolutely, tremendous. ...Maxine Audley, wonderful cast. Julius Caesar, Andrew Crookshank, Alan Badell, Anthony Quayle, Harry Andrews, John Gielgud, and so on and so forth. It was because of his performance of Cassius in this that Hollywood... invited him to Hollywood to play the part in the famous movie with James Mason as Brutus and Marlon Brando as Mark Anthony. Here is Much Ado, again supported by Gielgud and Robert Shaw. You’ve got Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice and Barbara Jefford as Hero.

TD: What was Peggy Ashcroft like to watch?

MA: Oh, I mean, magical. She always seemed to be so completely true, you didn’t really think of watching Peggy Ashcroft, you thought you were seeing the character. I saw her dozens of times during that time. This is what I got out of sequence, the four plays on four successive nights, King Lear, Gielgud as Lear, Maxine Audley, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davis and Peggy Ashcroft as the three sisters.

TD: How was Gielgud’s Lear, was that amazing?

MA: It wasn't really his part, of course, but he played it as if he was a very enthusiastic and vigorous old man. He comes in – when would it be, is it the second act – comes in through the door, he's just been out hunting, so this is just when you're getting to that awful denouement, the row with Regan and thinking of himself in the prime of life because he's so vigorous and 'ah, see, I'm still young, not a care in the world'. So he did that very well, he didn't really have the voice for the storm scene but then who does? I brought some other Shakespeare... The following year, 1951, here we have Michael Redgrave as Richard II, backed up by Harry Andrews as Bolingbroke, Hugh Griffiths... who else? Anybody else of any note? Rachel Roberts, quite a few well known names and then the following night I saw Henry IV part one, where Richard Burton plays Prince Hal and Anthony Quayle plays Falstaff, and Redgrave plays Hotspur – by the way, he was wonderful as Hotspur, he did the stammer terrifically, you know. Redgrave was a wonderful sort of improviser, he gave the impression of improvising the part the whole time and he was really fantastic. At that particular time some critics thought of him as almost on a par with Olivier and Gielgud.

TD: How was Richard Burton up against Hotspur?

MA: Oh, he was terrific, he was wonderful, in fact the third night was of course part two and here is Burton again and the way he plays the final scene when Falstaff comes forward and says, 'my boy, my boy!', and coldly he says 'How ill grey hairs become a fool...'... what is it?... '...go home old man and say thy prayers'. Anyway, that was absolutely...! He brought the whole temperature of the house came down to sort of zero just by the way he said it, it was terrific - he was a great loss to the Shakespearean stage, actually.

TD: It's incredible the amount of plays he did in such a short time as well, you think they have a whole year to do the complete works and they seem to be rushing through them one a day, almost, it's quite incredible, really.

MA: A couple of years later here's Olivier as Macbeth - by the way, he didn't play it well the night I saw him.

TD: I haven't heard about him playing that, actually.

MA: And here is Vivien Leigh, I thought she was very good as Lady Macbeth, but Olivier was rather ill at ease playing Macbeth, didn't seem to quite know how to play it, and he made a lot of technical mistakes on stage. That was the night I saw him. For example, when the ghost of Banquo comes in, he gave a tremendous start of surprise and horror before he'd turned around and saw him.

TD: [laughs] That's a slight error, yes. How was Vivien Leigh against him?

MA: I thought she was terrific, I admired her very much as a stage actress.

TD: People accused her for being too delicate sometimes, in retrospect.

MA: Oh no, she had a nasty edge to her voice if she wanted to. Here's... Oh! I don't know, why do we go to Othello? I think my wife saw that... Here is Titus Andronicus, which is of course with Olivier and Leigh. I've given him a... I think it's a cross, anyway, Maxine Audley, so anyway, I think those make the point, don't they, that the extent to which the great names of the English theatre went to Stratford for the summer season, absolutely fantastic. And, by the way, the Old Vic was worth going to as well, Tyrone Guthrie was in charge. This envelope is mainly Shakespeare, you see, so this is when the Stratford programmes came to London, this is Gielgud in Lear again, Gielgud in Much Ado - he revived that production many times - and here is the Old Vic doing Henry IV part two, which was very good. Open Air Theatre doing Twelfth Night with Robert Atkins as Sir Toby Belch. Here is Peter Brook producing Paul Scofield as Hamlet.

TD: What was that production like, because that's quite renowned?

MA: I don't remember it. I have a feeling that my wife - then my fiancée - went to see it, because I can't remember anything about it at all, so I don't think I saw it but anyway, this was 1955, yes, my fiancée's handwriting there. Is this the sort of thing you want?

TD: Definitely, especially having seen lots of these actors as well. ##

MA: Here is another, Memorial Company Theatre - they used to bring them to London, you see, that wasn't invented by Peter Hall - so here is Gielgud as Prospero. I thought this should have been his best - by the way, it was also directed by Peter Brook. This is when Peter Brook was working regularly in London instead of coming once every 25 years to appear in a converted warehouse in a suburb. But unfortunately Drury Lane is a huge theatre and I thought the production got a little bit swallowed up. Of course in those days I was always right at the back as a student so didn't really... Henry VIII with Gielgud as Cardinal Wolsey.

TD: That's not often performed, is it, Henry VIII?

MA: No. I saw it twice in those years, I've got a programme with this and then other. By the way, we've got Edith Evans here as Catherine.

TD: How was Edith Evans?

MA: I don't remember, but I have little snapshots in my head of some of the moments. I was... For a year at Cambridge, I was on the Russian course which meant I was a contemporary of Michael Frayne and Alan Bennett, who were both on the Russian course at Cambridge. I wasn't actually in their class but this was the Marlowe Society doing Romeo and Juliet and it doesn't say so but in fact the part of Tybalt was played by

– oh now, yes it does, beg your pardon, here we are. Here is John Barton playing Mercutio - and he was wonderful, by the way - and here is Peter Hall as Tybalt.

TD: How did you rate Peter Hall as Tybalt?

MA: I thought he was wonderful. He was saturnine... quite a powerful - as you would expect - stage presence. I've never seen a duel done as well as it was there, really good. Titus Andronicus, Donald Wolfitt was touring and here he is, we used to have to go to [the] Bedford Theatre, Camden Town. Unfortunately I never saw him as Lear, I don't know why but anyway, this was Macbeth which he did extremely well, I thought.

TD: One of the names which isn't remembered so much now, is he, but he was back then.

MA: He was regarded as the best King Lear, he was extremely theatrical [adopts thespian voice] in a most tremendous way, and I saw him somewhere here as an act of piety to his original boss in the theatre who was an actor called Mattison Lang. Wolfitt started off with him as a student in his company and as an act of piety he revived an extraordinarily melodramatic play called The Wandering Jew which Mattison Lang had played for years and years and years, and there is a sort of unique opportunity to see a sort of really a late Victorian drama done. It was really on the verge of being risible because it was so hammy. I remember at the end of the third act, somebody says, [thespian voice] 'What is that light through yonder...', something or other, and this is the curtain line and Wolfitt by this time was trying to control a very restive audience who were going, [makes sounds of coughing and clearing his throat] and he said, 'That is the lamp...' - coughing in the audience - '...by whose light...' - a lot of coughing in the audience - '...some find...' - more coughing - '...their way...' - he said, glaring at the audience - '...to God.' [laughs]. Curtain!

TD: That soon shut them up, I suppose!

MA: So in other words it wasn't really quite the same. Here is a Shakespeare, here is the Memorial people once again bringing Much Ado and King Lear. I saw Gielgud in two different productions of King Lear at Stratford.

TD: Which one was better?

MA: I think the first. I didn't really like... the second one had a set by Naguchi, the famous Japanese sculptor, and it didn't really work and it was just sort of square.

TD: A bit too modern.

MA: Now here is Gielgud with his own company - and this was 1953, the Coronation year - and he didn't appear in Richard! His was a very famous Richard II, of course, but I never saw him, but he got Paul Scofield to play the part here, ably supported by Eric Porter and Paul Damon, various other people. He was terrific, and then he did *The Way of the World*...

TD: Congreve.

MA ...Indeed. And here with Scofield, Eric Porter... Mason, Pauline Jennings and Eileen Hurley as Mrs Marwood, Pamela Brown as Mrs... she was terrific, and Margaret Rutherford.

TD: That's a Tennent production as well, that's interesting.

MA: Yes, well of course Tennent's paid for it, and if you read the *Life of John Gielgud* by Morley, he gives quite a lot of information about the background to all that. Anyway, here is *Venice Preserved* with Gielgud and Scofield by Otway, which is a revival - so he didn't just do the obvious things, this was a revival. And Peter Sallis, who is still with us in *Wallace and Gromit*. This was June '53, and I happened to be in the audience the evening that it was announced that Gielgud was getting a knighthood in the coronation honours, something long, long delayed for sort of social reasons, as you might say. Gielgud doesn't like being greeted on an entrance because he thinks it disturbs the way the play goes, but when he came on there was tremendous applause, absolutely tremendous, went on for about... and he held his attitude and he kept on holding it and holding it and holding it, and in the end the tremendous applause and cheering died down -, it must have been two or three minutes - and then his first line after that, 'My lord, I'm not such a miserable wretch as you may think me.'! At which point, the whole house dissolved into laughter and he had to abandon his pose and turn to the audience and acknowledge, which he wouldn't...

TD: We've talked a lot about Shakespeare, also during this period as well we have the obvious, John Osborne and everything.

MA: Well, Osborne was '56.

TD: Yes, so it was a bit later.

MA: Orson Welles' *Othello*.

TD: How was that, goodness.

MA: This was Olivier. Olivier, of course, took the St James's Theatre and he put on the most wonderful things. He didn't really make a tremendous impression on me as

Othello. I mean, he was terrible noble and sonorous and a big stage presence but I don't think he illuminated the part all that well. Incidentally, a few years later I saw Paul Robeson as Othello at Stratford and he too I didn't think was... you know, Robeson was an actor as well as a singer, and so they're... But nevertheless, the seasons at the St James's Theatre, this was Olivier's contribution to the Festival of Britain in 1951 and he did on successive nights - and I saw on successive nights - Caesar and Cleopatra, in which he played Caesar and Vivien Leigh played Cleopatra, and then the following night he played Anthony and she played Cleopatra, and so she played a 16 year old one night and a 45 year old the other night, and she was wonderful.

TD: That's quite a range, isn't it, within the space of a day.

MA: Look at the size of that company, there is quite a lot of - here is Jill Bennett, by the way, who of course became the second or third Mrs John Osborne, she was the wife he always referred to as 'Hitler'! - Elspeth March, Peter Cushing. These were visually splendid. By the way, they all were, the standard of staging at that time was terrific. Richard Burton as Coriolanus, that's at the Old Vic, Michael Horden as King John.

TD: Again, that's another play which isn't often performed, is it?

MA: It isn't. Very rarely done, and by the way, Richard Burton as Philip the Bastard.

TD: That's really the main part, isn't it, Philip the Bastard?

MA: Yes, it is. All's Well That Ends Well - also not often done. I think with Michael Horden as Parolles and Claire Bloom as Helena, and John Neville as Bertram - he's the cad, if you remember - and Fay Compton as the Countess of Rossillion.

TD: Really star-studded! Nowadays you're lucky to get one star in a thing.

MA: Absolutely, Birmingham Rep. used to come once a year, that's how I saw all three parts of Henry VI, and here is Henry VIII again, in this case it was Alexander Knox. I think this was the golden age. The ten years after the war, to me at least, was the golden age of the West End theatre. Here is Romeo and Juliet with... Just a minute, who's playing... I can't find Romeo. He's down here. Yes, with Alan Badell, and Peter Finch as Mercutio, 1954, Patrick Wynhart, Sir Louis Kessen, oh, Claire Bloom as Juliet. So, these are all Old Vic programmes from the mid... who is playing Hamlet here? Oh sorry, Michael Redgrave as Hamlet.##

TD: You said it was the golden age of theatre, so do you think perhaps after the Festival of Britain and everything and again, towards the John Osborne thing, do you think that was the beginning of a decline then or just a shift?

MA: Well, not to me, no, it evolved, but I think that in their own particular spheres Peter Hall and Osborne had to keep... perhaps they didn't have to, but they did keep making the point, 'this is a complete revolution'. It wasn't, there was a very high standard of Shakespeare playing, and as a matter of fact I think today's Shakespeare is very often not as good as it was 50 years ago, I think the standard of verse speaking has gone down rather severely, and I don't like the way very modern directors nowadays are constantly trying to put things in the wrong costumes and the wrong things. Personally I think it's a cop-out, it means that they just don't know...

TD: It can be distracting as well, can't it?

MA: Oh God, yes! You think, 'wait a minute, how...?'... I mean, I saw a production at the National Theatre of *Peer Gynt* in which Peer was played by a black boy with a Rastafarian haircut, and his mother, Åse, was played by an old Irish lady, and I spent the whole evening thinking, 'Was it the milkman?!' [laughs].

TD: You say the quality of verse speaking has gone down, you saw a lot of Christopher Fry's plays, do you think that's perhaps why he's out of fashion at the moment?

MA: No, I don't. I think he was in fashion at the time because people were very good at speaking verse and because we all wanted a bit of colour in our lives because the war was only a few years before, and he had this amazing start where Gielgud, Alec Clunes originally did *The Lady's not for Burning* and then Gielgud got H.M. Tennent to buy up the rights and himself produced it and played the main part and cast it very strongly. By the way, with Richard Burton – I've got the programme here somewhere – as the young man, when the curtain rises the young man is sweeping the floor and that was Richard Burton and the girl was Claire Bloom, and it was a fantastic success because Gielgud and his company managed to make a fantastic success out of it, all this sort of very light, airy, sparkling wordplay. It's a little bit like *Much Ado About Nothing* in that sense, sort of very literary, airy comedy. So all of the great stars of the theatre all wanted themselves to have a Christopher Fry play so Olivier commissioned *Venus Observed* – and, by the way, never understood it, and I think you could see that – and they gave it a wonderful production at St James's Theatre, but I thought it fell terribly flat; and then Edith Evans played in *The Dark is Light Enough* and I can never understand that either. Just in that sort of period between 1949 to 1953 there were about eight plays of Fry's produced, and just think of a famous name in the English theatre and they all did it, including Redgrave in *Tiger at the Gates* – it was a translation of *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, (*The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*), which I think is a wonderful title for a play – and of course Fry also did the Anouilh translation, *Ring Around the Moon* – the original title is *L'Invitation au Chateau* – and that was produced by Peter Brook and I've got the programme here. But as it turned out, Fry's own work I don't think really was... because underneath all this sort of airy persiflage there wasn't all that much in the way of characterisation and plot.

TD: Quite kind of shallow in a way, perhaps.

MA: I think so, and I met him about four years ago, because he was invited to give a talk at my club - which is the Travellers - and I was asked to do the thanks afterwards, and what I did was I produced the programmes for all of his plays and read out the cast, and that was my speech. Here is Ring Around the Moon, produced by Peter Brook with décor by Oliver Messor, wonderful stuff. Paul Scofield, Audrey Files, Richard Wattis, Margaret Rutherford, Cecil Tranter, Claire Bloom. And here is Olivier doing Venus Observed, this would be 1950, very soon after. Denholm Elliott, George Relph, Brenda De Banzie - you may remember her in The Entertainer - Rachel Kempson, who of course was Mrs Michael Redgrave... and Sleep of Prisoners, here we are, this was produced in the church just off... there is Denholm Elliott, Stanley Baker. It's staggering the people who turned... oh, I'd forgotten about this, The Firstborn, this was all about Moses, isn't it. Oh, here we have Alec Clunes, I don't remember what this is about but anyway this is, oh yes of course it's about Moses, that's right. The Dark is Light Enough, Edith Evans, Margaret Johnson, Peter Barkwith. Four of his plays were supposed to represent the seasons you see, this was the winter one and I think The Lady's not for Burning was spring. Here is Tiger at the Gates, this is 1955, I said it all took place within two or three years, that's not true, but anyway, here is Michael Redgrave as Hector. Diane Cilento. I think this is well worth reviving, actually, but who does French plays now? That's one of the great things about the English theatre in the first ten years after the war, it was quite common that the big French hits of the day would get translated into English by people like Christopher Fry and you'd see them. What about The Little Hut - La Petite Hutte - translated by Nancy Mitford, for example, which was a fantastic comedy success in about 1954, and of course all the big French companies used to come. Here's Jean Anouilh, Waltz of the Treadors.

TD: It's a tradition which has been lost now, hasn't it, translating? You get Chekhov which is obviously Russian.

MA: Oh absolutely. This was something we were used to doing all the time.

TD: In the sixties though, there was quite a push for... I'm generalising but new writing though, especially with the National Theatre and Tynan.

MA: Yes, that's right, that's the new thing which Osborne brought in, or was part of what was brought in, but that of course was because of the Royal Court and I don't wish to in any way imply that I didn't approve of what was happening, I went to all those as well, it's just that I simply feel, like Professor Shellard, that the years before '56 tend to be rather neglected. A lot of Ibsen - by the way Ibsen has been done more recently in the last few years, but for 20 you'd hardly see it. Here is Dorothy Tutin as Hedvig in The Wild Duck, presented by John Clements, that was 1955. The Boyfriend, I don't know what that's doing there, Salad Days, two famous... oh here we are, this is The Wandering Jew. I may have said when I was telling you about it that it was in the Camden Town Theatre, it wasn't, this particular one was in the King's Theatre in Hammersmith, and by the way, please notice that in The Wandering Jew we have Donald Wolfit and Harold Pinter as Godfrey, Duke of Normandy, and Vivian Merchant - who became Mrs Pinter, of course - as Joanne de Beaudricourt, and here is Wolfit. It's like the Makropulos case, the same person turns up in each century and wanders the earth, can never lay his weary head to rest, it's that sort of thing! Oh, here is Harold Pinter again with another cough and a spit. But there was... New drama tended to be

by established writers like Graham Greene rather than new ones. Here is Eric Portman. I saw all of Greene's, Greene wrote several plays, new ones for the stage. The Constant Couple...

TD: Were any particular plays at the Royal Court - apart from the obvious Osborne one - which you can remember?

MA: Not really, oh, The Good Woman of Setzuan, was that with Ashcroft? I should explain that I used to go to the theatre very, very frequently when I was a sixth former, in fact I'm going back so as to jump, I discovered this tucked into a programme somewhere and these are my notes on my last nine months as a schoolboy before I went and did my National Service, and I think this was some notes, I was writing a letter to somebody and these were what I was... and I used to go, by the way, seeing two productions in a day, because I used to go to a Wednesday mat... it was sports afternoon, so January 3rd, His Excellency, which was a drama, and Bartholomew Fair at the Old Vic in the evening and then [on] the 16th, Fledermaus and The Little Hut on the same day.

TD: Where did you see Die Fledermaus?

MA: Sadler's Wells and Preserving Mr Panmure is a Pinero farce, a very good one too. And [on the] 25th, Spring at Marina's that was a new play, of course they're not thought of as being new drama now because they were sort of formula plays written for the benefit of H.M. Tennent, Penny for a Song, John Whiting, and I went to see Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the evening, Tobias and the Angel, Man and Superman - this is the year of the Festival of Britain, I should explain, there was a hell of a lot to see and it was my last year at school. Count Your Blessings, The Shaw Festival, the Arts Theatre which was then a club did all 50 of Shaw's one act plays - can that be right, 50, it was a lot, anyway, dozens, quite a lot.

TD: Yes, he did quite a few. ##

MA: They did all of them, all of them, and I saw several of them. I went to two of the programmes, some of them very short, so here we are in May, I saw the Shaw Festival, Samson Agonistes, Caesar and Cleopatra and Anthony and Cleopatra, that's what I was just showing, then in June the Shaw Festival, the second programme, The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet, the following week The Merry Wives, the week after that I went up to the York Festival to see the York mystery plays and Marcel Dupre at the York, and then Perocles that was in the Madame Arquette in Norwich and then Guinness' Hamlet on the 28th - by the way, that's with Ken Tynan as the Player King.

TD: That was one of his acting roles, how was that production?

MA: He was awful [laughs] but when I was on the OUDS committee I got Ken Tynan to come and give us a talk once and he very kindly left me all his notes which I printed in the OUDS magazine.

TD: How did you find him as a character?

MA: Oh, wonderful, the most engaging and...

TD: Charismatic, wasn't he.

MA: Charismatic, he had very cultivated conversation and so on and he was rather like Oscar Wilde in a sense, very well thought out epigrams and jokes would drop from his lips. For example, the Observer... Was it the Observer? Agate! James Agate was a very famous drama critic and he said, when he died his place was taken by Harold Hobson who actually subsequently of course really became quite famous in his own right as the great prophet of the French theatre, but at the time it happened everybody thought Harold Hobson was no good at all, and by the way, he was a very small man with a gammy leg and almost walked with a crutch. Anyway, Tynan said, 'The mantle of James Agate has fallen upon Harold Hobson like a bell tent collapsing in a storm on a dwarf.'

TD: [laughs] Good description!

MA: Not very nice! And here we are, this is all the same, Winter's Tale, I showed you that, August, this was when I went and saw The Tempest, I had to go home, I didn't see Henry V. Then September 5, Man and Superman, this was John Clements and Kay Hammond did all of it, including the famous fourth act, and so the whole performance lasted about five hours. I've got the programme somewhere. And then I went to see Peter Ustinov in The Love of Four Colonels, well that was a new drama, he wrote it and played in it. Ardale, that's another translated French piece. Tamburlaine, Donald Wolfitt at the Old Vic and then we had a famous French actor came to do Les Fausses Confidences (Marivaux) - it's awful, my memory is going - you know the film of Les Enfants du Paradis? Jean-Louis Barrault and he came and half of one programme that he did was actually the mimes of Debureau, the part he played in Les Enfants du Paradis. Anyway, so here they are, it was called Baptiste because that was the name of the character, the Lyric Revue, London had lots of revues then, I didn't bring them with me but I have another envelope with all the comic reviews starring people like Hermione Badley and Hermione Gingold and so on, and Joan Sims and Ian Carmichael and...

TD: Were they very popular at the time?

MA: Yes, very - Arthur McCray and all sorts of people wrote pieces for them, including Noel Coward.

TD: Again, that's something which hasn't really survived to now.

MA: No it hasn't and I thought it was wonderful stuff because one of the things they used to do, of course, parodies of current productions so if you saw a lot of plays you could see what they were parodying, and they were very good at it too. So that means up to 9 October when I disappeared into the Air Force I'd been to 38 theatrical productions since 1 January.

TD: That is quite some going, isn't it! Goodness!

MA: October 10 I saw the other Jean-Louis Barrault thing, The Anfitrián [?] was a production by Christian Berat, sorry, designs by Christian Berat which again something we don't see. We have these wonderful world theatre seasons organised by Peter Dalbany, I first saw the Moscow Arts Theatre in London, I didn't see much then because I was in the Air Force but I did see Artello [?], Relative Values which was a new play by Noel Coward, Dickens, that means Emyln Williams imitating Dickens' public readings, it's a one man show. Columbe there's another Jean Anouilh translation, so there, so I saw ten Shakespeare, five Shaw, one Fry, one Marlowe, one Jonson, one Marivaux, one Milton, one Ustinov, one James Bridy, one Pinero, one Andre Rousseau, one Anouilh and one mime.

TD: It's almost to their lives, isn't it, it's quite interesting.

MA: Oh, here is Katherine Hepburn as The Millionairess.

TD: Oh goodness, how was that production?

MA: I thought it was terrific. Shaw was done a lot then and he's not done much nowadays. I saw You Never Can Tell recently, a much praised production, and I thought it was... I didn't think it revived terribly well. Did you see it, it was...

TD: No, I haven't seen it, no. It seems like quite a rich time though, especially for the actors who you've seen on stage, but not necessarily like a wealth of new writers, but there is definitely new writing then, isn't there?

MA: Well, the new writing was by established writers, basically. Oh, here is Man and Superman, 1951 with a fourth act. The entirety version was only played on Wednesday starting at 5.15 - a bit like going to Parsifal! D.A. Clarke-Smith, so here we have Kay Hammond. I thought Kay Hammond was wonderful as the eternal woman. This was the Shaw Festival that I was telling you about, A Woman of No Importance because Oscar Wilde was done very frequently, I mean nowadays but Shaw, yes, here is A Woman of No Importance, these names may not mean much to you but it's a very strong cast with Isabel Jeanes for example, Clive Brook, ex-film star.

TD: Athene ... she was a dancer, wasn't she?

MA: Well, she might have been when she was very young, she was amazingly old then. Stringer Davis, by the way, is the husband of Margaret Rutherford. Peter Bain, Nora Swinburne...

TD: You said you saw the Moscow Arts Theatre, how was that?

MA: Oh, wonderful.

TD: Which productions was it?

MA: They did a new production of Three Sisters, which I found rather annoying because I'd always wanted to see the famous old production of Three Sisters which started in 1937, produced by Stanislavski and they played it right up to before they came to London but they thought as the actresses were fairly mature by the time they first appeared in 1937, they were all quite old, then they thought, 'The London audience won't stand for this because they won't see the point of it', so they did a new production of Three Sisters but it was very good, and they did an adaptation of Dead Souls [gives Russian Title], a dramatisation of Gogol and that was what I enjoyed most, I thought it was a wonderful character actor that was playing all the comic parts and I saw them do [gives Russian Title] The Inspector General. I've subsequently seen the Moscow Arts Theatre in Moscow, of course they've split into two now, as you probably know. So, anything else, quickly? I keep on coming across all these French comedies, there is another one here: Try and Remember, a romantic comedy by Jean Anouilh.

TD: They must have been quite popular.

MA: Yes it was. Margaret Rutherford is in this, Richard Goulder.

TD: They don't seem to have survived into the sixties at all, which was quite interesting.

MA: I don't remember. You see, 1956 onwards, firstly I got married and then of course I was working for EMI and we started having children and I really wasn't free to go to the theatre anything like as much, so it isn't that I lost interest, in fact I'm acutely conscious of the fact that I missed some of the best things but as you can see this level of activity, you can't keep on doing this. I think I've done enough talking. I tried to skim through, I looked quickly at these programmes just before I came.

TD: It's an amazing collection.

MA: Incidentally, please note that is what a programme looked like 50 years ago and apart from the fact it cost sixpence, which I suppose you can say is 60p or even a pound

in today's money, but the fact is it's very easy to keep it because that's all there is. I mean, just imagine, what do you do...

TD: The full size ones you get now.

MA: These things that are rather like copies of Hello magazine. Just about as well written, too.

TD: Thank you very much for this interview, it's been really great. Is there anything else you want to talk about at all?

MA: Not really, these are things that I thought might be... I mean obviously lots of people can tell you about what happened after 1956 and I did go to one of the earliest performances of Look Back In Anger in May 1956 because friends of mine at Oxford said that it was so outstandingly good you really must go.

TD: What did you actually think of it, though?

MA: Oh, I thought it was wonderful, a very, very strong drama but of course it was extraordinarily strongly cast with Kenneth Haigh as Jimmy Porter and Alan Bates as his friend and Mary Ure as his wife and I can't remember who played Mary Ure's father now but I thought it was terrific and I then started to go to all Osborne's things so I saw Olivier in The Entertainer at the Palace Theatre, which of course is an old variety house and it was done with the numbers showing, you know in a variety house - well perhaps you don't, but they would have light bulbs lighting up numbers so you would know which act was coming on the stage, so you knew whether it was somebody with performing dogs or a singer or something. Well anyway, they produced Look Back in Anger in that style with the numbers coming on either side of the stage.

TD: Did you see A Patriot For Me, because that was the one which fell onto the censorship?

MA: No I didn't, that's one I feel guilty about. I think that was around about the time when either our first or second child was born, so I missed that. The second Osborne play I saw was the one he wrote with Anthony Creighton, one he had already written before Look Back In Anger which was called Epitaph For George Dylan and it's what made the name of Robert Stevens, that was his first starring part and he was wonderful in that, but I thought was Joseph Fiennes was nothing, there's a recent revival in London.

TD: I haven't seen it.

MA: Well, Joseph Fiennes is a well known movie actor, I think, my wife thought he had a cold or something, he seemed terribly subdued, he didn't have this sort of theatrical flourish and charm which Robert Stevens brought to the part. Osborne was really portraying himself, by the way, I think. I almost knew Osborne but I didn't actually meet him, he lived at that time on a houseboat in the yacht basin at Chiswick, just off the River Thames and in the boat next to him there lived a chap who became a colleague of mine at EMI, or rather I joined EMI and he was there, and he was in the publications department and we became quite friendly, and his name was Richard Harris and in the end he managed to escape from being in the press department of EMI electronics and started writing plays and in the end did quite well, *Outside Edge* for example, just recently. T.S. Eliot, we touched earlier on the question of the verse drama and you were asking me what I thought of Fry's plays and I thought it was because they were so well done that they became so much en vogue that there really wasn't anything to last, unfortunately. But at the same time of course he wasn't the only person whose first plays were going on and there is *The Family Reunion*.

TD: You don't remember T.S. Eliot as being a playwright at all, do you?

MA: Here we are, *The Family Reunion*, produced and designed, please note, by Peter Brook, how about that, with Sybil Thorndike, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davis, Nora Nicholson, Harry H. Corbett as the chauffeur, Silas Casson. This was a tremendous hit. Of course, as the little note here tells you, it's sort of translated into modern day's ideas about the Furies of Greek Mythology pursuing, and it came off tremendously well. It was the complete antithesis of Fry because it was so amazingly serious the whole time, there wasn't a laugh in it, but we all sort of chilled. Oh sorry, here's Paul Scofield. It was extremely effective, what we would think of it today I've really no idea. This reminds me of another thing here, more French plays, *Hotel Paradiso*, which is a translation of Feydeau, this was when the Feydeau farces were first played.

TD: [Inaudible]

MA: I did see that, but I don't know where the programme is. You could go and see Margaret Rutherford and Robert Morley on stage. Here is Gielgud's production of *The Chalk Garden* with Gladys Cooper. This occasioned the great row with Cecil Beaton, I was just reading his diaries, he was furious because when this play... it opened in New York and when Gielgud brought it to London he dropped the scenery by Cecil Beaton and got somebody else to do it, because he didn't think it was up to it, and they weren't on speaking terms for 20 years, apparently. I'd like to say you can have all these programmes, but...

TD: We do have a special collection.

MA: And you probably don't need them, but if there is anything...

TD: They'd be much appreciated, we have a special collection at our university for any memorabilia which comes by us from this project.

MA: I'd like to hang onto them, but if you were seriously interested, I might mark them as being for Sheffield University in due course. Here we are, how about Robert Donis as Thomas à Beckett. Good heavens, Robin Bailey as the second knight. Andre Melly, George Melly's sister - it's funny, you look at Old Vic casts in the early fifties, amazing the number of really quite... ah, Joan Littlewood was going strong, here is the Theatre Workshop doing Volpone.

TD: What did you think of the work they were doing there?

MA: Terrific, absolutely wonderful. I'm not a great fan of Ben Jonson, I've never yet seen a production of a Jonson that I thought justified his reputation, however they did do this, George Cooper was very good as Volpone and here is Harry Corbett, this is when he was Harry Corbett, not Harry H. Corbett as it would be. And here is Joan Littlewood herself appearing on stage.

TD: What was it like as a space, the Theatre Workshop?

MA: It's fine, it's yet another old Victorian theatre and like all such Victorian and Edwardian theatres it's extremely well built from the point of the view of the auditorium. You could see, you could hear. I can't say I went there very often but 1955, oh, here is another T.S. Eliot play, The Confidential Clerk, and please not, Henry Sherrick, who is another commercial manager, putting it on. Denholm Elliot, not quite such a starry... E. Martin Browne of course was celebrated as an Eliot stage producer, I think he did all of them. The Doll's House, Mai Zetterling as Nora. It's the best production of The Doll's House I've ever seen.

TD: How did they stage it, was it normal, straight?

MA: Yes, normal straight thing but they did a very clever thing. Do you know The Doll's House?

TD: Yes.

MA: Well, you know the last thing that happens in The Doll's House is the sound of the door slamming, very famous coup de theatre, well, where they - Torvald and Nora... was on a first floor so without them drawing attention to it you just used to the idea that when anybody was going out of the house, you didn't actually hear footsteps going downstairs but there was a certain period and then you heard the front door open and shut. I don't remember how many seconds it was, but subconsciously you just got used to the idea that it took five seconds or ten seconds or whatever from somebody leaving the flat and going out of the front door, so when you get right to the end and she walks out, really leaving, she goes out and you don't hear the front door, and you think, 'she's coming back!', and then you hear the front door. So what they done well, you didn't see anything and you heard nothing, but your mind told you that she'd just paused,

she'd just waited, thought again, but she didn't, I mean it's the most wonderful theatrical moment and I absolutely treasure that.

TD: Thank you very much anyway, it's been excellent. The programmes will be much appreciated, we have got quite a collection building up, but nothing of this era.

MA: I didn't bring all of them. Basically, I just brought those that I spent an hour or so sorting, looking through. The great thing about keeping the programmes is that you can remind yourself as to who was in it.

TD: My mother's advice is always to get a programme when you go and see a piece of theatre.

MA: I used to go and see all the big American musicals, by the way. My mother took me to what in fact was the original production of Oklahoma. When I say the original production I mean the Theatre Guild cast came from New York. I didn't see Alfred Drake because he didn't play it in London but of course it was a man called Harold Keele, who when he later went to Hollywood changed his name to Howard Keele because he didn't think Harold sounded quite romantic enough. I saw Mary Martin in South Pacific, and, by the way, her son was in the chorus - Larry Hagman. I didn't know it at the time, years later I remember reading that he was actually in the chorus because she was 40, you see, when she was playing the part of the 20 year old Nellie Forbush and somebody said that Larry Hagman was a chorus boy in that production so I looked at the programme and there he was!

TD: Thank you.