

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Christine Shellard – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Hannah Hassock**

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Theatre-goer and musician. Access to the theatre; cinema; issues in theatre; kitchen sink drama; London theatre; Look Back in Anger; My Fair Lady; radio; realism; regional theatre; television; theatre-going; Theatre Royal, Norwich.

HH: It's the 18th December, 2006 and this is Hannah Hassock interviewing Christine Shellard. Christine, can I just check with you that it's OK for the copyright from this interview to be given to the British Library Sound Archive?

CS: Yes, that's absolutely fine.

HH: OK brilliant, we'll get started then. OK, you were a student in London in 1956, is that correct?

HH: That was obviously the year that Look Back in Anger by John Osborne was produced. This was obviously a very controversial development in post-war theatre. Can you tell us what you remember from that time?

CS: Yes. I mean first of all talking about Look Back in Anger just specifically, I didn't tumble on it 'til later through radio - which of course was a great resource - and also film later on. And then I was really interested in the historical impact of it all. If you like anything that 'appeared to be kitchen sink dramas', this idea of actually getting into the living room and it wasn't all glamour anymore, of the earlier times. And also beginning to talk in normal voices and dialects, not that specific theatre... I don't know, BBC, Royal Family-type accent. That very stylised approach to everything really and so much... I mean, it was a... in a way a milestone in its own right, but so much seemed to emanate from that time - which was all going to happen anyway. The much more that theatre is for the people, is not just for the selected few, it tries to mirror our lives as we live our lives, and much more in so many ways. After the war the sort of stiff upper lip and we didn't talk about it. You know, even men coming back from the war - and women too - it was not felt correct that they should talk about things like that - whatever 'like that' was. So all of... as we've arrived today, as we're talking now, all the movements for freedom of speech - although I know we've got political correctness - but all those sort of things emanated, not just obviously from Look Back in Anger, but the whole movement of the theatre trying to give a much more realistic view of everybody's life. That theatre could be eventually for everybody. And just touching on that a bit, theatre

was very rarely thought of for children. Yes there were the classics; pantomime always was thought of as suitable for children – which wasn't always the case; there were the sort of pier shows and one or two bits and pieces, but nobody ever thought very much about either including... not just for children but young people generally. So... And whole segments of society really obviously just felt for all sorts of reasons that theatre couldn't possibly be for them, it wouldn't be anything for them at all.

HH: Would you say then that it was very much limited to the upper classes, and do you think that society would have benefited from it being more available to working class people?

CS: Yes. I mean certainly there was a money aspect. And theatre was expensive. As a student in London I was very busy at the Academy obviously, practising and keeping up with my exams. At that time I was on a major county award and music was not considered again to be a very worthy career for anybody at all really. So I had to sort of fight to get [ed. an] award. My money was conditional on my passing these various staged exams and getting my qualifications as I went along. We did have free tickets to the Wigmore Hall, which were great to go to but that was limited obviously to music. There were of course student productions of various things, and I belonged to the University Union - London University - and they mainly seemed to me again rather erudite and Greek tragedies, things of that kind. So you'd see Medea, you'd see Aristophanes, you'd see different things like that. But theatre, very much so then, was limited: if you had money, and then of course means of travel. Because again, London of course was reasonably well resourced for the travel, but it took a long time to get back after the war and all the damage and stuff. So people could travel to a certain extent to the West End or wherever, but anywhere else in the country, you know, you needed a car and very few people had a car. My family... luckily, we did have a car until my father died when I was ten. But then again petrol was on ration, so there was all these hurdles really. And for me obviously it was my schooling that raised the love of theatre for me. I was lucky: when my father died I went to a boarding school – Masonic school, he was a Mason so our education was free for my five siblings, or four siblings and me. I was one of five - and so that raised my awareness, and of course acting in school plays and all of that kind of thing, and reading stuff. But actually going to see theatre was something really people - the majority of people anyway that I knew... and I suppose... I don't like the idea of class but I suppose vaguely [ed. we] were middle class, my father was a professional you see in a reserved occupation so he didn't go to war. So we had a reasonable amount of money and so on. But even so we would have our radio, which of course was hugely important during the war, and I'm remembering going to students 18th - 1956 that you asked me about actually - having my own portable radio, and that was a gift from my mother, it ran on batteries and batteries were expensive. And things like Saturday Night Theatre... now I'm not sure, quite, say, when Look Back in Anger came on to Saturday Night Theatre, but that was the resource you had to listen to an amazing amount of plays and things of that kind. And it still... if you like Radio 4 today it's the same sort of thing where you've got that resource...

Now secondly television. Now I was aware of television, my grandmother had one because she was quite a wealthy lady, the doctor had one. We had one when I was 18, so again I remember coming home that first Christmas, from London and my mother said 'Look'. You rented in those days because you thought they were going to blow up any minute now! You did, because the tube used to go and things like that. And I just remember the excitement of that and thinking of the potential of what that could do.

And of course cinema, I mean, cinema was huge. I remember going with my sister when I was very small – and we lived in Norwich at that time, that's my family base. And again so gradually things like *Look Back in Anger* and so many other things would come on to the screen, and that would be your access to say *The Importance of being Earnest*. I'm thinking of *The Wilmslow Boy*, all sorts of excellent films. And then maybe one day you'd say, 'Yes, well, perhaps one day I will go and see it at the real theatre'. So yes, it was - going back to your question - very much for the upper classes, mainly London because there wasn't much else. Secondly, because of the problems of travel and for the huge majority of the population, it would be limited to what their school offered in the way of anything at all. And because I was at a boarding school, as I say, we had drama competitions and we had people adjudicating them and you did things like... well, I obviously was a musician so I played the piano and the cello. We had elocution so you learnt reams of poems that I still remember. And not so much... it wasn't, I don't think, a snobbish thing. I think it was much more the cultural side: it was designed... I don't think to make us speak 'properly' in that sense, but more again to enrich our learning of poetry and classical things. And again, the idea of taking exams in these things was meant – and I'm sure for the right reason – to help you perform in public, to not have nerves, to be able to present yourself etc. But there again it was only for the relatively wealthy few that could afford all this, because everything had to be paid for and there weren't any grants of any kind, where even medical services had to be paid for, so everything was very different. So really when you come down to money for theatre tickets, I mean, that would almost be unheard of.

HH: That was a real treat, yes.

CS: And the only thing again... I can perhaps... if I can refer back to the great joy of the radio – the BBC Home Service as it was called then – and my particular delight was *Dick Barton Special Agent*, which came on at quarter to seven. And it had a wonderful theme-tune, and I just loved that. And *Children's Hour with Uncle Mac*, that was... Again you see - I mentioned before - children were not thought of very much, they were very much 'growing-up adults'. So as in fashion, until again when I went to the Academy for the first time, I had tartan jeans and a black sweater...

HH: Oh wow!

CS: Which is amazing. And of course you think of Rolling Stones and the Beatles coming in. Whereas before that you were just a copy of your mother, you wore a twin set and pearls as soon as you grew out of school uniform. You never had casual clothes of any sort. So all of that links in with that sort of cultural base of what there was at that time. So '56 for me, coming to London... although I had been to boarding school so I was used to being independent, but having to live in digs and having to practise a lot and carrying the cello on and off the tube, all these sort of things. But the one key thing that does stick in my mind was that I went to see *My Fair Lady* for my 21st birthday. We had a group of go and Rex Harrison, Stanley Holloway and... I can't remember who it was as Eliza. I was going to say Julie Andrews but I'm sure she's the film. And it might have been Audrey Hepburn but she might have been the film, so I can't remember that little bit. But I just... I mean, and that was a huge treat, that was a 21st birthday! (It wasn't 18 at that time.) And to have a group of 12 of us go and a meal at the Strand Palace was special.

That was another thing you see: to go to the theatre, there wasn't anything in the way of anywhere to eat. You had to eat before you left home. And eventually it was a cinema which introduced things like the ice-cream at the interval and maybe a little café where you could have something to eat before you went. And certainly in the cinema, more people felt relaxed because they could just dress casually – and again clothes were very short and there was still rationing. And then later... and you see as I say this is 1956 when actually clothes were suddenly being designed for young people. And therefore in the cinema you didn't feel you had to dress up particularly, but theatre yes you did. So again that was another barrier for people. And everybody always assumed that the people who went to theatre probably wore tiaras and long dresses and, you know, DJ's and what you called 'evening dress' in those days. And talked with very loud posh accents and knew everything and I think it was all of that, you know that most people just didn't think... But schools did a lot into introducing people gradually as time went to read scripts, to dare I say read aloud in class, to put on little bits and pieces of scenes and things. So that by the time I went at 18 I was certainly ready but didn't really have the money, but did as much as I could. And I think as I say, My Fair Lady was that sort of key point I think at that time that I went to see.

The Theatre Royal in Norwich was good, it gradually improved after the war... and in fact I remember the first time I went on the stage - this is within your date time - I was 10 and it was a Greek pageant. And I hadn't realised of course stages were sloping – that was the first thing you realise. And it was a sort of Greek dance with tennis balls which were covered in glitter, which of course came off and went all over you. And then of course I dropped mine and it rolled into the footlights, and then it started to smell a little bit as well, so it was all turning dramatic this production – nothing to do with the production! But then my sort of feeling of let-down in a sense – because I'd only ever seen pantomime there – to go behind the stage and it was really seedy and quite smelly. And even at that age I was aware that the dressing rooms were really tatty and the toilet smelt and all this sort of stuff, and so therefore disillusioned a bit with the front of house which was just amazing. But I thought, 'Well, at least I'd been on a stage', you know, and that was quite exciting for me at that time.

HH: Yes, at such a young age.

CS: And then there was the Maddermarket Theatre - which is quite renowned now – which was 'amateur' originally and did period pieces and stuff, but that took quite a long time after the war to get going. And then the third thing was the sort of Art Cinema, so as opposed to the run cinemas, which did have special films that came on and different things. And we had a thing called the cinema Noverre in Norwich and that again... I did remember seeing Oklahoma! at the Theatre Royal.

HH: Oh did you?

CS: Yes I remember the stage and they started gradually to have travelling companies you know, the one that starts off in wherever, probably the West End and so on, and then did do a tour. Once theatres had started to develop around the UK, and then the productions came. So I do remember that, and I do remember Gilbert and Sullivan - that was always the stock for school productions and for local dramatics, which often went on at the various theatres as again things got going. So I remember quite a lot of Gilbert

and Sullivan, and my parents were very fond of them so you know, I had a background of that and they encouraged me to go. The other thing was the circus.

HH: Oh yes, of course.

CS: Yes, that was another sort of great treat, to go to Bertram Mills Circus I seem to remember, before it was frowned upon to have animals sort of thing. But again, I was aware that the animals were in very small cages and not very well treated. And you know, even as a young person growing up in a not a very aware thing at that time because the adults were still reeling from the repercussions of the war and you know, on the whole children weren't particularly involved in anything very much at all. There was a children's newspaper which was brought out specially, but I think it was a bit like blue paper thing and not particularly wonderful with world events. So you were sort of aware of things, but not in any great extent. The Coronation of course was a great pageant theatre, and we saw the film of that, listened to it on the radio – didn't see it on television. Ascent of Everest at the same time, that was a big thing. But what I'm really trying to say is theatre was very still very special.

HH: Yes, it was.

CS: ...you could occasionally go to and afford, but unless you were within touch of London, probably you didn't go very much at all apart from the local stuff.

HH: Right. So you mentioned... obviously you went to see My Fair Lady on your 21st birthday, I mean that isn't something... I mean now obviously I'd enjoyed going to theatre, my 21st birthday's coming up. I probably wouldn't choose to go to the theatre. Would you say that theatre was a more popular pastime for young people then, you know was it like a fashion, was it a new trend, or was it just personal to you?

CS: I think it was beginning to be seen as accessible if you really saved up for it, and it had to be a special event. And particularly if you were a student in London, you did have to go once or twice. But all the time I was here, for three years... but it was again literally because of, you know the strictures of study and travel and cost, and the dressing up... and that was a big impact, My Fair Lady and the stage you know. And particularly the Ascot black and white scene. And I've done productions of it since, I've seen it lots since, but you know, that impact, the original one was particularly amazing I think for that sort of theatre at that time – the staging and the technology. I mean, I've only just very recently been with my three sisters to see Wicked, and the technology... well, there's no comparison with My Fair Lady all that time ago. But at the time for us, it was very special.

HH: It was something special.

CS: And Drury Lane seemed to have that name for old-established theatre. And very recently you'd see The Producers there...

HH: Oh did you?

CS: ...you know I say to you, 'Oh all those years ago, you know, I went to see My Fair Lady'. But yes it could be seen I suppose that it would be that sort of treat you know. If you had... or if you had very wealthy relatives or somebody that would treat you... certainly not a boyfriend, they'd never have the money! But you know, somebody who could take you, and then we had a meal at the Strand Palace. But you'd have to go somewhere else for a meal. But that was beginning to come in, yes at that time. But it was special, yes.

HH: Yes. So do you think that... Obviously theatre began - like you mentioned - began to address social taboos at this time, would you say that that was a cause or an effect of the kind of audience it was drawing in? I mean, did they deliberately create you know, all this controversy because they knew the students would enjoy that and really get involved in it? Or do you think that the students went to see these new plays because they were so much more interesting and so revolutionary?

CS: I think both really. Because again - speaking as a woman - I'm probably the first generation that did go to university and perhaps since have had full time careers as working mothers. Now all that sort of thing was unheard of and certainly not for mother, and certainly not grandmother. So that was an issue, the women's bit particularly. And there were the very early seeds of... certainly not girl power or anything like that, nothing. But just beginning to think - you know 'hang on a minute, we're doing the same job'. And of course that did come again from the war - so many of these things did, because people travelled... we're an insular island, we still are, we still don't even learn other people's languages. You know we're pretty bad at all that sort of thing. But very much so then. But people had seen dreadful things anyway, but were not unaware of other people and things of that kind. So the seeds were there, and even if not for them themselves, their children obviously began to sort of look outward and to discuss different things.

Now again, my mother was a very forward-thinking woman and she did have to bring five of us up on her own. I was single-parent family - one of those dreadful things. But many were at that time, because so many had died in the war. My father didn't, but he died fairly soon afterwards. So that was a thing. And women obviously became much more independent, questioning things. In fact there was a play on recently, Housewife 49 with Victoria Wood, and pictured very well in the writings all women in the war. You know, what it was like and how the men didn't understand the growing role of women. And then of course other issues, of course you know the terrible anti-racist things. You know, 'No Irish', 'No Black' signs all over the place - really awful. So gradually, because people had met other people, and even in my year - in '56 - we had several friends that were from Africa you know, or had black skins if you like. And gradually thinking, 'Hang on a minute you know, they're entitled to come.'. We welcome into this country to do things in British transport and the Health Service that we don't wish to do. And it's very similar now of course with the immigrant workers from other places. You know, not taking our jobs, it's doing jobs that a lot of us don't want to do. So awareness of... and therefore beginning to tease out in the plays scripts and things. And saying things to shock, but saying things to make people think. Because all right, all right, shock horror, you're going to say these things - whatever, say connected with race - then at least

people talk about it and it'll raise a reaction. Because so often through the years you know you talk to your students, they say, 'We don't like this.' I say, 'But you're talking about it.' You know, whether it's art, whether it's music or whatever. And you know, the art generally, you need to express new ideas, new things. And fine we may not understand it; perhaps we appreciate the work that's gone into it. But who's to say our next generation, our children, grandchildren whoever might look back and say, 'That was a great time in theatre or art or music because...' So I think arts generally... so that was the race issue and the women's issue, then there was also the things about daring to talk about men with men and women with women, the whole of that – sexual orientation. Well again, we have all these words for it then, but then it was always a little bit difficult. I mean naturally I think - initially anyway - men in many cases were very homophobic if you want, from the forces, and of course it was illegal. And there was a lot gradually coming through in drama, teasing out these different issues. But again you see, fashions had changed so much. In my childhood many cases, siblings, friends lived together of the same sex and nobody ever discussed it, thought about it. You know economical, financial perhaps until you got married that's what you did anyway. And so nobody would ever think. And yet to live with somebody of the opposite sex would... oh! Shock, horror! Dreadful! 'No better than she ought to be, and if she gets pregnant serve her right!' sort of thing. So it was very different, very different. And because again of course there was no birth control... well there was, but it, you know it was all very clumsy. So that again... and again the theatre to tease out all these issues. And then also gradually talking more about the sort of government, the bureaucracy, the Royal Family, all this bit again that originally was just that top bit that most people really didn't know about. Yes, during the war listening avidly to the radio we did start reading the papers. But again a lot of it was propaganda. Even in this country obviously certain bits that we were allowed to read. Whereas now... alright maybe it's gone the other way and you've got media all the time, and media overkill and do we really need to know, you know, what about a kangaroo killed in Australia and stuff, you know the next minute. And of course more serious issues as well. So I think again theatre, and playwrights the new generation of people, yes did want to tease out these issues, did want to make people think. And of course the student population... because when I went in '56 there was only 3% went to university of the population. Well of course now the targets are up to 50% and some maybe say that was too much. But you know there's all these issues. But there's so much more in the way of travel, of training, of training abroad, of all sorts of different schemes. And so the population... I think my generation onwards was so keen to talk about these issues. Initially to think, you know to blush and say, 'Dare we use this word?'

My mother was exceptionally good and my boarding school education was always very rigid so often these issues would arise out of stuff we were writing. And they would actually, if we did have any magazines, they would cut out little bits that we weren't allowed to read you know, and things like that. So I'd write home and say to mother you know, 'What's this, what's that?'. And she was so good... but her mother was, very broad-minded, always told us exactly... if we were ready to ask, we were ready to learn. And that's always been the same thing for me with my children, and my grandchildren now. So you know, once you're ready to ask that question then you need to know about it. And you explain it in the best way you can. And so... so I think theatre again did this for people. And whether it relayed them on to radio or into the cinema... and to a certain extent television, gradually, as that evolved. I think it was both, I think it was a huge opportunity and all the issues of the Lord Chamberlain and censorship. And I think a lot of people hadn't realised that it was censored in that way. And so many things, because they had too many... shall we say now 'f' words or because it mentioned the unmentionable, whatever that is - Oscar Wilde and so on. All of that and then... and

gradually again thinking of the Royal Family now and the links with the Germans of course and the war was all very difficult. And then after the war. And then... and people that the ordinary people would think well... I don't want to say... It's an old fashioned phrase but you know what I mean, above sort of suspicion like Caesar's wife and all this sort of stuff, and actually just normal people like most of us, and muddle along and some get side-tracked and all sorts of things. And you know we're all the same really under the skin but that... and I think theatre did such a great thing in starting gradually to raise people's awareness.

And as to the growth of repertory and therefore... and the amateur dramatics. Some playwright took it on some of these difficult issues. You know, in a little village somewhere or small town you know, shock horror people just hadn't thought of or even wanted to talk. And I think very brave that they took on these things. And I just think it was both ways. I think it was the theatre was there and the playwrights were there to write about whatever issues – topical issues – that people wanted to talk about. And alright some might have been shocked by it but that's not a bad thing. But similarly, you know, students wanting... particularly young people obviously because they felt they were open-minded, broad-minded and all this sort of thing as where every generation thinks that. You know, to go and see these things and then to go and say, 'But yes, I well I went to see...' whatever it was. And you know, and talk. So I think it was a gradual thing, but I think it was both. I don't think it was cause or effect, I think it was just right for things getting gradually back to normal, you know after '45 really.

HH: Shelagh Delaney was 18 when she wrote Taste of Honey...

CS: Taste of Honey, yes.

HH: I don't know if you went... did you go and see that?

CS: I didn't see it. Again, it would be the film that I would have seen.

HH: Right OK.

CS: With all these things... or I would have heard it on Saturday Night Theatre when it went onto the radio. Or I might even have read it. In fact probably, apart from Shakespeare – oh and the plays I acted in school – I wouldn't have read very many scripts. You know, you didn't - you read literature and stuff. Shakespeare was always the standard diet, and I can't think of many other plays that were. So again that would have inspired me probably to buy the script, to read it. So it was that way round. But again very aware of that and, you know you can sort of see... well Rita Tushingham was in the film but, you know all that flavour of things. And yes Shelagh Delaney, and I'm thinking of the... Who was that great woman producer in the East End? It'll come back to me in a minute. Again women coming into the forefront a bit, sort of writing, producing. I mean their ideas are what an all male... you know apart from starring roles, you know for women, but not much else. And gradually you're aware that women were coming in. And backstage as well, gradually you know the technology side, the stage craft, the design etc, etc.

HH: So it was all kind of hand in hand.

CS: It was, yes. I have a cousin who is now retired, because she's my age. But she, through art, went and she was at a certain part of her life, one of the stage designers at Stratford. And I used to go and see things and go and see her stage, designing a play. And how technology again went hand in hand with that. So as you got materials... because as a child, and I was aware that you know that bit of scenery was flapping, and that Queen of the Fairies really was probably 60 and overweight. I mean, you weren't naïve, you didn't think everything was wonderful - he was out of tune and she forgot her words.

HH: Be critical.

CS: And of course again, the people to take after the war were obviously probably fairly ageing starlets and things. You know, because the... I won't say all the younger generation had been wiped out, they hadn't, but it took a long time for them to get back into things and stuff. So you know, you were aware of things that weren't so good. And then... and giggling because the Green Fairy didn't come in at the right time - or whatever. And then gradually how amazing things were and the idea of... oh I don't know, circular stages, apron... theatre in the round, all these sort of things, you gradually... so it'll always be you know stuff behind the curtains, all the standard stuff. And the bit of flapping scenery and not much else, the occasional trapdoor if you were lucky, and occasionally a flying fairy or something. So gradually all that was hand in hand. And therefore again, because you were always so used to, if you like the fantasy of theatre, and of course my awareness of what backstage looked like from an early age. Again suddenly having Look Back in Anger... did it open with the ironing board in this awful little room and...?

HH: Yes, yes, it was a real shock.

CS: Yes, and again that you see, that... I'm not sure we come to theatre to see this. We want to see, you know, magic, fantasy. We want to escape; we don't necessarily want our noses rubbed in it. But that wasn't my generation, that was more my parents.

HH: No, that was the... exactly.

CS: We were the sort of... keen, we were aware to a certain extent of life in the raw, and rough and raw. And even only as a child I'd just assimilated, you know different aspects of the war, nevertheless we were aware there was another side to life, and actually yes we would like to see it. We didn't actually mind if you didn't have 20 sets, changes and all this sort of stuff. We were quite happy to be stuck in this back room, and you know up somewhere there, and you know nearly sort of chewing each other to pieces in the dialogue and things. And sort of appreciating how clever that was. And yes, so I was getting back really to the involvement of women as well as men, not only being

the actresses with the technology, the stagecraft, the writing of the stuff, that gradually they were getting to be equal partners with men on all that sort of stuff.

HH: So for example, you just mentioned the kitchen sink drama. You know obviously John Osborne instigated by putting an ironing board in the stage in 1956. I mean obviously that was... or we can assume was intended to bring people closer to the realities of life. But as a woman, would you find that offensive? Because obviously, you know kitchen sink is very much related to women rather than men. But did you find it offensive or was it... or what did you find it, encouraging like 'Yes, people need to see that this is what's happening and maybe it can change'? And of course it did change, so how do you feel about...?

CS: Yes, yes. No I didn't at all find it offensive. No, no problem. And I think again because, certainly amongst all my friends and colleagues – because we went to a school where all the girls had lost their fathers – a lot of our mothers did have to go out to work. So in a way, they were gradually being independent people and thinking not as a career woman, certainly a working mother. So in a sense I was really pleased with that, and of course was very conscious I think when I took my first teaching job. You know, even then being aware of words and the patronage of the... you know the sort of people in the staff room. And you know, very quickly the women amongst us would, you know sort of say, 'Hang on a minute...'. You know, in a nice way, not unpleasant not challenging... but yes challenging in a sense. And of course there was equal pay in certainly in teaching by then which was a great step forward. And yes I think to be fair the bit about the 'new man' took along time to come in – certainly in the equal parenting. I think probably that was my fault as well, that I wasn't very good I think about delegating tasks to my children's father. But I think possibly that was partly women's fault as well. I think we had to come quite a lot further. And I do question still now, there are one or two I am aware of that really do take an excellent role and sometimes are the... you know the house father if you like, and look after the children while the woman, who perhaps earns a better wage anyway goes out to work and stuff. And has her career and so on and so forth. And of course there was no childcare, any of that sort of thing. So of course, you know, to a certain extent, even I didn't work full time until my youngest was five and was at full time school. I did part time when she was three. But you know, and I had two other children as well so it was quite a challenge...

HH: Juggling as well.

CS: Sort of juggling act in the air. But I don't... coming back to your original question I don't think it was certainly any of my friends, colleagues, people I met, we didn't find it offensive, we found it intriguing, interesting, good, and yes why men...

HH: Positive.

CS: ...why shouldn't men do the ironing? Why shouldn't men wash up? And of course you didn't have all the things you have now. I remember having my first washing machine when my son was born. [Laughs]

HH: Just in time then!

CS: And that was just in time, so I mean you really didn't have central heating all that sort of stuff. So there was still a lot in the house to do, from cleaning to washing to... and all these things and stuff. And again, not that many people could afford a car. I mean eventually did have one so shopping was easier, you know all that sort of stuff. It still loomed quite large. But it was interesting and exciting and good that at last women's role was being shown for what it was. Even if you still had to go on doing it, at least perhaps there was more awareness. At least between women, maybe not so much amongst the men.

HH: Yes. So obviously at that time theatre was addressing homosexuality, teenage pregnancy, poverty, all these things that at the time weren't as... they were ignored and so obviously theatre had a real impact when it started to portray all these things. Do you think that therefore now, you know theatre has less of a role? Because obviously now all those things are much more readily accepted in society. Like for example homosexuality, people barely bat an eyelid. Whereas as then 50 years...

CS: Civil partnerships and things... yes that's right.

HH: Exactly, 50 years ago it wasn't the case. Do you think therefore theatre's lost its place, or do you think it's just... has more entertainment value now?

CS: No I certainly don't think it's lost its place, definitely not. More people have access to the theatre because it's not just London-based. There are excellent, excellent theatres. And we mentioned one or two already around the country. And in fact one of my brother-in-laws, he's just about retired now, he was always in work, he was an actor. And went round all the reps, ever he started in Birmingham Rep all those years ago.

HH: Wow!

CS: And I and my three were his fan club and we would be there on the front row, touring him round the country seeing all the different things he did. So we've always been aware in the family of, if you like the sort of plight of actors. Particularly if you don't quite make it or the headlines, and you know the top roles and stuff of that kind. So I think theatre's definitely got a role, very important, and perhaps good away from London, perhaps good to a certain extent aware from Stratford. But of course the whole world comes to Stratford. In fact I work with American teachers - I do a teacher exchange with American teachers of the Fulbright. And every year we take them for a Stratford weekend, that's the one things we do with them. And the actors come and talk to them and we had some voice training with... is it Cecily Berry the voice coach?

HH: Yes, yes.

CS: That was just fantastic. So different things, and we have lectures about the productions. So because for them of course, we mustn't just assume they've even read Julius Caesar, let alone... and the production we saw with them last year was very much Blair-Bush, you know, it was brilliant the way it was portrayed and done. So I think again, I must say regurgitating but taking a Julius Caesar and putting it in a modern context... think of all the staging.

HH: So it's current issues.

CS: You know, current issues that really... and almost saying in some ways nothing's new under the sun. All these problems are the same. All right, different contexts, different technology, different fear. I mean fearsome weapons now, nuclear and all that potential. But it's a great trading point for us. You know our West End... I had two friends over... I did some work shadowing working in Namibia in schools. And then I had two friends over, and they had never been out of Windhoek where more or less the airport was a, you know, shack. And they flew into Heathrow, so of course not only were they just spaced out to start with, and I said, 'Right up to the West End, off to Chicago.' We went to see Chicago, and of course by the end I wondered, I thought back... when I... you've seen Namibia, seen where they come I thought, 'Oh my gosh what had I done with them?' I should have given them a bit of orientation first, a little bit of gentling in. But I was so keen to show what London had to offer. And so I'm... what I'm coming back to is really our theatre is renowned, I mean we've got a wonderful theatre tradition. So whether it's Stratford, London, anywhere, people will come from all over. So that's the first role. Again the nothing new bit, the wonderful standard stock stuff, you know Dickens and Shakespeare and you just name two, but all the wonderful stuff that's now come on from then onwards, will attract worldwide audience. And all the student population, they will have more access. I know the exchange rate is terrible for Americans, they're very poor over here, we're fine when we go there. So there's all that issue of course and there's still the expense which is taken as read. But so many more people will have a weekend in London and come. And I think, you know whether it's... I still really enjoy Radio 4 when I travel about and I like to hear the afternoon plays, the dramas are specially written, 50 minute stories, the readings from different books, the reading from different plays. And all that sort of stuff, as far as I can see why should ever end really. I think we do need still a bit more of that perhaps quiet listening sometimes. I think our senses are so much bombarded with the visual and everything else. And I think I'll be hugely excited, you know for the potential for young playwrights, for theatres. Of course, yes there's costs and huge budgets and some go under, and some never make it in the first place. And that's as it is. But I don't think... you know there'll always be issues.

HH: Yes, there's always something to address.

CS: There'll always be things. I don't know whether it's IVF now, whether it's stem cells, whether it's cloning, whether it's now the difficulty of children needing to know their birth fathers and things. And when you've been a sperm donor do you do that anymore. I mean there's technology all the time I think will be raising new challenges for us as people to live. And I suppose I'm thinking not so much my children are well launched in

their lives, but my grandchildren – my latest little one and the oldest who is nine, and five of them – how life will be for them. But I'm sure theatre will always be there. And I hope it won't just be through the multi-screen and the cinema. I do hope that live productions are still there because I think the impact... I remember each time with my three, trying to take them on their own because they were very close and I took this little troupe everywhere – we had a box and sat on the floor and Sonya went to sleep and you sat and watched what you wanted to watch. But you know their impact of their first ballet, their first opera, their first... whatever it was I chose for them, just to take them on their own. And just to see, you know that live show. I just... well I can't think of any experience like it. Certainly in schools things were live and well in drama. I've just been to my nativity plays and my old school show. And you know, all right little beginnings but they gradually grow. In the senior schools and the school I left three years ago now, you know very lively drama sections and things which are all the seeds. And if it still goes on in schools then I'm sure people will then want to be themselves in local drama let alone, the professional stage. And will again want to see things on stage. It may be still perhaps the more affluent older generation, I think its my age group that perhaps have the money and the time to spare to perhaps go to a lot of theatre. And unless you're actually in that world of English and drama or you're a critic or, you know all that kind of thing. You may not still go so much. But oh I... I'm sure it's fine. It maybe to find new ways, yes to appeal in different ways. Maybe more audience participation, maybe all the latest in technology – I don't know. But then yes I'm sure it'll still have an appeal.

HH: Yes. Oh brilliant. Well thank you very much Christine, that's excellent.

CS: Right, OK.