

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Joy Ranger – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Thomas Dymond**

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Actress and theatre-goer. Back-stage; ballet; censorship; digs; Harrogate; Japanese theatre; Vivien Leigh; the National Theatre; Old Vic; RADA; repertory; repertoire; theatre-going; theatres; working in Japan; translations of plays; touring; Turn of the Screw.

TD: I believe you trained at RADA. How was that as an experience?

JR: Fascinating, but very frightening at the time.

TD: Was it?

JR: Well I thought so! Yes. I went then, I was 16, so I was very young. I think I was the youngest because most of the men had been National Service...

TD: Yes

JR: ...and it was quite frightening, it was quite an eye-opener.

TD: Did they put you in right at the deep end, or how did they...?

JR: Fairly, yes. I mean, there's no concessions. You went in with who you came in that year and that was it; and you worked with them and occasionally you lost some of them.

TD: How was the training process? How did they take you through the craft, as it is?

JR: Oh! Well, you started a lot of voice work, a tremendous amount of voice work: diction, voice production, movement. It's all technique. As they said, they can't give you a talent, but they can give you the technique and so on, and they put us through that and they put us through it quite fiercely on occasions. [laughs] Terrifyingly, sometimes!

TD: Any particular instances of this terror?

JR: Yes! In our fourth term - you didn't get her to start with but her reputation went ahead of her - you know, how some fearsome teachers this can happen. And we knew we were getting her, and I remember spending the holidays thinking 'I don't wish anyone ill but I hope she's not there, I just hope she's not there from the stories I've heard.'! [laughs] And she was, and it was the entire class, and she was a little lady, absolutely terrifying with tremendous presence. And she stood me up and she asked me to read something by Quiller-Couch, which I happily couldn't pronounce at the time. I got my tongue totally tied up, and then she said 'what had I learned since I'd been there?' and I said 'how to breathe'. And there was a silence and she said 'Oh really, dear? And what did you do before that?'. Talk about shrink in front of everyone. [laughs] It doesn't sound bad now, but at the time it was.

TD: Mortifying, I can imagine.

JR: ...it was mortifying. She actually was a very good teacher and I did learn a lot from her, but the start was not auspicious.

TD: What was her name?

JR: Miss Duff.

TD: Miss Duff, oh dear. [laughs]

JR: But she was... No, a lot of people went on to have lessons with her afterwards. She was very, very good. She just frightened the hell out of you to start with.

TD: Marvellous. So your RADA training's over. Where did your career go from there?

JR: My first job wasn't really theatre, because it was waiting for a job. It was – you'll love this! – demonstrating Coca Cola! [laughs]

TD: Demonstrating...?

JR: Because Coca Cola had only just come over here. I had to go to these grocery stores and I had a cooler, Coca Cola, and of course the minute the schools emptied I had a crowd of children who just wanted to drink free Coke! That was for three weeks. and then I got a job in Harrogate with the White Rose Players as an Assistant Stage Manager and small parts.

TD: How was that? How was the White Rose Company?

JR: Fun. Nice. Enjoyed it a lot. No money. You were £4 10/- a week, which was Equity minimum in those days and that's what you got.

TD: What kind of company were they? Were they a repertory company or...?

JR: Repertory company. Weekly rep.

TD: Weekly rep. So you got through quite a lot in quite a short time, I can imagine.

JR: That's right.

TD: Are there any particular plays you remember which were perhaps tougher than others or...?

JR: Not particularly, no. Harrogate is quite straight-laced. I don't know if it still is, but it was in those days and we did a play called The Little Hut. Do you know it?

TD: No, I don't. I haven't heard of it, no.

JR: Oh, there's two men and a woman on an island - shipwrecked, I think - and there's a little hut and a big hut, and obviously they go from one who sleeps in the little hut and then two of them, one man and a woman sleep in the other hut. And the ladies of Harrogate were not terribly happy with that. I played the monkey that appeared at the end [laughs] but they were not happy. It was not nice.

TD: It was a bit too controversial for them?

JR: It was a bit close to the bone for them. Nowadays it's so mild that you wouldn't blink, but then, yes.

TD: Audiences often responded badly to any particular...?

JR: Well, they did, and also you had the censor.

TD: Oh, of course you did, yes.

JR: Yes. That was fun. You couldn't... if you had a love scene, and you were sitting on a bed and you had... one foot had to be on the ground all the time. [laughs] You try it some time, you've got to anchor this foot to the ground! Which was good. And they had... just before I arrived, a play by, it was Osborne, and I don't know what it was, but it went to the censor that week, while they were in rehearsal, and it came back with so much blue pencil in it I don't actually think they did it and I can't remember the name of the play but it was just...

TD: Was that *A Patriot for Me*, perhaps, because that was around that time, wasn't it, in the sixties or...?

JR: This was fifties.

TD: Oh, fifties, oh, sorry.

JR: I can't remember the name because it all happened just about two weeks before I turned up, and I heard about it, and it was blue-pencilled completely.

TD: I think a lot of his plays were like that, weren't they. [laughs]

JR: Yes, but that one was really blue-pencilled.

TD: Was that frustrating as an actress when....?

JR: It was something we were just used to. It happened.

TD: You just got on with the job!

JR: You got on with the job [laughs] because the Lord Chancellor was there and that was it. You did what you were told, which you wouldn't do now.

TD: No, not at all.

JR: No.

TD: You also did some stage managing at the same time. How did that fit in with your occasional acting responsibilities?

JR: Well, you had to do it because your first job would be Assistant Stage Manager, 'ASM and parts', and then you moved to doing parts.

TD: So there was actually like a scale of how you went up in the company?

JR: Yes, depending on what work you got. Some from RADA that were there, some of the men in particular were very, very good at that time and they went straight into sort of big stuff, and kept with big stuff so, yes.

TD: You mentioned that you were working in Harrogate. Were there any other, was it all kind of regional work you did around, kind of...?

JR: Yes, it was regional, except for touring, yes.

TD: Any particular tours or anything?

JR: We toured Doctor in the House out of London. That was [pause] quite good fun.

TD: How did the audience respond to that?

JR: The audiences were fine to that, absolutely fine. The digs were interesting.

TD: Were they? What kind of...?

JR: Some of them were dreadful. You had a little book which was the Equity book, and you wrote ahead and booked your rooms. Some you were recommended and that was OK. Some was by guess and by God because the others were full. And some were pretty ghastly. And some were unreal. Edinburgh, two of us had booked digs somewhere in Edinburgh and we arrived from, I think it was Leeds, on a Sunday night in Edinburgh. Well, Edinburgh on a Sunday night in those days was like sort of death. There was nothing, and it just sort of shut down from 10 o'clock onwards and we didn't get there until about 9-ish, 9.15, I think. And we get to the digs and we rang the doorbell. They have these sort of stone staircases inside the houses and you heard this 'clank, clank, clank', coming down the stairs and then the door opened and we said 'Doctor in the House tour, we've booked'. And this little old crone went [Scottish accent] 'I've let your rooms.' We said 'You've what?!' 'I've let your rooms. Kismet's in for three weeks. You're only in for one.' [laughter] I mean, what do you do? 10 o'clock on a Sunday night in Edinburgh, and we drove round, oh we didn't drive round, we walked round all the digs that we knew and eventually - thinking 'We're going to end up in the Police Station, I know we're going to end up in the Police Station, we've got to sleep somewhere' - and the last one, one of the men from the company was there and he talked to the landlady there and she gave us a bed, and it was a bed for two of us. At least it was a bed!

TD: Was that part of the joys of touring, looking at the venues...?

JR: it was part of the joy of touring, yes! [laughs] And then I nearly got lynched, because in those days you take the orchestra that goes with the theatre – there were orchestras that went with them, I don't know if there are now, I doubt it – and we were standing in the wings? Usually you've got somebody fairly jolly, because it was a comedy, and this dirge started up! [laughs] They were ancient and they were sitting there with very arthritic hands playing this dreadful dirge and I thought 'My God, what is this?' I turned to someone standing next to me and said 'Excuse me, is this the Scottish National Anthem?' Oh boy! I think I played the week in the dark, the electrician was there and that was my lot. [laughs] But it was fun. It was all good fun.

TD: Have you got any particular production which you toured which you remember enjoying or...?

JR: I enjoyed Doctor in the House very much. It was good fun. It was a lovely company, they were nice people, so it's good fun. It's the people you're with.

TD: How long were you with that touring company?

JR: I can't remember. I honestly can't remember - it was so long ago.

TD: Oh, was it!

JR: I think I got blood poisoning in the end from something I'd eaten, so I had to leave.

TD: Another part of the joys of touring! [laughs]

JR: That was another part of the joys of touring, yes! [laughs]

TD: Obviously, the food.

JR: The food, yes!

TD: I'd like to focus on perhaps more general theatre at the time and what you remember of it, perhaps. The actual environment of the time. How was that at the time towards ending censorship around that particular time, and before?

JR: Meaning what?

TD: [laughs] How do I explain? How – let me try and phrase it without leading too much, if you see what I mean! [laughs]

JR: Lead the way!

TD: How... Was the atmosphere, perhaps, in the theatrical world leading up to the end of censorship? Was it quite joyous? There was kind of...

JR: I wasn't really here when it really ended, because I'd got married in '59, did a little work afterwards and then helped with the Sunday ballet club which my husband started - which he did after work - but it was a professional thing, so I was quite useful, I could stage-manage or do things for them. I'm not a dancer but I could help. I had worked backstage because I had an Equity card, very useful. And then we went abroad. We went to Japan so...

TD: So did you work within the theatrical environment in Japan or...?

JR: Yes, I did, a bit, because I wanted to work. We had that blissful thing of help in the house and help with the children, so that was tremendous and I did voice-overs, it was all voice work in Japan, and it was fascinating - except for a television thing I did for them which was English language television - but it was great fun and it was fascinating. I can remember I went to one audition which was - what? - five minutes from our house and I walked there, did it and this Japanese came up and bowed, handed me a brown envelope and said 'Sign, please.' Well, it was all in Japanese. I couldn't read it and I thought 'Well, they're honest. I'll sign.' So I signed and I happened to say 'And what's the envelope?' 'Well, it's your audition money, as in England.' And I managed to keep a straight face [laughs] and say 'Yes, yes, thank you.' And took it and went!

TD: That's right! [laughs]

JR: 'Yes, we do, yes!' [laughs] If only!

TD: So was the machinery of working there quite different from here, then, in general?

JR: Yes. They have their traditional theatre which we have nothing whatsoever to do with. I was lucky enough to be taken backstage to see one of the onnagata – I don't know if you know what an onnagata is? In kabuki it's a man that plays a woman's role and there's a very famous one called Byko and he was getting ready for a performance and he allowed me to sit in there and watch him, which was fascinating. All the kimonos going on and the make-up and so on, and the dresses. That was extraordinary.

TD: Did you get to see his performance as well?

JR: Oh yes.

TD: How was that?

JR: Wonderful - he was amazing. I mean, you see them on stage and they move as well, - often they send geishas to watch the onnagata, because they are better than they are at the movement and so on! And it's a family thing. It goes down the families. They go on from generation to generation.

TD: That's Japanese theatre, then. Obviously I don't know anything about it, to be honest, but it does sound quite interesting, especially with this...

JR: It's very interesting. Some of it's an acquired taste. Noh is an acquired taste. It's very, very, very slow. It can take twenty minutes for them to just turn a little circle, and that is a bit bum-creasing, if you're watching it! [laughs] But no, it was fascinating. But we did... They did the most amazing things with our style theatre, western theatre, if you like. They did *Gone with the Wind* on stage. Now that is a long book. So they did it in two halves, you know, you did up to the burning of Atlanta for three months, and then you did from there onwards for the... and they had earphones for foreigners so that they could understand what was going on, and I was asked to do *Scarlett* on the earphones and some other people were doing the other parts, and they said they wanted a sort of mid-Atlantic accent, not a southern accent or anything so everybody could understand it. That was fine, but the script was positively filthy in places, only because it was written, I believe, in New York, it was then translated by a Japanese professor into Japanese and then when they wanted the script for us to work from, we didn't have the original we had a translation by the Japanese professor back into English which in a lot of cases didn't make sense. And there was one particular, Melanie's death scene, which is - I don't know if you know *Gone with the Wind* but it's a big weepy...

TD: Yes.

JR: We get to rehearse this and Rhett and I looked at each other. I said 'I can't do this, I'm going to be hysterical.' We both were, and I said, 'And furthermore, the audience are going to be hysterical. They're going to be lying on the floor drumming their heels.' So we said 'We can't say this' And then the script went back, and it came back from the professor, well, from the producer, the next day, saying 'The professor says that's what it says.' You know better in Japan than to argue with a professor. That is God. If you're a professor you are God. So we had to say it. We said it, staring at the table, absolutely flat, dead flat, no expression whatsoever and I think we got away with it. [laughs] But it was a nightmare.

TD: Did you have to do other voice-over work or was that the only voice-over work that you did whilst you were there?

JR: Yes, I did. We couldn't go onstage there, no.

TD: Obviously, yes, but...

JR: Yes, but I did this television thing as well which was quite good fun. They paid you before you went on. Weird!

TD: What was the television work again?

JR: It was an English language programme really and...

TD: Okay.

JR: ...talking to a professor and so on. So that was quite good. And you just did these voice-overs which were fun, because they liked British English. They thought it had more class than American English. I agree with them entirely! [laughs]

TD: Sure.

JR: So, no, it was good.

TD: So, can I just ask, when you were doing most of your theatrical work, was that mostly when you were in England before you went to Japan?

JR: Yes, then I did a bit when I came back, but that was only commercials and stuff and voice work again.

TD: Oh right. So you worked in the fifties and sixties, that was your main area. All right then, so did you only ever work in London at the time or...?

JR: No, not really.

TD: So was it all repertory based?

JR: It was repertory based, yes.

TD: So where else did you work, apart from Harrogate and...?

JR: Harrogate, Whitby, Yarmouth, toured, I can't remember. There were other places, it's awful, I can't remember where they were.

TD: What work were you doing in Whitby?

JR: Whitby repertory.

TD: Whitby repertory again.

JR: Yes, repertory in all of them, which has died now, hasn't it?

TD: It has, yes.

JR: Such a shame, I mean, some of it was awful, but some of it was quite good.

JR: Well, it was sort of your first job, it was assumed that it was your first job unless you were lucky or you were spotted. That would be your first job, so you just got your brain into gear and you did a different play every week.

TD: So was that the best way of learning, do you think?

JR: I don't know. I think you got into some bad habits. You had to.

TD: Short cuts, I suppose?

JR: Well, yes, because you know how repertory works, you open on Monday, you read through on Tuesday the next week's, you do the first act without books on the Wednesday, you do the second act on the Thursday, you do the third act on the Friday, you run through the thing on Saturday and you open on Monday and you keep this process going unless you do it fortnightly - and some people were lucky enough to do three-weekly - but it was usually weekly or fortnightly.

TD: So it is actually a machine, a theatrical machine of... kind of...?

JR: Yes, you did get the occasional week out when you could rest your memory cells.

TD: Was there a kind of cycle of comedy and...?

JR: Yes. Again, you had to be careful, because some of the provincial audiences did not want some of the stuff you wanted to do, so you had to be careful as to what you put on and so on, but that wasn't our job - that was the director's job, thank God! But some of the plays were very strange.

TD: Were they?

JR: Well... Strange? No, not strange, they were just, I suppose pot-boilers, comedies, little comedies. Quiet Weekend, funny play. Quiet Wedding, another funny play but I don't think you'd get much out of them now. One that you would - and is actually in the West End now - is See How They Run, which is very, very funny and if you get a chance, go and see it.

TD: So out of some of these weekly performances there were occasional hits then, which would kind of...

JR: Oh yes.

TD: Or were they ones that just came out of London and then went back or...?

JR: Some came out. We did, where was that, was it Whitby? We did the first out of London of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, which I believe was considered quite risqué at the time, or quite different, and that was... that was good fun; and we had, at that theatre we had a blind man who came every Monday and he sat in the front row and his wife sat next to him and she told him, and you were used to this quiet [whispers] where you hardly heard her, she was very good at it, telling him what was going on and that was fine [ends whisper] but there was a big dramatic moment in this when one of the daughters...? Yes, broke down and went off stage and she got carried away and over the footlights came this voice going [whispers] 'She's going, she's going, [louder] she's going, [loudly] ooh! she's gone!' [laughter] Collapse of stout party on stage - everybody! - but it was sweet! They came every week.

TD: You would have that regular...

JR: Yes, and some you got to know. You would see them afterwards, or they would be in the bar or something, and you would see them and have a drink with them.

TD: There was almost like a community, a kind of spirit of...

JR: Yes. Community theatre.

TD: ...which has been lost now, perhaps, I don't know.

JR: It has, yes, I think so. There's nothing like that now, is there?

TD: No, not really. They're very rare, any kind of touring company. Well, even touring companies are...

JR: I know touring companies are rare but...

TD: Repertory as well.

JR: Repertory's gone, hasn't it?

TD: It seems to have, yes.

JR: It's a shame.

TD: It is perhaps. Perhaps there's one or two money issues here, I don't know. You said that your...

JR: Well, there were money issues. Always. I mean, it was always tight.

TD: Yes, which is strange when it's like a machine. It's quite...

JR: Yes. I'm sure the performances... actually, if you saw them now you'd think 'How dreadful! How did we get away with doing that?'. But you did, and the audiences loved it. They were very happy and they loved - loved - the comedies you did. And it was entertainment. Television wasn't that tremendous in those days, anyway, that I think rather killed it.

TD: Yes, sure.

JR: You didn't have to go out, you didn't have to spend because you'd spent on your television and your licence and that was it.

TD: Yes, I see. So you worked at quite a few different theatres. Would you like to describe some of these theatres to me, and perhaps what they were like to work in?

JR: Cold!

TD: Cold! [laughs]

JR: Extremely cold! The one in Whitby had a hole backstage...

TD: Oh no!

JR: ...and when the snow came in, we were in the middle of doing The Rainmaker which is all about being in - I think it's Australia, where there's a drought. Brrrr! You know, thermal underwear under your summer clothes!

TD: [Inaudible]

JR: Yes! That was cold, very cold, small, pokey. Back stage dressing rooms were not very nice, but they were a dressing room and, as someone said, if you've got a broken mirror and a lavatory, consider yourself lucky! Yes, we had dressing rooms. They were perfectly adequate. There was nothing glamorous about them, there was nothing glamorous about anything backstage but it just seemed natural, they were lovely old theatres, which is nice.

TD: Are most of these theatres still working now, do you think?

JR: I don't think so. I would imagine some are, yes. Some are still touring. We did Doctor in the House in Sheffield, I remember.

TD: Which theatre?

JR: I can't remember. It was a big theatre.

TD: There's the Crucible, the Lyceum...

JR: The Lyceum, I think. I don't think the Crucible was... That's fairly new, isn't it?

TD: Yes.

JR: No, I don't think there was a Crucible. I think it was the Lyceum.

TD: Lyceum, yes. Well, that's still very much up and running.

JR: Yes, that had the Scottish play on just before we got there, and, boy! Did we reap the rewards of that one!

TD: Why was that?

JR: I don't know - everything seemed to go wrong [laughs]. No, it was good. It was the job, it was what you'd signed up for really. You weren't expecting warmth and glamour and everything else. You were living on £4 10/- a week and that was the first job, it did go up from then on, and you had to find your own make-up, clothes and one evening dress. They'd provide wigs and any more evening dresses that were needed and/or other things, period costume if need be.

TD: Why did you decide to go into theatre? Was it just for a love of plays?

JR: I always wanted to. I don't know why I always wanted to, but I always wanted to. My school was dead against it. They thought it was terrible. We were only just out of being rogues and vagabonds, I suppose, which they thought, and it wasn't the sort of thing they liked you to do. I said I'd taken my exams, I'd done my exams, what was I meant to do? Sit around and wait two years before you could go to university - because it was two years - and I wanted to go to RADA, and my parents said 'No, you can have one try for one place and if you get in you can go, but if you don't then you'll do as you're told.' And I was lucky, I got in, but...! And they were horrified! [laughs] - but anyway I went which was... My husband keeps saying 'you should have gone two years later, you should have...' Yes, I should. I think I'd have got..

TD: Why was that?

JR: I was still... I was very young. I'd been at an all-girls boarding school, and RADA was a totally different thing and I think I'd have got more out of it. I got a hell of a lot from it, and in retrospect I loved it, but at the time you were frightened. But we had a reunion and as we went in some of the people who I thought were, phew! Wonderful! Sir Ian said [whispers] 'I spent my whole time here absolutely scared stiff!' I thought 'Phew! It wasn't only me!' But it taught us a lot.

TD: What was that really like? Was it people from your year, or was it just general...?

JR: People from our year.

TD: Had most of them gone the same way as you, the repertory theatre and...?

JR: Yes, I was there with some very good memories. There with O'Toole...

TD: Oh really?

JR: ...and Finney, Alan Bates, Julian Glover who's working a lot now, and quite a lot of...

TD: So you saw these people in the earlier stages of their career.

JR: That's right, yes.

TD: What were they like back then, some of these people? [laughs]

JR: Oh, that's not fair, it's not fair on them! They were fine. I mean, they were obviously good then, very good, terrific personalities and so on. Slightly mad... Well, to me, slightly mad, but then they were that much older than me because they'd done their National Service. All except for Albert, who was the same age, but then he left to go into the National Service and then he came back again. He didn't do the whole thing but he came back. But the others were that much... and they'd all been in the Navy, some of them had had jobs. Frank Finlay who was there, he had done his National Service and I think he'd worked at something else and then gone to RADA, I think. You're going back in the mists of time! And I think he'd worked and then gone, so we had every age from sixteen to thirty, really, and it was interesting.

TD: So did you all work together on productions and things?

JR: Yes, oh yes.

TD: Such as?

JR: What did we do? What did we do? She Stoops to Conquer we did... What's that play we toured from there? Morning Star? Marjorie Morning Star? Morning Star. We did that on a sort of LCC tour going round and for some old people's homes and so on we did that. That was in our fourth/fifth term - year - term because by then they reckoned you could just about let the public see what we were doing [laughs]. And that was good experience, very interesting. We did Boy with a Cart. Oh! Pushing me back! I can't remember the name of some of them. Love's Labours Lost.

TD: So you got through some Shakespeare early on...?

JR: Oh yes, Shakespeare, sure. Love Shakespeare but yes, we did Shakespeare. Oh yes.

TD: So, while you were at RADA did you do much theatre-going while you were there as well?

JR: When I could afford, yes. I went... you went and stood, all went in the gallery or you bought a gallery stool and you sat outside. You know about gallery stools?

TD: No, I don't, actually, no.

JR: Ah! Well, if you wanted to go to the gallery you could queue and you bought a stool for, I don't know, whatever it was, and you sat on that or you got someone to sit and keep it while you did something else, then when the Box Office opened you were in a queue to get your seat in the gallery which could range, was about 2/6d.

TD: So it was a better bargain than some of the other seats, perhaps.

JR: Perhaps. Or you stood, stood at the back.

TD: It seems quite strange now when everything's so kind of like no specific seats and it's all kind of like...

JR: Yes, [even] people [who] are standing now. At Covent Garden the standing is regimented. You stand where you're told to stand. We didn't. We stood where we thought we'd stand! [laughs] And then if someone wasn't sitting you'd go and sit.

TD: So how was... Going to the theatre, what was that like? Was it more of a formal occasion when you went?

JR: Much more formally dressed. People were much more formally dressed. If you went to anything it was like a First Night, again sitting upstairs or anywhere. Even in the Gallery people dressed better than they do now and it certainly was black tie. Nowadays you go to Covent Garden and in the Stalls and the Grand Tier you'll see jeans. I think Sergeant Martin who was on door would have heart failure [laughs] if he'd seen anybody had come in like that! Yes, it was more formal. It was more of an occasion, which is good in some ways and not in others. Now, more people go - or a wider spectrum of people go - but it's not so much of an occasion, in a lot of ways.

TD: I see, yes. Were there any particular productions you saw which you can remember, or have fond memories of from back then?

JR: The Ice Man Cometh at the Winter Garden. And, boy, did the Ice Man Cometh! It was freezing cold and it went on for four hours! [laughs] In the gallery, that was the interesting one! Yes, I saw... oh, I saw the Oliviers do - that was him and Viven Leigh - they did Caesar and Cleopatra and Anthony and Cleopatra. They did the Shaw and Leigh thing in the Season.

TD: How was that?

JR: Fantastic. Absolutely amazing, that one. And Ustinov's *The Love of Four Colonels*, that was... That started with a four minute silence with just the Colonels sitting round in a room at a meeting and it was hysterically funny. It was brilliantly done. That was very, very good. And *I am a Camera*, the first time that came out.

TD: *I am a Camera*, I've heard of that but I've never seen it or...

JR: Haven't you?

TD: No.

JR: Ah! Well, you've seen *Cabaret*?

TD: Of course, yes.

JR: Yes, well, that was taken from that, and you've read the Isherwood?

TD: Yes.

JR: Yes, it was good. Some people didn't like it. Someone gave it a crit of 'Me No Leica' which they thought was very clever, Leica being a camera at the time. I thought it was good. It was Dorothy Tuten who played the girl, and I can't remember who played Isherwood. That was good, very good.

TD: Why was it good? Was it just the production or just the story or...?

JR: It was the production, it was the story, it was different from anything I'd seen before.

TD: In what way?

JR: In what way? I suppose it was... life, as opposed to, sort of, comedy or Shakespeare or something. It was just very, very interesting and very, very good and the other very good one was *Turn of the Screw* with Flora Robson.

TD: Oh right. How was that?

JR: Brilliant. Frightened me to death. It really did. They gave us tickets at RADA. She taught there and she had been there, I think, and she sent tickets through. They had the ghosts just sort of appear on the stairs or in places and it really did, it knocked you back in your seat. Okay, now, I suppose, people wouldn't notice the effect, the stage effect but at the time it really was superbly done.

TD:; Did they do it with mirrors?

JR: I don't know how they did it! [laughs] I really don't know how they did it. I think they did it with lighting but it really was, Miss Jessell sort of appearing was just sort of 'whoo!' It was, and Peter Quinn, that was very good.

TD: And so were there any particular actors' or directors' work which you admired at the time?

JR: Olivier, Gielgud, Richardson. All those. I mean, you'd do anything to see them. Gielgud for his voice, which was just wonderful. Of the women, Vivien Leigh, then, and she did a play, this was, I think, early sixties, called The Duel of Angels – Anouilh - and she... I can still see her now, she had to, I think she was the Bad Angel, she was in red. And she just said 'Yesss' and the way the hiss of the 's' came out you... 'Whoa!' you thought, 'that's...!' That was quite stunning to see. She was terrific.

TD: Were there any directors, apart from Olivier, whose work you would make an effort to go and see, perhaps, or...?

JR: More now, I'm more aware of them now, I think. I can vaguely remember. The Lady's not for Burning, that was another wonderful play. You must know all these plays?

TD: Christopher Fry. Yes, I know that one, yes.

JR: Yes. And that's one they should bring back. Pamela Brown played the lead in that, and was amazing. They did bring it back a little while ago. It's one of those, you could see again and again and again. Very, very good. I've forgotten who did that one, who directed it, but that was extremely good. I'm sure if I get home I'll remember and this is the awful thing! [laughs]. No that's, all these plays are sort of gradually coming back but...

TD: I suppose around the time you were working originally was the kind of time when the National Theatre first started up as well?

JR: Still at the Old Vic, yes.

TD: Yes, still at the Old Vic.

JR: And we had the Burton/Claire Bloom Hamlet there, and you could get obscured vision seats at the Old Vic for half a crown which meant there was a pillar [laughs] and you spent the entire production like that!

TD: But was it worth it, though?

JR: Oh yes, of course it was. You got there, you were sitting in the Stalls, for Heaven's sake, you just happened to be behind a pillar! No, it was okay. Yes, it was fine. And then there was Regent's Park and Robert Atkins and... no it was just great.

TD: Did the National Theatre make much of an impact at the time?

JR: No, not so much. It really blossomed, began to happen while we were away and then the building was opened and remember going to it and thinking 'I don't like this at all' because it was so grey.

TD: Yes.

JR: It was all concrete and grey and...

TD: It's not an attractive building, is it?

JR: ...and I'd expected something like a theatre theatre, like the little Haymarket Theatre which is sort of green and gold and hugs you. You know? They go round and they, just something about them, I know they're tatty as hell backstage and the bar area's awful and everything else, but they are lovely and this sort of grey concrete thing, to find your way around at the time, was impossible. [laughs] But now I've got used to it and go frequently.

TD: What have you been to see recently? Anything you've admired?

JR: What have we been to see recently? Yes, we did go. Oh, only the other day. And it was good, what was it? Oh yes, Market Boy.

TD: Oh, how was that?

JR: Great! If you get a chance, go. It's good fun. It really is great. I didn't like what they did with Royal Hunt of the Sun but that could just be me because I saw the original one – I...

TD: Did you?

JR: ...Yes, the...

TD: With the amazing voice and, was it Robert Stephens, wasn't it?

JR: Yes.

TD:; Yes.

JR: And that was something else and you saw this and I thought 'Oh, it's doing nothing.' It could be that the play is dated and it's doing nothing for me, or it could just have been me with the memory of the other one being so fantastic that this one just left me cold. I don't know. But any Stoppard I'll go and see.

TD: Did you go and see Rock'n'Roll?

JR: Yes.

TD: Ah, me too!

JR: You've seen it?

TD: Yes, I was lucky enough to get a ticket.

JR: Fabulous!

TD: It was, it was very good, yes.

JR: Yes. No, that was just, and Arcadia was my favourite of all time. Have you seen that?

TD: No, I haven't seen it, no, but I have read it.

JR: Really? Yes. It reads very well, actually.

TD: It does, yes.

JR: Yes. But, no, that's worth going to see.

TD: I was slightly bemused almost why the Rock'n'Roll was at the... it was the kind of play I would have thought would have been at the National Theatre rather than the Royal Court.

JR: I would have thought so too. I don't know. I don't know whether they didn't want to take it or whether they got it in. I saw it in London. It moved in from the Royal Court, London. I saw it at the...

TD: Ambassadors.

JR: Ambassadors. St. Martin's Lane, Duke of York's.

TD: Yes.

JR: And I thought it was fantastic, tremendous. In fact we're taking someone from overseas to see it again, because I want to see it again! [laughs]

TD: So do you think... I keep banging on about the National Theatre, but as actually, there was a lot of doubt about it to begin with, wasn't there, but it has...

JR: Yes, there was, tremendous, but it has taken, well I think it's taken off...

TD: I think recently as well...

JR: Yes, it's had some very good people, and Nick Huyton's been fantastic with it and they've done some very good stuff. I mean, Two Thousand, the Mike Leigh, that's very, very good. In fact, most things are very good. When they have a miss, boy, do they have a miss! But then you can't hit every time.

TD: No, sure.

JR: And I've seen some really good things there.

TD: It's a strange institution, I think. I was actually at a conference where a Literary Manager was giving a presentation, and he started off on the defensive which I suppose he's probably used to at that, perhaps, but it was quite... I suppose that's because it's such an easy target in a way, isn't it, just having that brand of a national theatre, perhaps.

JR: Yes, of course it is.

TD: Yes, so...

JR: Yes, of course it is. You know, they're going to say 'Yeess' [laughs] 'Let's get 'em!'

TD: [laughs] Yes, basically, that's what happened. Yes, I find it a really interesting institution. I was wondering what it was like coming back away from overseas and...?

JR: It was very interesting. There was a tremendous change because...

TD: How long were you away for?

JR: Five years.

TD: Five years. From?

JR: We were away from '63 to '67, so there was a tremendous change. They'd also shot, or got rid of or tied to a chair the Lord Chancellor of the censorship thing. It was very, very different going for auditions and things. Everything seemed to have changed tremendously in that time.

TD: For the good or for the worse?

JR: A lot for it for the good. Some of it, I thought, for the worse, but that was me and I... I don't know, you leave something with one idea in your head and you come back and it's totally changed and you think 'God! What's happened here?' I'm not sure I could do this or something but on reflection, no, for the good, I think.

TD: Were there specific examples of what you think were good apart from the end of censorship?

JR: [pause] Just there's more freedom. I mean, you were so tied before. There is more freedom. It's not so hide-bound, you can experiment, you can do things, I suppose you

could have done then but not as you can now. All these little experimental theatres all round London, it's wonderful, and there's so much excitement and so many things going on now.

TD: Variety. I hope we have started to come into that now, perhaps why it's a kind of Golden Age at the moment, perhaps, I don't know.

JR: I hope so. I sincerely hope so. I know it has, I've had to have a lot to do with the dance because for a while my husband was Chairman at Sadler's Wells and that... they do some extraordinary things and dreadful things, as far as I'm concerned, but other people like it.

TD: Yes.

JR: And things have changed. It's good. It's all for the good.

TD: Your involvement, well, your husband's involvement with the dance...

JR: He is not a dancer and if you saw him you'd understand! [laughter]

TD: But how different is the dancing world from the theatrical world?

JR: I have a lot of friends now in the ballet world, mainly with the Royal but, yes it's different. They work a damn sight harder or at least they exercise a darn sight harder because they have to, but really it's the same, they're hard-working, live for the theatre. Their lives are much shorter. They've got to find something else to do by the time they're 40 - their bodies aren't going to take much more.

TD: Exactly, yes.

JR: They teach. Mainly they teach, or they remount works. I've got a friend who's Repetiteur for the Royal. Because he worked with Kenneth MacMillan, he does all his stuff, and Ashton's, and it's interesting talking to them. They have some wonderful stories. If you really want to get hold of them, there's some that you really want to talk to that I could tell you who to get hold of because they are really good.

TD: Excellent. Were there any particular, well, I suppose, productions of ballet – I'm not quite sure of the right word for it – which particularly hit you?

JR: Yes, Mayerling. Again, they're all Kenneth MacMillan because he's so theatrical. Mayerling, Manon, The Invitation. That was the one that first rocked you back on your

heels. It's the first one he ever did, and the first ballet about rape, for heaven's sake. That was before we left? Or what it just after we got back? I can't remember. But that was just stunning and his Romeo and Juliet, and his requiem, Le Foret which he did for John Cranko who was a great friend of his, and then Cranko's Lady and The Fool which was lovely. Quite a few. And any dancer listening to me will be going 'Oh but it's all like ballet', well I like their work! [laughs]. I do like their work very, very much.

TD: Were there any particular dancers you saw which you remember being breathtaking?

JR: Yes, Lynn Seymour, who could act her socks off and dance at the same time. She and Chris Gable, Fonteyn/Nureyev, of course, and latterly Mukhamedov. Oh, lots.

TD: Do you think... I don't know that much about ballet particularly, but there seems to be some arguments that the quality has perhaps gone down since then. Do you think that's true?

JR: No. I think what's happened is we haven't got so many British dancers with the Royal Ballet. I don't now go to much else. My husband does. I said I'd had - while he was Chairman of Sadler's Wells - enough of sitting up straight and smiling and talking to sponsors after things that were sending me to sleep, that I wasn't going to go to them anymore. I don't have to. Waste of money for me to go now. We haven't got as many British dancers. We've got a lot - if you look at the cast list - a lot of foreign dancers but then a lot of our kids are going abroad so...

TD: Do you think that's a problem, not being able to retain some of the dancers, do you think?

JR: Yes, there's a certain British style, an Ashton, but a lot of them learn it and it's there, and while you've got Monica Mason at the top there they'll keep it. She's brilliant. But I think, so you want to speak to a dancer. I'm not really a dancer. I just know what, it's just one of those awful things I know what I like but if you want to speak to someone I suggest you speak to someone like Donald McLeary, and I've got his number at home, he's a great friend, and he danced with Fonteyn, he danced with Besmertova and he still now teaches at the Royal.

TD: That's one thing you can do with it, I suppose, afterwards.

JR: Yes, and he was dancing in the fifties: '58, because I've got a photograph. He danced for us for the Sunday Ballet Club then, so he knows all the way back. He's a nice guy too.

TD: Excellent. So, perhaps we'll start summing things up now, I don't know...

JR: It was part of theatre in the fifties. Very much so.

TD: Yes definitely. It seems to be very kind of bracketed now, I think.

JR: Yes, I think more so. People say it's elitist which is a load of rubbish. It has a tremendous following. It always has had a following but it has tremendous, I mean, people will stand in the slips. I don't know if you've seen the slips at Covent Garden? You can't really see at all, you're round the side and you stand and you're... well, if you have vertigo I think you'd die! But those quite often are full with people standing and going to rehearsals and so on. It's got a tremendous following.

TD: That's interesting, yes. Perhaps we'll just, like sum up a few things, about how you think theatre has changed during, perhaps, your lifetime and whether you think what the future of theatre might be, whether you think it's still going to continue in this...

JR: Oh, I hope so. I do hope so. I don't know, you can't, you can't say you know. I sincerely hope it does because it's exciting, there's some very, very good actors, some very good young actors coming along now.

TD: Any particular ones you're admiring at the moment?

JR: Well, Adrian Lester for a starter. He's brilliant. Macfadyen, he's very good. Well, Rufus Sewell, but he's not young, is he? [laughs]

TD: No, he's not now, is he? [laughs]

JR: But I saw him first in Arcadia and he was so good in that.

TD: Oh really? What was his role in the original production?

JR: He played the tutor.

TD: Oh did he? Oh right.

JR: Yes and what was the girl's name who played the girl? She was very good, and she's doing a lot of work now...? I can't remember. It was... I'll never forget it, we were lucky enough to go on the first night of that and it was just gob-smacking, and he was superb in it, as he is in Rock'n'Roll. You go to the theatre and you say 'Oh God, who's that?' and they're fantastic. There are some very, very good actors and I just hope that it keeps going. I hope so, sincerely. It's exciting.

TD: It's a good time...

JR: It's a good time now because, look at the National, they've got the Travelex season for £10 which I think is fantastic. You can go...

TD: That is one of the things, isn't it, about theatres that the expense of it is probably what does put some people off, isn't it?

JR: Yes, but it isn't and you can get a stand-by, there was a... my husband went, something he wanted to see at the Bolshoi, and he went up and got a stand-by in the Grand Tier at Covent Garden for £12.50. Now that is not expensive [laughs] and really if you put the price of the best seats, even, against going to a football match, which is horrendous I believe! - I don't like football - I think, it's not...

TD: It's well worth it.

JR: It's well worth it. You've got people working their butt off up there. You've got colour. It's fantastic. I just think more people should go, more children should go, and the more children that go then it'll keep going and if you can get theatre to the children, and I think they do, there are some touring companies still, aren't there? Because there used to be Carol Jenner who went round the schools. Have you researched her?

TD: I haven't, no, but I have heard the name before.

JR: Yes. She used to do, tour schools and so on. She had a place in Kensington, I think, a little rehearsal room. And there's some companies now, but hers was very well-known. And if they can do that, and get children interested then it'll keep going. If they don't that's it, because that's your audience of the future and that's what was so lovely about oh, that Philip Pullman...

TD: The Dark Materials?

JR: Dark Materials. It was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. That was fabulous. They say Coram Boy, which I didn't see, was fantastic, and then Ayckbourn did something in the Cottesloe, Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays which was for children but we went - a couple of kids [laughs] - but it was fantastic because you had to work out what was going to happen on this set and shout out and so on, and it was wonderful and the children just loved it.

TD: Perhaps that's the kind of thing The National should be doing as well, isn't it?

JR: Yes, it is, very much so and they were just sort of 'Wow!' and it wasn't pantomime but it was just terrific. So if they go on doing that then you're okay and theatre's fine. They leave it just for, they keep it elite which they don't luckily, at the moment, then it's had it, especially nowadays.

TD: I agree. Okay, I'm going to wrap that up now but thank you very much. It's been excellent.

[they talk about other potential interviewees and JR offers to supply contact details]

JR: And I tell you one person to ask him about. Ask him about Gelsie Kirkland.

TD: Gelsie Kirkland?

JR: She's an American. She was an American that came over here and she was, if you can have such a thing, a Method Dancer.

TD: A Method Dancer? [laughs]

JR: [In an American accent] 'Oh Donald, I need to know my motivation for going on.' For this why does she come in after that one? And his answer's [whispers] '[Inaudible]' They've left me giggling ever since!

TD: Excellent.