

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Jean Newlove – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Kate Harris**

**6 November 2007**

Movement and dance specialist. Artistic policy; audiences; Fings Aint Wot They Used T'Be; Rudolf Laban; Joan Littlewood, Ewan MacColl; modern dance; Oh! What a Lovely War; The Other Animals; sets; Theatre Workshop, theories of movement; Uranium 235.

Text in square brackets [] denotes clarifications requested by the interviewee.

KH: This is an interview for the Theatre Archive Project with Jean Newlove. It's on the 6th November, 2007. Can I just begin by asking you how you first became involved in Theatre Workshop?

JN: Yes, it's really very mundane. I was with Laban, and he came into the room one day and he had a letter in his hand. And he said he'd received a letter from a woman called Joan Littlewood. He didn't know who she was; I didn't know who she was. And she was the director of a young theatre company, and she very much wanted somebody with a Laban training to go and work with her young actors in her company. Whether we knew it was called Theatre Workshop I can't remember.

But Laban said to me, 'Well, you're very busy' – because I was doing a lot of work for him – and he said, 'do you think you have the time. She would like you to come once a fortnight' because they were running drama courses at weekends. The company were on tour, and at the weekends she and Ewan – who was the playwright, she mentioned that – would be teaching, and they wanted somebody to teach movement. And when the company were not touring they would be joining in the classes. And I said, 'well, yes, I could go at a weekend'. So it was arranged I should go, I think for one or two weekends, a fortnight apart. And that was the introduction.

KH: In the early days how did the training work when you first joined the company?

JN: Well of course the thing was, for me, it was marvellous that here... I went to a group of people who were all young, or my age or a little bit older, not much. And that was lovely. It was a breath of fresh air for me, because I'd been working with, as a teacher, to older people and a very mixed bag of educational people like teachers and HMIs and people who were running courses for land girls and factories and directors of factories, and all this. And I'd been teaching engineers, and if you can teach engineers you can teach anybody. After movement, I mean trying to get the collars off and the ties off, and the waistcoats off, and the shoes off – but I managed it in the end!

And then... so coming to Theatre Workshop, they're all ready to do it. They were all eager. Joan had enthused them, and Ewan had enthused them about Laban's work because she had been introduced to Laban's work briefly at RADA, before she dropped out – by a woman called Annie Fleig. And Annie Fleig had worked with Laban in Germany but had come to England and was teaching a bit of movement at RADA, but couldn't explain – because her English was so poor – she couldn't explain exactly what she was doing and what it all meant. And I remember Joan saying that she didn't have any tights so she had to wear black knickers and black stockings and stitch the two together. [Laughs] And she said she had this... and she said she had this woman and Jean Bedells, who was ballet. And of course ballet was not Joan's scene at all, and ballet's not going to help anybody act. And funnily enough I had Jean Bedell as my examiner for my ballet sessions, so that was... you know, exams when I was little. So I could see why it wouldn't appeal to Joan.

You see the main thing... the crux of the thing is that there are all different types of movement if you like – the theories of movement. But none of them are necessarily geared to helping actors. Now, you've got Alexander Technique, a lot of actors do that and why not, it's very good, you keep a balance.

KH: It's good for the posture as well isn't it?

JN: Posture, and that's great, why not do it. Ballet, well, do it for fun if you like. Tap, do it for fun, but you may never be in a musical. But if it's an exercise and you enjoy doing it, do it. But don't... do bear in mind that it's not going to help your acting, it's not going to improve your acting.

But Laban does, because you see Laban is not just physical and that's where the really the whole crux of the matter lies. He goes right into the emotional aspect of moving. And many people... because as I said before, most people start with the efforts – the eight basic efforts. And I did that with the Theatre, but oh gosh! So much more intensively! And then they stop with that you see. They think, 'Oh eight basic... oh yes eight different... oh yes eight different characters... good, that's all I need to know. I don't need to know any more about Laban.' They're just scratching the surface. I think I said that at the end of the last thing [the Hidden Theatre event at the British Library], because this girl said, 'Well, what's it got to do with the voice?' Well, it's got to do everything with the voice – everything! Voice and movement are synonymous, you can't split the two.

KH: How long did you... when you started working with the actors, how long did you feel that it took before people were able to work within Laban's ideas, and kind of competently and feel like they knew what they were doing, and it kind of showed in their performance?

JN: Well the first thing that shows in their performance is their own movement, how good they are. And that's all we did. And they had... and don't forget they were young, and they wanted to work, they really worked hard. And every day they had... every day they had least an hour – at least an hour's movement – when I went fulltime, because we could see how well it was working. So then I went fulltime. And it was very obvious then that people were improving.

Mind you, they were very stiff to begin with. They called me Irma Greizer. I don't know whether you've heard of Irma Greizer – probably not.

KH: I haven't, no.

JN: Well she was... she was a woman deputy commandant I think of some concentration camp.

KH: Oh gosh!

[Laughter]

JN: And they were living in a... as a community in a house, and the first day none of them could get up the stairs, they were so stiff. And however they continued to exercise, and the next day they couldn't get down. It was very funny, they were walking down backwards. But you know I suppose if they'd been the ordinary student they would have packed it in there and then and thought 'that's enough of that'. But of course they didn't, and they got beyond the pain threshold.

And then it started to come out, because in various plays where they'd done a bit of dance, there was a girl in the company who'd done a bit of ballet, and so she'd be... a little before I came. And she was an actress. And so she had just been called upon to give them a bit of movement. But it was not really what they wanted. And Rosalie was very happy to go back to acting when I came on the scene.

And I was able to already start in the Molière doing the opening, there's a little dance, and the ending. And it began to be noticed how much better they moved. And of course our actors mostly wore shoes that they can move in. They'd be not proper shoes as such – not outdoor shoes – but they'd wear sort of either black ballet shoes, or soft shoes that they could really move in. And Sigurd Leeder who was, you know, one of... who was Kurt Jooss's colleague, at one time it was called the Jooss Leeder Ballet Company, and then it became the Jooss Ballet Company. Well, he said, 'these actors move like some of the best dancers I've ever seen, Jean'.

KH: That's quite an extraordinary compliment isn't it?

JN: Oh it was lovely. It was lovely. So in the end we were doing a chess ballet, and an atom ballet.

KH: In Uranium 235.

JN: Yes.

KH: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

JN: Yes.

KH: How did you go about working on the ballet scenes in that play, because it's quite extraordinary in the stage directions when you read it? It's quite hard, for me, to visualize it on the page.

JN: Yes, well, first of all you see Ewan, who'd left school about 14 or 15, he didn't know about quantum physics and all that. And he went to some professor who was an authority on the atom, and he explained it to Ewan, who explains it beautifully in the play – very simply. And then I took it from there and explained it in movement.

So we had... I played the role – I've got a picture of myself out there – as... I was the Lola the Smasher that went over the line that blew the thing apart. There was Alpha Particle, and there were protons and neutrons. And I've got a picture somewhere, which I can't find now, where you've got a whole pile of these people altogether and there's a leg sticking up there, and they're all intertwined with each other. I mean, I can see Harry Corbett's face sticking out somewhere, and somebody else's leg sticking out somewhere else. So I mean there were a few complaints at the time that I was cruel you know, but it was very exciting. And then there'd be a load bang and they exploded.

Now it was bad enough to get into those very difficult positions, but to have an orchestra that suddenly explodes, and you have to explode on the dot – it's not 'Oh I've got to get my leg out first before I can leap, you know'! And there was no gentleness on my part; they just had to explode on that thing. But they did, because it was expected of them they did it. And it was very exciting, because with the lighting and the sound. And then the next movement is you see people leaping high in different directions, because the bomb's gone off so to speak. And I think that was very successful, you know the way that we interpreted it.

KH: That was a play that Sam Wanamaker saw.

JN: Sorry?

KH: Sam Wanamaker later saw that play didn't he?

JN: Yes.

KH: And you took it to London. Is that right?

JN: I think so, yes. Sam Wanamaker and... oh what's that other actress – a family of actors... Redgrave. Michael Redgrave. Yes, Sam Wanamaker and Michael Redgrave came to see us in [Manchester], and liked it so much that they took it down to... we were in Manchester and they took us down to London. And of course another thing that we did was Alice in Wonderland where there was... and we've got no pictures of it at all because we were so hard up we couldn't afford...

KH: Oh, what a shame!

JN: And it was brilliant. The set was absolutely brilliant. Now there again we had... it was a chess set. You know, when she's playing chess?

KH: Yes.

JN: And it was at the point... a corner of the chess set was pointed towards the audience, and the first half, the first triangle was one the... just the ramp of the stage. And the next triangle was built up in layers, so it went up quite high. And I followed the story of a chess game. And you know, the music was specially written. And we had all the pawns coming on doing their little dance together. And we had the bishops being rather sort of satirical in a way. And the knights – and I had a fight between the two knights. So although the knights had to follow the actual pattern that they would have done – you know - what is it, two down and one across? Like that...

KH: It's kind of an L shape isn't it?

JN: Yes so that... but at the same time they had a fight, but they never touched each other. They kept their... what I call the kinesphere. So they were battling with each other, very close to each other, but they didn't actually touch. It was very stylised. And they could move, of course they could bend right back, and hold it as they went back, and press forward. It was very, very exciting. And when we were at Barnsley, which wasn't the best place to go with Alice in Wonderland at Christmas, I must admit, because they were a very tough audience. When we got there they said, 'Oh we've... we got rid of so-and-so... we got rid of Wilfred Pickles a short time ago. We booed him off the stage, and he was from the North.'

[Laughter]

KH: He was a pretty famous person at that point as well.

JN: It was quite funny, because poor old Howard got pennies and ha'pennies thrown at him.

KH: Oh dear.

JN: And he'd never had that experience before. He didn't quite know whether it was... and he kept picking them up and putting them in... he was the Red Queen. He kept putting them in his purse you see. He didn't realise... [Laughs] He didn't realise that it was an insult. And... but the miners who sit up in the Gods – because Joan would sit there and take notes – and she heard two old miners say, 'Now this the best bit. This is

the fight.' And this would be the fight of the two knights you see. That was rather interesting.

KH: In general what were audience reactions like to Theatre Workshop when you were touring in different places?

JN: Well there were audiences where we had a full house. And there were audiences we didn't have a full house at all. And there was one occasion when we only had one person in the audience – and that was at, I think Poole in Dorset, in the winter when... it was at Christmas and it was in the evening. We were playing at some little theatre, or some place on the seafront, which was wooden. And we noticed a few of the audience in the afternoon coming with blankets and hot water bottles. And it didn't dawn on us 'til we got in there and had to change that it was absolutely freezing. There was a roaring sea outside you know, and oh gosh! And then in the evening there was just this one man who came. And Joan said 'Everybody's got to do their very best. He's come to see our show.' So we gave it our very best. And at the end, as the curtains went up he was so shy he ran out the theatre. [Laughs]

But having said, for the most part people were very excited by it. What they saw, they may not have always – and like I'm talking off the top of my head at the moment – they may not have always understood or liked what we did politically, but they loved the way we did it. They loved the movement, they loved the music, the singing. And Ewan always wrote according to the manifesto, which I don't know whether you know?

KH: Yes, I've seen the manifesto.

JN: Where it had to be a sort of plasticity, and music, and so that... and people should be able to sing. A bit like the [inaudible] of the old days, and the commedia dell'arte... and it was an in-depth experience. And yes, they did like that. And I felt they felt that it was different to anything else they'd see. And of course many of the people up North just loved the politics, there was no doubt about that. There was of course a great difficulty when we came down to London. I mean, what people saw in London was not the Theatre Workshop – the true Theatre Workshop of what it had been.

KH: How did you feel that it changed?

JN: Well, I was sorry I must say. There were many people who felt we shouldn't come to London. That we'd already established ourselves up North and we should stay there, and Ewan was one of them. And Joan despised the West End, Ewan despised the West End, so why were we coming down to London. But at the same time we were... [hard up] the company... Well there was David Scase and his wife Rosalie, and they had a child. We had... Hamish who was two. And we couldn't go on living the way we were. We had no money, and we were touring, constantly touring. And it cost. And there was the opportunity of having this theatre at Stratford, for peanuts. And many of the company were very much against it. We had many heated discussions over it. Joan wasn't very keen at first. But we were living in an awful house, which was subsiding down the hill. Yes, so you know, we'd been living in pretty much squalor for our art.

And so in the end it was decided that we should go down South to see what this theatre was like. And Gerry and Harry went down. And Harry, who was a bit of a do-it-yourself guru, he thought he could do something about it. I thought it was the most horrible place I'd ever seen, absolutely awful. I wasn't particularly keen on London. But... and of course we couldn't afford to live anywhere. So we lived in theatre [Laughter], which of course was not officially sanctioned.

KH: How many of you were living in the theatre?

JN: Oh that's a good question. I think most of us at one time or another [Laughter], and sort of hiding everything away during the day. But we couldn't afford lodgings because they were too dear. And when you're [really] poor, you know you're poor in every sense of the word. Until in the end I think we eventually all found a place. But it took some time.

But although people say oh yes, you know Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, well it wasn't. Joan came up to Manchester, I think she walked to Manchester from London – well she said she did. Mind you, Joan's a romantic so she probably did. She probably got lifts on the way too, I don't know. But Ewan had already started the agit-prop group [performing on the back of a lorry] in Manchester with a view to having a theatre at some point. And then it came... I think it became the Red Megaphones – or was it the other way round? I'm not sure.

KH: I think it was the Red Megaphones.

JN: And then Joan joined him, and then they decided together on the Theatre Workshop. And I think Ewan's mother said well they're working so closely together they should get married. So I think they got married at 19, which didn't last very long at all. And by the time I was on the scene, oh, Ewan must have been 31. So you know, their marriage had been over for years and years. And of course Joan was, by that time, with Gerry.

KH: Gerry Raffles.

JN: Ewan was a freelance so to speak. And otherwise had he not been I would have left... I didn't... it wasn't my scene to break up any marriages. I was a bit surprised at that. But they hadn't bothered to get divorced because it had not meant anything to them. So they had to get divorced before Ewan and I could marry. But I think... Joan had been with Gerry for something like... whatever... maybe about ten years. [Ewan] and Joan were only together for about a year or less but it was a very good [working] relationship Joan and Ewan, from the theatre point of view.

KH: Yes, I was going to ask you about how they worked together, and how that collaboration worked.

JN: Oh they were very good together. They were very, very good. Joan had flights of fancy which were sometimes in cloud cuckoo land. And Ewan would bring her down to reality. And he was the only one who had the sort of capacity to do that, that she would respect, because most of us were that much younger. You see, I was eight years younger – eight or nine years younger – and my background had been very different. So when Ewan did leave, when he came to London... And I thought... I think he could see that the manifesto would not work in London in many ways.

KH: What was it about London that made him think that?

JN: Well we first of all we had to get the West End theatre down to Stratford, and that was difficult in itself. You would think they were going to another world. And the politics would be against us.

KH: Why do you say the politics would be against you?

JN: Because the West End was all for the middle classes, and the upper classes. And you never saw working people go to the theatre. It was expensive and they just didn't go. It didn't appeal to them. I mean, you might get a very odd few, but not many. You know, you wouldn't get many people wanting to go and see... what's this chap called...? Noel Coward really, because his plays were about different people.

And when Ewan left because Alan Lomax came on the scene and he was doing ballads and blues with Humphrey Littleton, Peggy Seger came on the scene and he suddenly realised that although Ewan didn't have any musical knowledge as such... I mean, writing music or being able to play an instrument was not his scene. He had all the theatre experience of acting in his plays, writing his plays, knowing about Stanislavski, knowing something of Laban, and that he put all that into his performances as a singer. And later on he used his theatre experience to do it. [He created the Ballad Operas on Radio. He also trained The Critics – a singers group]

And I think in a way he... he probably sometimes missed the theatre because of that. Now Joan... and they were both bloody minded in that. Joan said... 'What a waste, he's gone to the hoot-a-nunnies' – that's what you called the folk scene you know. Well, I thought it was a waste too, because he could have done what he was doing. I mean, he did do most wonderful radio ballads, and he got the Prix d'Italia for them, on two of them I think. And it was a new art form, it was fantastic. But I think he could have done all that by taking time out from the theatre but still working in the theatre as a playwright. Hugh McDiarmid was very upset that he was wasting his time singing when he should have been writing plays. You know who Hugh McDiarmid is?

KH: Yes, yes.

JN: And I think George Bernard Shaw said there were only two playwrights of genius in the country today, one was Ewan MacColl and the other was himself.

KH: What was it for you that made Ewan MacColl's plays so interesting?

JN: Well, because they were always written with a view to the... I suppose to the manifesto. The music, there was opportunity to move, there was an open stage, there was not much in the way of sets all that, sometimes a bare stage but sometimes the most wonderful stage with ramps and sets where you could dance and move around them – use them as part of your dance you know, whatever.

And there was opportunity for people to dance and to do group scenes and movement like we did in *The Other Animals* where we got a scene of the dead rising from the ground, with the music very, very, very, very slowly. And the hand, all the fingers pointing in one direction to an actor on the stage, which is quite powerful. Now a) that was great from the Theatre Workshop point... from... I mean Ewan had written the play where these people rise up, but I had found the place in the music where they should use that as a dance... as a dance movement if you like. But they had to have the training. It is most difficult to move from a lying position on the floor, to a position where you're standing and you're pointing forward, and you do it without any shuffle or slip or bang. You just move as one. This whole body of people moved up very, very slowly. And their arm moved up too, and it was like one thing moving altogether, getting higher and higher with the arm pointing out. And very powerful. And then of course the lighting on top.

You see, later on in West End you couldn't do things like that. People didn't have the training. And there was a time when it was a mixed bag, you'd get people who had worked with you, Theatre Workshop... they were in demand, because they could move well and they ... We were sort of the new kids on the block, and everybody thought we were great. And you couldn't blame the actors for wanting to go and earn some money. Normally we didn't earn any money you know, and so they would go off and get well paid. And good luck to them. Then they'd probably come back for a show.

And I remember they all came back on one Christmas to do *A Christmas Carol*. And I was able to do a lovely scene, in that skating scene. I did Scrooge with his first love. And we... you know, in the story where he has a love, and it showed how he was very much in love with her, then he hadn't the time to spend with her, and then in the end he didn't go. And so... those were nice little sequences, but the best in it was the skating scene. We did that at Stratford just on this rather horrid bare floor. And we did it here, and we had actors who were acting as though they couldn't skate. And they were being slid along by people. There were others who were good skaters, and we got them turning you know, and others that were racing. And it was fantastically good.

In fact, a chap who wrote for the *Financial Times* – oh, very famous writer, dead now – said at the time 'brilliantly simple choreography'. And I thought 'I wish he'd said "simply brilliant".'. But actually when I think back, you know, 'brilliantly simple' because they were good. And it was just done out of movement. We had no other sort of little things to help us skate. It was the sheer movement.

But I couldn't have done that with newcomers from the West End. I mean they just couldn't move. They'd all done their bits and pieces in movement, but the thing was it didn't... whatever they'd done it didn't help them improvise; it didn't help them use their bodies with ease in everything that they did. And there's always a discrepancy between their movement and their voice. The voice would always be beautifully trained, but the bodies would let them down. And I think that Joan got fed up in the end.

You see, she was able to do *Fings Ain't*. Well, I sat next to Avis Bunnage, and we looked at her. We'd obviously been used to Ewan's perfectly crafted playwriting. And because he was an actor in the company he wouldn't mind if something needed changing a little

bit. Often it didn't need changing at all, but just occasionally you might... changing of a line to fit in with what was going on and Stanislavski and whatever. And because he was an actor in the company he could see that.

And then we got people who... well Joan can... Joan got this young man who was... I think he was a prisoner for a time. I think he was the playwright of Fing's Ain't – Frank Norman. And we looked at the name and I said, 'Fings? He can't spell. Fings!' But Joan you see, being a cockney, was I think quite into the cockney background, and into the Soho thing.

And I was in two minds about this show. I thought it was quite funny, but it wasn't the stuff that I really wanted to do. You know, when I thought of The Other Animals and Fings Ain't, and the movement there and the passion and the voices and the singing and... but it went down very well in London, which you would probably expect. Whether it would have travelled I don't know. I think we did travel with it a bit, I can't remember. But it certainly went to the West End and was a riot.

KH: Who was choosing to do those kind of plays? Who decided what was going to be put on?

JN: Well initially when I joined the company when we... before London, they'd always be waiting for Ewan to write another play. Or if he wasn't writing another play it would be one of his adaptations, i.e. Lysistrata, which was really I think the best adaptation I've ever seen - ever read - it really was. Or adaptations of Molière like The Flying Doctor and... or the other thing...

KH: Was it The Good Soldier Schweik? The Good Soldier Schweik?

JN: Oh yes, we did that, that was very good. And so that would tide us over until he'd written another one you see. When he left of course... I mean, we did do a couple of his plays while we were down in London, and then he left. And then... well we had Fings Ain't and then we had Shelagh Delaney... it was all a lot of notes which had to be turned into a play. And then there was Oh! What a Lovely War, and some people thought that was marvellous.

Now Ewan went to see it and hadn't been involved in it, and came out and thought it was the nadir of Theatre Workshop, which was very sad because he went and came out and listened to what people were saying. And he said what was so dreadful for him, having started Theatre Workshop with Joan, was that they were all saying, 'Oh jolly good show. Very good show.' And they were all people who were... knew people in the last war, had been... in the First World War, and that sort of class of people if you like. And they were... and other people were coming out and humming and singing and laughing about the tunes, you know and enjoyed the tunes. But you can understand that they were catchy tunes or something, it did miss the point. They had missed the point about it being a... it wasn't a 'jolly good show'. 'Well done, jolly good show' you know.

But then I think a couple of widows from generals or people who were top brass in the First World War, who'd done their bit you know, and others who... were lower down and had probably died in the war... were in tears that the memory of these heroes, as

they thought they were, were being maligned and shown as being rather stupid men, who'd sent men to be killed unnecessarily.

So the thing that... if it has a reaction, if you get a reaction well, that's good. If you get the two things... as Joan said, if people leave the theatre with their thoughts on the last bus, 'oh, if we hurry we'll get the last bus home', you haven't succeeded. But if they leave the theatre very much involved with what they've seen, and very pro or very much against it, that's a good sign. But if they're indifferent you've not done your job.

KH: It's a bad sign.

JN: And that really comes back to what you said to me, what did the audience think of the show, of our shows generally. And I think they admired them tremendously. And they certainly admired the way the production went, another thing that we did.

KH: You've talked about the way you were involved in productions in terms of the choreography and your input into how different scenes should be done, which is really, really interesting. In a more kind of general way, who made decisions within the company?

JN: Well the director has a pretty good idea we'd have meetings of course, and I was left to do my movement entirely on my own. I was never, ever given any [guidelines]. I was a freehand. I was completely free to do what I wanted, which is great. And I would work with Joan, and if she would be doing something I would just... well, we got to know each other so well working like this that I would say to her 'look, if so-and-so did this, you know, and...' and she would take it up, and she would try it out. And if it worked - and it often would work, because I'd been watching it - if it had problems, you know and we helped each other. So not only did I do the movement but I would often be... not always but often be with Joan when she was doing something. And she was willing to learn, because she wanted to learn about Laban too.

Ewan, we had a great respect for each other's work. And she respected Ewan's writing, and he respected her direction you know. So that he would write the play, and she would... she would admire what he'd done, and then when we started to do it she'd probably go through it with Ewan, and then when we started acting it and... there might be a little bit somewhere where there was an awkward part, and they would go round it together, and then they'd think well maybe this ought to be changed here. And Ewan would be happy to do that. So artistic policy was with the three of us.

The financial policy was something else again where everybody met. And when Gerry took over the management, because he was not an actor, he couldn't act... I never thought he was very good at business management. But I think that was my ignorance really as much as anything, because I mean, to be a business manager of Theatre Workshop must have been absolutely frightful. [Laughs] And you know, I was in... I was just very happy doing my job. If I'd had to try and get any money for the theatre it would have been total disaster. And of course Joan just thought it would somehow come, the money. You know, there were great crises from time to time when we had no money. And we gave ourselves a bit of a holiday, and then we were meeting up again and starting again. It was extraordinary really.

KH: When you first began working with Theatre Workshop did Laban come and watch the things that you'd choreographed?

JN: Laban never took any... there's a mistake here that I really ought to put right. We always said 'we did Laban', we didn't say 'Jean Newlove did Laban'. I wouldn't have expected it at the time, I just did... Laban so to speak. And we always said 'we did Laban'... and of course researchers then got it all wrong and thought Laban came and did classes, helped by me. And there's a girl - who should have known better - a dancer who wrote in a book Laban taught Theatre Workshop, Jean Newlove assisting. Well, that was a load of old codswallop! Laban never took a class for Theatre Workshop, but he did come and see them. And he loved the company, and said had he been left to his own devices in Germany he would have liked to have done something like that, because he did act himself a bit. And he would have loved to have done that. And I took him to his first show of Johnny Noble actually.

What did happen, where we did have a contact was the dance studios, when there was a studio then - by that time there was a studio run by Lisa Ullman - and the students were having a party and a bit of a performance beforehand.

JN: What did happen, where we did have a contact was the dance studios, when there was a studio then - by that time there was a studio run by Lisa Ullman - and the students were having a party and a bit of a performance beforehand. They invited Theatre Workshop actors who were in Manchester at that time, round to the party, and Laban was there. So they saw the sort of movement and stuff that was done. And so we made contact there.

And then when I was away for a time, two of the company went to Sylvia Bodmer for a class. It was probably going to be more if they could do it, if they got the time before they went touring. And that was Rosalie and Howard. Rosie only stayed for one class of Sylvia's because it was so intense, and she got painful legs or something, and she felt that she was getting arthritis. So she didn't go again. Howard went and Laban happened to pop in, watch Sylvia teaching Howard.

And Howard, of course, was light as a feather, and I'd been using that for [the Molière]... because he was playing Sganarelle in *The Flying Doctor*. And I used to have him jumping up and lying full length and talking to the audience, and then springing up again. And he could do that, he was great. And he was very proud because Laban said he would make a good dancer, he was very light on his feet.

But then what was nice was that Lisa's studio in Manchester, during the holidays when they were not using it, she allowed Theatre Workshop and me to take classes there. So I was able to teach from there. And I remember going one day, we were so pleased to have a nice studio to work in, we started about half past nine, and we were going to work for, I don't know, an hour and a half or something like that. And we went on and on and on and on, and I went on and on and on, and I thought oh surely... actually there wasn't a clock around. I thought it must be time. But not wanting to waste time, and thinking any minute somebody would tell me time's up, I didn't... and then I said 'I think we'd better find out...' and we'd been going on for something like two and half, three hours. And you know, whether you would get that commitment today I wonder.

KH: What do you think it was that made people so committed?

JN: Well [long pause] certainly Joan and Ewan knew their theatre background, and they had charisma. And they had a goal. And they explained this goal to us, and explained how theatre could really be – really good theatre. And we were going to take from the past, the good theatres from the past. And when I joined them, she said 'Oh well, now we've got the trinity' you see, which was the part that was missing. And now we've got voice, and we've got movement, and we've got [a product]... And I think that that was the... that it was their charisma, their knowledge of theatre – they were very well read. And also they gave classes in various aspects on theatre and on voice, and people in the past who were... had produced some excellent theatre work, across the world you know.

KH: I was going to ask you about this actually, and we've talked a little bit about Laban, and you've mentioned commedia dell'arte, what other styles or practitioners do you think had an influence on Theatre Workshop?

JN: What do you mean? People?

KH: Yes, people or theories or... your point of view really on the things that you thought were influential maybe apart from Laban.

JN: Well Stanislavski. Joan... you see Joan would be interested in various aspects of theatre that she'd read about, you know. I can't remember now what her... Anybody that had brought theatre ahead, advanced it in some way. I'm trying to think of a man's name, I can't remember his name now. And of course Ewan and Joan were very interested in... from the word go you know, the plays of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, which were plays of the people if you like, which dealt with people's problems. Whether they were comic or humorous or whatever, or tragic, they were there, and they wanted to do the same thing in a modern way, which they succeeded in doing in many ways. And any... I think they may have... I think Joan may have had a few people who she admired in the theatre, but they would be... I think they would be few and far between really. I'm trying to think of a man's name but I can't remember it so it's gone now. But I don't ever remember her saying 'oh yes he's a great blueprint for what we want to do', because their ideas of theatre grew out of really what was lacking in British theatre today.

KH: Why did you decide to leave Theatre Workshop?

JN: Why did I leave?

KH: Yes.

JN: Well for one reason I became pregnant. And then I... there was a girl in Theatre Workshop who was... she was leaving and she said she wondered what she was going to do. And I said 'oh start a drama school' - you know, half joking. And she did actually.

And I helped her promote it, and I worked with her on it. And that was the East 15 Acting School.

KH: Oh, OK.

JN: Which is now part of Essex, I think, University. And I worked there for quite a long time. And then... before that I was going abroad and I trained my own dance group and went to Warsaw and Moscow with them. And that's again something which is quite interesting because in Eastern Europe 'modern dance', as it was called, was not recognised at all. You can either do classical ballet or you could do folk dance. And it was both of a very high standard. But nobody ever did modern dance.

KH: What were the reactions to your work when you took it over?

JN: Well of course... well I entered a competition, my dancers. And I'd had to be very clever about it because had it been modern dance they wouldn't have understood it, because it didn't [belong]... it was a folk dance competition. I obviously couldn't enter the classical ballet, because my people weren't ballet dancers. But I trained them in modern dance, in Laban. They were Laban trained. And I also got them to learn highland dancing and Irish dancing. Not... I don't mean country reels, I mean step dancing and highland dance, which is quite difficult – it's as hard as ballet really, the way you turned out, and the way you have to hold your arms and so on. It's like bad ballet that, because it's the antlers of the deer you know. I mean, if you hold the arms like that in ballet you'd be thought, oh, dreadful, because you hold them like this you see. This is different, if you hold them like this, with a crook and all this, like the antlers.

And I... well what I did was I adapted the folk dance. The highland dancing we learnt swords, seann triubhas, which is a man's dance which is not often done, it's very technically hard. And I got the six of the best dancers to do that, and eight of them to do the swords. And it's very [hard]... it goes... it starts slowly and then it gets faster and faster. And we started slow and we just got much faster than they do normally. And I got them turning all the way round, turning to face different ways. So they seemed as though they were spinning at one time, and still going across the swords. And so that was movement mixed up with folk dance.

And then when we came to do the Irish thing, it was a dance again... it was really a dance, a man against a wife who's being argumentative or something. But it actual fact it was also the... I think the British Army against the Irish; you know when they were over there. And she's shaking her skirts and getting very uptight, and clicking her heels and doing all this sort of thing. And it's a woman's dance. And so I put that into it with the Stanislavski you see, used that, the units. So this is this woman who's furious, or it could be this army who's against the occupying forces.

So that went on quite well, and actually did win an award, which was quite surprising. But there was a lot more movement in it. I had people dancing and picking up wool and weaving cloth and dancing with the... you know the finished product and so on. And so the Russians didn't know really what had hit them. But they could accept it, whereas if I'd just done anything as a modern dance, it would have been thrown out I think.

KH: Did you keep in touch with Joan Littlewood, after you'd left?

JN: Oh yes. Well she was the godmother to both of my children. So we kept... and she kept coming to see my courses that I ran. She loved them, and was always very keen, always loved the sort of scales that I did in movement. Just as you have scales in singing and piano, or any musical instrument, so you have scales in dance. And she used to love those, loved to try and join in. And she came to my last course a week before she died.

KH: I think I'm coming to the end of the questions that I had. I think one of the last things that I wanted to ask you was whether you had a favourite production that you worked on with Theatre Workshop?

JN: I think possibly the most enriching was *The Other Animals*. Yes, because Ewan was... he was... he had listened to Mahler's Second Symphony, and out of that seemed to come *The Other Animals*. And he introduced me to Mahler's work, and I loved it. And I felt quite inspired by it, so that that had a great deal of meaning for me. And there's a lot of opportunity to work, you know with the music.

KH: That always seems to me that it would be quite a difficult play to stage, because it moves around so much in terms of the characters and the time and the space. Did you find that at all when you were producing it?

JN: Well no not really. I didn't find it difficult. I don't know whether John Bury did with the set, but once the set was there it was very easy for me to arrange the dancers around it.

KH: The set always looks so interesting, because that was the one with the cage wasn't it?

JN: Yes, it was. And of course you know, Ewan who was the prisoner was high up, and he had to stay there whether he wanted to go to the loo or not. He could get down at the interval but then he'd be up there again. So he had to be always in sight.

KH: And that production involved dance as well didn't it? Did it have specific sections where... I'm thinking... I can't remember the name of the character, where the female characters, there's two sections where they come on and talk to the prisoner. It's later, it's a kind... it's later, sort of in the middle of the play. I just can't remember the character's name.

JN: Do you mean...?

KH: There's a character in green and then one in red who come on. I just remember the colours described in the stage directions.

JN: Oh you mean the women?

KH: Yes, the women who come on.

JN: Oh yes, well there were three women, and they represent different women in his life. One is the virgin in white, there's all... is the sort little housewife – the little woman. And the other one is, I think, the prostitute. And I was the moon, who was another woman but was unapproachable.

And that was... that was interesting to do, because they had some gorgeous music for it, but I can't remember... I think it was Shostakovich. And I had to have strings coming from my neck, which you couldn't see, they were silver wires really, with a huge aura. Is it an aura, the thing goes round of the moon, where it shines? And you have to be very careful spinning, because I had to come on on an archway, and gradually turn and go down the slope. And then I'd spin and get to the stage on the floor and spin madly. And I had to watch it, because in spinning this thing kept going in front of me. And it started getting, you know sort of twisted. And the wires were getting tighter and tighter around my neck. I don't know what Chick had done, but he'd done something vitally wrong, because I could hardly breathe [properly].

KH: Oh gosh!

JN: And it was really cutting into my neck. But...

KH: I think that brings me to the end of my questions. I don't know whether you've got anything else that you'd like to add in relation to the work you did with Theatre Workshop?

JN: Oh I don't think so dear. I mean I... well, I'll probably think oh yes I could have said this and that and the other but...

KH: Yes, people always say that afterwards though...