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Ted Loveday – interview transcript

Interviewer: Charlotte Chelsom-Pill

7 December 2007

Scenery designer. Audiences; The Blue Lamp; Empire Theatre, Croydon; Enid Blyton; Brunskill and Loveday Ltd; John Brunskill Ltd; Bonar Colleano; Jack Hylton; impresarios; Wilfred Lawson; Loveday and Higson; the Old Vic.; John Osborne; Val Parnell; John Reith; television; scenery changes; scenery design; variety; Norman Wisdom.

CCP: OK, this is Charlotte Chelsom-Pill with Ted Loveday. If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to begin with how you became involved in the theatre.

TL: Well, I have here an article from The Stage newspaper, 1944, written four months after I was born. It says: 'There should be no need to worry about Scenery for Shows for a good many years judging by what we saw of Master Edwin Loveday, aged four months, at his Christening party on Sunday. Eddie looks like following in his Fathers footsteps - 'Following dear old Dad', and Ted Loveday was justifiably very proud of his son. Ted, of course, has an enviable reputation in the world of Scenery.'

I was born into Theatrical Scenery. I was brought up surrounded by Theatrical Scenery. My Father at the time was Managing Director of the most successful Theatrical Scenery firm of last century. He taught me really from the moment I popped out into the world how to design scenery, how to build scenery, how to run scenery, how to fly scenery, how to trip scenery. You name it and he taught it to me. That was my total environment at home; and I spent many hours in Brunskill and Loveday's Theatrical Scenery Works in Newport Street in Lambeth in South London and in the Cornwall Works at the Oval in South London. I saw hundreds of sets being built. I experienced hundreds of pieces of scenery. I went into nearly every - if not every - principal West End Theatre of the day. I went into hundreds of other theatres, provincial and London, such as Wimbledon, such as the Grand Theatre in Blackpool, such as the Pavilion in Bournemouth - loads and loads of theatres. It was my total background as a child. We had at our home in Croydon, once, twice a month, garden parties which involved many theatricals of many strata within theatre: designers, producers, actors, props makers, other scenery makers. You name it, they were there. So that was my total environment.

CCP: Wow, that must have been fantastic!

TL: Can I say: you are asking me to consider the years 1945-1968?

CCP: That's right.

TL: From my perspective, whilst I appreciate that 1945 was a convenient year because it's the year immediately after the conclusion of the Second World War insofar as Germany was concerned - although not insofar as Japan was concerned - it's an artificial year insofar as theatre is concerned because the changes in theatre in fact began when cinema came in and when radio came in. But though cinema adversely affected theatre, radio in fact promoted theatre because many people would listen to the radio; and in those days all towns, I would suggest, certainly large towns, had at least one theatre - often two, three, four, sometimes five or six theatres. So, having heard a performer on the Radio, people would want to see these guys when they turned up at one of their local theatres. So radio perhaps enhanced theatre. Cinema worked against it; but television was the major medium that really adversely affected theatre. John Reith in 1935... John Reith, I understand, didn't think much of television, didn't have a great deal of faith in television - as was the case with most people who were major players within British Theatre. John Reith was not a major player within British Theatre but, because of the fact he was the first Director General of the BBC, he had a close relationship with it. In 1935 he contacted my Father and said to my Father 'We have this thing called 'Television', he said. 'Are you interested in building all the scenery for it?'. My Father said to him 'I'll let you know'; and he 'phoned him three or four days later and said to him 'I've thought about this,' he said, 'No, we're not interested', he said, 'There is no future in television.'

CCP: Really?

TL: Well, he was not alone. This was the attitude of most theatricals at that time. If you can visualize... I mean, television today: You have screens of enormous dimensions; but in those days they were very small, the definition was appalling, and nobody could really believe that people who went to theatres and saw shows principally through proscenium arches with loads of colour and loads of movement were going to sit in a room and look at this diminutive little screen in a corner somewhere. They just didn't feel it was going to catch on. So theatre continued really in the belief that television was not a threat. My Father and his belief that it had no future was just one of many, and they just trundled on: And the records of shows that Brunskill and Loveday built evidence in the thirties that there was no threat. Look at 1936 - They built 92 shows for London Theatres; 1937 they built 86 shows for London Theatres; 1938 they built 104 shows for London Theatres.

Brunskill and Loveday at that time was made up of two competitive firms which was 'Loveday and Higson' - which was my Father's firm - and 'John Brunskill Ltd.' John Brunskill in fact died in 1934/35 and the business was taken over by his son Jack, but they were the two principal competing firms, and when I say 104 shows for 1938, for instance, that Brunskill and Loveday built - that was between the two firms. The two firms came together in 1939 because it was felt that [everybody knew the War was coming, and it was felt that] both firms possibly couldn't survive but at least maybe one firm would survive, and so they amalgamated to form 'Brunskill and Loveday Ltd' in 1939. Well, in 1939 they built 73 shows for London's West End. 1940 that dropped down to 28 shows. So, they were quite right in their feeling that British Theatre was going to suffer.

About this time Churchill 'phoned my Father up and [Winston Churchill was Prime Minister at the time]... or shortly after he became Prime Minister...

CCP: That's amazing!

TL: Well, you've got to realize that politicians and theatricals often interrelate very closely. If you remember that one of Churchill's daughters was herself an actress...

CCP: Right.

TL: ... and if you look at today's politicians they socialise quite a lot with theatricals.

CCP: Yes.

TL: So it's nothing unusual that Churchill and my Father knew each other. Churchill 'phoned my Father up and he said 'I want you to build coffins'; and my Father said 'No'. He said, 'I've always built to entertain the public - I'm not going to bury them'. To which Churchill replied, 'In that case you've lost your Timber Licence'. Well, for a theatrical scenery firm without the ability to get timber ... it crucifies them; and it was a cause for great concern : But my Father, who by then was 60 years of age... and Churchill, who was a formidable character... was as obstinate as you like as Churchill. So neither would give in; and Churchill then phoned my Father up and he says, 'I've got an idea'. He says, 'Build dummy towns and villages and tanks and this, that, and the other and you can keep your Licence'. So my Father then went into building dummy towns, villages, tanks, and all sorts of things for which a magician called Maskelyne - Jasper Maskelyne - quite often takes the credit : But many scenery builders got involved, including scenery builders from film studios such as Twickenham and so on; and they were building these artificial things to fool the Germans. So when you look at the number of West End shows built by Brunskill and Loveday in 1940 - i.e. 28 shows which in 1941 went down to 18 shows - it's not too worrying if one bears in mind the fact that they turned their attention also to building all sorts of other things for the War effort.

CCP: Yes.

TL: 1942 though things began to pick up. Now, there is a great belief that London Theatres closed down throughout the duration of the War.

CCP: Yes.

TL: Well, that basically is a load of nonsense.

CCP: Oh, really?

TL: London Theatres did close down because they were more or less forced to close down, but you can't keep impresarios... I mean, impresarios want money. Their whole lives are geared to putting on shows in order to generate money or at least their whole lives were geared to that. There is a saying in the theatre today - and there has been a saying for many years - 'The show must go on'. Most people believe that this saying means that 'We mustn't let the audience down'.

CCP: That's certainly what I thought it meant.

TL: Well, I am of the opinion, having been told by my Father, that that is not entirely correct - 'The Show must go on [because the Impresario needs the money, wants the money]'. So, in other words, 'You bloody well get out there and perform, because I need the money'. So, the theatres weren't closed voluntarily really. They were closed under duress, and they were opened as soon as possible. So, we have got a record here of Brunskill and Loveday - 1939 [which was the year that war was declared, September 3rd 1939]: 73 shows. 1940 we dropped down to 28 shows. 1941 we go down further to 18 shows. 1942 we're up to 53 West End Shows. 1943 we've gone up a wee bit to 57 West End shows - and don't forget they're building these dummy towns, villages, and tanks, etcetera as well. So, 1943 - 57 shows, 1944 we're up to 80 shows. So, we are back almost to where we were before the outbreak of the Second World War. So, 80 shows going into London's West End in 1944. It dropped down to 64 shows in 1945, but for the wartime period 1940-1945 Brunskill and Loveday built 300 West End shows, which is an average of 50 West End shows per year.

CCP: Yes.

TL: Now, from a scenery builder's point of view, the last thing you really want is a 'long run' show. Clearly, if a show goes into, say, Drury Lane and runs for a period of 18 months you have one show in Drury Lane for a period of 18 months. But if a show goes into Drury Lane and only lasts for a month and that keeps being repeated you get 18 shows going into Drury Lane over the 18-month period which - from the point of view of a scenery builder, a props maker, somebody who makes costumes, somebody who makes hats, etcetera - 18 shows in 18 months is a damn sight more attractive than one show in 18 months. So, the more shows that trundle through, the happier that those who are behind the scenes in providing the backup to the shows - I don't mean the scene shifters, etc., but those who supply the scenery and so on - the happier these characters are. After the War, Churchill, for instance, was very keen on the idea of Commercial Television. He was unsympathetic to the BBC retaining its monopoly, and he, and many others, encouraged the path which culminated in the early-to-mid-fifties in Independent Television.

Now, one of the misconceptions, I would suggest, is that those who are the impresarios - those who are the producers - are primarily motivated by the well-being of the performers in their shows. There are, I think, exceptions. I would suggest that people like Jack Buchanan, himself a major performer - a 'song and dance' man, highly skilled entertainer, and a producer, theatre manager, and also a film star. They, I would suggest, are the exceptions. But if you look at the history of Val Parnell, of Lew Grade, of the Littlers, of George and Alfred Black, you might perhaps conclude that their prime concern was their own well-being. If you look at Jack Hylton, that also applies, but Jack

had a more genuine rapport with his Artists and Artistes than perhaps the others did. The others, certainly Val Parnell when he was Managing Director of Moss Empires in 1945 and therefore controlling the Moss Empire circuit, which was a major, major player within theatre in the forties... Val Parnell began to realise that a lot of money could be made out of Independent Television. Lew Grade also came to the same conclusion [Louis Winogradsky, to give him his proper name] and his brother Boris Winogradsky [Bernard Delfont]; the Littler Brothers [Prince and Emile Littler] came to the same conclusion - There was a lot of money to be made in Commercial Television. Now, Val Parnell... who was the son of Fred Russell, a major entertainer in Variety Theatre... Val Parnell had the major influence with the Moss circuits, and realised that by offloading some of the freehold sites they could raise a lot of money to pump into television. Val Parnell came to control Stoll Moss when Stoll - who'd always worked closely with Moss since the early turn of last century... but when they came together and worked very closely together and were formally constituted as being one unit, he realised that the Stoll circuit had a lot of theatre [freehold] which perhaps if realised could be pumped into television. So, if you look closely at the history of, principally, ATV and its relationship with the Stoll-Moss setup, you can see perhaps that money was raised by means of sacrificing theatres and pumping it into television.

CCP: Right.

TL: Now Jack Hylton was perhaps the exception. His attitude to television was that it was a means of promoting his theatrical undertakings. Jack Hylton was a remarkable professional within television. Principally a Bandleader, he had, in the early part of the 20th Century, created several [world-leading] bands which performed not only throughout the United Kingdom but also America, under protest from the American Unions occasionally, but also throughout Europe - Germany right up to the start of the War almost, France, Holland and elsewhere. Jack, in his promotion of his bands, also involved various Variety Acts and so on. Jack really stayed loyal to these acts and performers generally, and saw television as a means of promoting theatre. But the others, including the likes of [Lew] Grade, saw theatre as a means of funding television. Now, that really meant that performers in theatre would be sacrificed. Prior to television, prior to the introduction of ITV in 1955 people would go to the theatre and see the performer - the Variety Performer, whatever... the 'legitimate' performer - and they would see that performance, that performer, that performance, that show, etc., would then move on to the next town and so on and so forth. It might spend a week in one town. On the Monday ten, fifteen, thirty people would go and watch it, on the Tuesday about the same. Gradually it would increase. Maybe two shows on the Wednesday with the matinée show, two shows on the Saturday with a matinée show... But you might get a full house of five hundred, maybe of fifteen hundred depending on the size of the theatre, but over the week in any one town maybe a thousand to two thousand people would have seen the performer or the show or whatever. Then that show would move on and the same performers would perform in the next town, and so they would go round the circuit. But when ITV came into existence - and if you take, for instance, 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium', which was Val Parnell's great show - an audience of several million would sit down one Sunday and watch the performer; and who on earth would want to watch that act again the following week? They wouldn't want to watch it. So, in effect it crucified a lot of Variety Shows, it crucified a lot of the 'legitimate' shows, and it took over. So, really certain 'movers' within theatre who are often given the credit for promoting and assisting performers within theatre deliberately, in my opinion, crucified theatre in order to fund, to a large extent, ATV but also

Associated Rediffusion and, to a lesser extent, the other Commercial channels as well. Occasionally today I get in conversation with producers, entertainers, and so on - quite often who are Members of the 'Grand Order Water Rats' for instance - who say to me, as one did only very recently, 'If only a producer would realise the importance of Variety Theatre and so on and give us a chance'. Well, money is the prime motivator, not the performer, and therefore Variety Theatre... Everything is cyclical; and Variety Theatre will probably come back, but Variety Theatre is fighting a losing battle when compared to the power of television.

CCP: What a shame.

TL: It's a great shame. You look at a show today... If you take Morecambe and Wise for instance: In their day they achieved a viewing figure on some of their shows of twenty million viewers or more. Now that really means that twenty million people have sat down and watched Morecambe and Wise in one sitting. If you can imagine all those people sitting down in a Theatre... Twenty million people! A theatre audience... seeing a Variety Act in which Morecambe and Wise were exceedingly talented and hugely successful... But that twenty million people have seen them; and therefore it is no real wonder that circuits that used to promote the likes of Morecambe and Wise - and Morecambe and Wise did a lot of theatre work, spent many years flogging their guts out going round the theatre circuits doing their act. But who's going to go to the theatre to watch the act when they have already seen it on Television? Certainly some loyal theatrical audiences will do so, but the general public won't. They will sit down and see their proscenium-arched theatre straight ahead of them in the form of a television. And so, really the Parnells, the Grades, the Littlers, George and Alfred Black, etc., deliberately, I would suggest, sacrificed theatres in order to promote this great money-spinner of Independent Television.

CCP: OK. Why don't you tell me about your time working at the Old Vic?

TL: When I worked at the Old Vic I'd worked at the BBC for a while in the props Department and I left because I am principally a designer and builder of scenery but felt that if I was to go back into designing and building scenery - which I did for a while on a freelance basis for BBC Television - then I should have some experience of physically handling scenery on stage... running the scenery, flying the scenery, and so on. It's one thing to design scenery, it's another thing to design it knowing how you've actually got to operate it - and theoretical operating of scenery is vastly different from the actual physical operating of scenery. So I went to the Old Vic... and the hours we worked were almost beyond belief! It was very, very hard. Although, of course, we had nothing to do in the afternoons - except on Wednesdays and Saturdays when we had matinées, but still we knocked off at one o'clock until the matinée started [or just before the matinée started] at four o'clock or whatever it was. But I often worked in tandem with an Australian colleague and we would, for instance, pull a tree out in a twenty second blackout. Now blackouts, I know, these days are not all that common but they were quite common in those days, and for a period of twenty seconds the lights would be killed on stage; and so... there were no Auditorium lights on, so the whole thing would be in darkness and myself and my Australian colleague had to pull a solid-built tree - a piece of scenery but very heavy, very solid - we had to pull it out - we had to fly it - up in the air, clear of the bottom of the border; and to do so we had a single rope over a

single pulley, and the two of us would, as soon as the lights were 'killed', pull on this damn rope as quickly as we could - this enormous weight - and, if we hadn't managed to pull the tree out of the sightline within the twenty seconds, when the lights came back on we had to stand there in our little void, dark void. We had no lights. We couldn't see within the void, but we could just see the stage. We had to stand there for the entirety of the next scene, holding on to this tree because we couldn't pull it up any higher because the Audience - who were experts in the show - would start to be critical of us, and so on and so forth. So we had to stand there, hold this damn tree throughout the entire period of the next scene. If we had let go of the tree, the weight of it would have taken it straight down and probably through the stage and into the void beneath the stage; and perhaps destroy the equipment down there and maybe anybody who happened to be under the stage at the time.

I have a splendid memory of a superb actor by the name of Wilfred Lawson. Wilfred was an excellent character actor. His speaking voice was magnificent. He spoke with a mesmerizing tremble in his voice. He, like many an actor, liked liquid refreshment, and, like many a theatre, the Old Vic had a pub next door... And Wilfred played the part of the Button Moulder in Peer Gynt - and those who go to shows such as Ibsen's Peer Gynt are often highly 'clued-up' on the script and they are really mentally very into the show. Wilfred didn't come on until Scene Two of Act Five, which meant that he spent quite a bit of time in the pub next door. There he was sitting in his costume waiting for his call, and his first call came and warned him that he was going to be on soon, and then his 'two minute call' came - or 'three minute call' came [or whatever the length of time was] - and he then trundled himself into the theatre and he, on his way, picked up a long pole with a ladle on the end of it, the Button Moulder's ladle [because he was playing the part of the Button Moulder], and a tool box, and then he went behind the house tabs and waited for his entrance. Leo McKern, who was starring as Peer Gynt, was out in front of the tabs, the lights were dim, and Leo McKern then starts the scene off by saying a line or two, and then two backstage staff [Scene Shifters] open the tabs - one scene shifter holding one tab and one the other tab - sufficient enough to allow Wilfred through so that he can walk forward onto a small apron stage and give the Button Moulder's Speech. Now, everybody is sitting there waiting to hear this great actor, fine actor, superb actor give his speech. They know what he is going to say, many of them, but they want to hear him say it, and Peer Gynt is a long show and they're all sitting there enthralled and waiting to hear this superb actor. Wilfred didn't have need of a mic. I mean, he could project his voice across Waterloo Bridge up to the Strand - it was superb. So he goes out, the curtains closed behind him, there's two 'spots' on him - one on the left, one on the right; and they're just on him - you can barely pick out Leo McKern. All the attention is on Wilfred Lawson. And he staggers to his apron stage, and he bangs the base of his Button Moulder's ladle on to the stage and, instead of lowering his toolbox [or bag of tools] down on to the stage, he drops it. There's a long silence, and he lifts up his left arm [which had held the tool bag] and he slowly points to the audience and... a great hush, great silence... and says, 'You can bloody well sod off'! And then he collapsed backwards on to the stage!

CCP: Wow!

TL: Absolute panic!

CCP: Yes.

TL: Hands come out from underneath the tabs and drag him back behind the tabs. Poor old Leo McKern is standing there wondering what the hell he's going to do.

CCP: [Laughs]

TL: We 'behind stage' are faced with Wilfred who's still holding his ladle completely oblivious to what's going on. The Front of House Manager comes backstage to find out what the situation is, and then goes out in front of the curtains and says. 'Mr Lawson is not feeling too well tonight'.

CCP: Well, there's an understatement!

TL: There's silence, and then Wilfred slowly comes to and he says, 'I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I don't know what's come over me. This has never happened to me before, I'm so, so sorry'; and he's plied with black coffee, and he is reassuring everybody that he's OK, and he's sitting up and he's drinking his coffee and, 'I feel fit to go on now. I... I'm so sorry. I... I can not understand it.'. So we stand him up, and the Front of House Manager is now backstage again and is told that Wilfred is going to go back on. So, he goes out in front of the tabs and he says to the audience [who's wondering what's happened - they're quite concerned] 'Mr Lawson is feeling able to continue'. There's a round of applause, and then the curtains are opened again and Wilfred goes out, the two spotlights come on him, and he goes slowly to his apron stage; and he bangs the base of his ladle down on the ground, and he lowers his Button Moulder's toolbag slowly down. So we think to ourselves, 'it's going to work OK this time'. And then he raises his left hand, and he points to the audience, and he sweeps his arm across as he points to the audience; and then slowly, with all the audience eagerly awaiting the great man's speech, says to the audience, 'And you can bloody well sod off too' - and he just collapsed backwards again. [and that was the end of the show for the night!]

CCP: [Laughs] Oh my goodness! So your time at the Old Vic was 1961? Is that right?

TL: 1961 or 1962, yes, 1962 I think.

CCP: OK. I understand that as a child you visited a lot of theatres?

TL: I did indeed. I performed in one or two theatres. When I was three I was on stage with Laurel and Hardy at the Victoria Palace in London for a charity show put on by the Grand Order Water Rats and Grand Order Lady Ratlings under the banner 'Rats Revel' to raise money for theatrical charities, and I can't recall it... sadly... but The Stage did a write-up in which they kindly mentioned me. But they also included a reference to an 'up and coming' young Comedian by the name of Norman Wisdom who filled a vacant slot. Jack Hylton had the theatre at the time. He had a five-minute slot or something and Norman was appearing in another theatre across London during the week. Of course the theatre doesn't normally perform publicly on Sundays - and this show was on a Sunday,

and Jack said to Norman, 'Do you want to come and fill this slot? It might do you some good'. So apparently Norman came down and filled the slot and stopped the entire show, and was described as being considerably more funny than Laurel and Hardy. So that, apparently, was the launch of Norman's 'big-time' career.

I was also in a show, *The Blue Lamp*, at the Grand Theatre in Blackpool, 1952. I'd gone up there with my Mother and Father apparently for a week's holiday in Lytham St. Anne's. There were three shows, I think, running in Blackpool at the time, and *The Blue Lamp* - starring Jack Warner, Gordon Harker, Susan Shaw, and Bonar Colleano - was running at The Grand, my Father, of course, having built the scenery for it. I had three quoits and I was throwing them in the garden of the boarding-house we were staying in, and one quoit inadvertently strayed next door and the woman who owned the house next door refused to return it, and I was distraught at having lost my quoit. So my Father took me to The Grand Theatre in Blackpool. Now, I knew Jack Warner - I'd know him all my life. Gordon Harker I'd known all my life because he was the brother... one of three brothers. The other two worked with their father and they were scenic artists - the Harker Brothers. Joe Harker, the father - probably the finest scenic artist of all time. His son, Joe, and the other son, Phil, went in partnership, whilst Gordon became one of the finest character actors of last century. So, my Father and I arrived at The Grand Theatre... And I'd known Bonar Colleano. Bonar was actually a big star at the time, starred in *A Streetcar named Desire* and in films and was a big, big name - a sort of British version of Marlon Brando at the time. Sadly, he was killed in a car accident a few years later... But Susan Shaw was Bonar's girlfriend; and so I knew them all, and they asked me if I would like to appear on stage in the show that night. So I said 'Yes'. I was given a very quick rehearsal and duly appeared in the show that night when... *The Blue Lamp* in fact was the forerunner of *Dixon of Dock Green* and in *The Blue Lamp* PC Dixon is shot dead, and my job in the show - in which I appeared three nights running - was the first person on stage after PC Dixon had been shot by Bonar Colleano, and I had to stand there and gasp - and that was my nightly experience. Didn't get paid, just went on.

Another show that I appeared in was a 'Noddy' show, one of Enid Blyton's 'Noddy' shows. Again, the scenery was built by my Father and I was asked whether I would like to go on the show, and I did quite a few sort of shows like this - was asked by various 'personalities' if I'd like to go on stage. So the answer was usually 'Yes' - and I usually enjoyed them, but this particular show I hated, absolutely hated it. Now, most children... To appear on a 'Noddy' show would be fantastic. I was introduced to Enid Blyton and I remember speaking with her...

CCP: Really? I love Enid Blyton.

TL: ...and she was polite, kind, and this, that, and the other, but I... I, for some reason or other did not take to the woman at all, and it seemed to effect my attitude towards the show. And it was only years later, just a few years ago, watching a programme on television, that I learned that Enid Blyton disliked children. A former schoolteacher, she disliked children. In fact, it was believed that Enid Blyton actually hated children. So maybe my reason for disliking the 'Noddy' show that I was in was because my vibes, from talking to her, made me realise that she didn't like children.

I have happy memories of the Empire Theatre in Croydon. I never performed on stage but I often went down there with my Father. The Manager at the time, Arthur Dixon, was an old crony of my Father's, and they would go and... Well, my Father would go

and I would go with him... and he and Arthur Dixon would chat to each other about 'old times', about this, that, and the other; and I would go on to the stage and wander round and so on. This was the days of Variety Theatre. This was the day when you would have ten, twenty, thirty, even more artists appearing, and their acts, on stage in a Variety Show. So, every act was different. You would have high-wire acts, you would have jugglers, you would have comedians, you would have singers and so on; and one of the things that the Empire Theatre had was lions and tigers on stage. I can remember them vividly: the trailers used to park up alongside the theatre with the lions and tigers in them, and then a run of hooped cages would go from the trailers to a big circular iron contraption or construction on stage; and then these lions and tigers would be released out of their travelling trailers, through the tunnels - the hooped tunnels - into this large cage on stage where the lion-tamer would do his act with these tigers. Absolutely fascinating, absolutely fascinating to watch these animals on stage growling and sort of pawing at their trainer and their trainer sort of using his cane to control them.

One of the myths that developed over the years is that these animals were treated badly by these guys. Well, they weren't treated badly at all. They were very well looked after; and they were very well looked after because these were these entertainers' livelihoods. They couldn't afford not to look after them well. Unfortunately, few years ago - due to the somewhat unpleasant actions of one well-known circus proprietor in the circus's winter quarters where the animals were ill-treated - animals that went into circuses, animals that went on to stage were believed to be ill-treated, but this really wasn't the case. The owners of the animals couldn't ill-treat their animals because their animals then would be unable to perform, unable to perform properly, would be unhappy, and so on - and that would be the end of the livelihoods of these performers. But going down to the Empire Theatre in Croydon was absolutely fascinating. I lived in Croydon, and it was absolutely fascinating to watch the different acts and to watch the enjoyment of the audience; and I was always somewhat privileged and had the best seats in the house. But Variety Theatre was a wonderful experience - and doubtless it will come back again given time. The Empire Theatre was converted to a cinema - became the Eros Cinema - and Arthur Dixon continued as Manager; but it damned near broke his heart to lose his beloved theatre.

CCP: So, do you believe, or would you say, that the growth of ITV around the fifties and sixties was the major driving force in the changes in theatre, in this era, rather than perhaps the new, slightly radical, plays of John Osborne?

TL: I have the greatest respect for John Osborne. He was a playwright who certainly appealed to a minority who deserved to be entertained by the likes of John Osborne. The greatest change in attitudes within theatre, perceived attitudes within theatre, was not, in my opinion, the arrival of playwrights like John Osborne, but the evolution of ITV... the switch of financial emphasis by the likes of Val Parnell, Lew Grade, the Littler brothers [Prince Littler and Emile Littler] diverting the money away from theatres into television caused the audience to switch from going to the large proscenium arch in a theatre to sitting in front of the small proscenium arch known as the television set. It's interesting, incidentally, that the small 9-10 inch - whatever it was - television set is now evolving into television sets the sizes of which occupy almost the entirety of one wall within a room. So, clearly the public is demanding a return to where they were before ITV came on-stream. In other words, a larger proscenium-arch type of theatre. But in switching the emphasis to ITV in the mid fifties enabled the freeing up of theatres and therefore increased the available capacity within the theatrical profession. This therefore

enables many more authors, scriptwriters, playwrights to come on stage which therefore gives capacity to the likes to John Osborne to have his productions staged. So, there was no shift away from what was going on before, in other words, mass public entertainment.

CCP: The 'well-made play', do you mean?

TL: Well, it would be offensive to anybody to say that somebody's play is 'well-made' and somebody else's play is 'not well-made'.

CCP: No, sure.

TL: Most people within the profession, I would suggest, do strive to do their best for whatever reason.

CCP: [Laughs]

TL: So, to label a play as being better made or better scripted or whatever as against others is perhaps wrong. From my own point of view, being a person brought up in theatrical scenery, I find it very sad that many productions moved away from having scenery to drapes or to just suggested scenery or implied scenery or whatever, because I, with my background, support the 'the more scenery the better'. But I would venture to suggest that that is the attitude of Joe Public as well, because if today you consider such popular shows [and that's what they are] as Neighbours, EastEnders, Casualty, Holby City and so on, they are watched by millions of people for entertainment. Those millions of people go to their local theatre, which happens to be the box in their living room, sit down to be entertained, and they watch not only the performers but also the considerable amount of scenery that exists around those performers and the considerable number of props that exist around those performers. Take the scenery, take the props away or just leave suggested scenery and I suspect that many of the audience - i.e. the viewers - would give up viewing because what they want to see is... The majority of viewers, i.e. the majority of audiences... want to see a total concept. My own feeling has always been, certainly since I was very small, that at least 80% of the production that people go to see - although they might not be consciously aware of it - certainly their subconscious wants to see scenery. 80% of what they watch is scenery and props. Only about 20% are the actual performers. If those who are sitting watching, say, Casualty really analyse what they're watching, what they're watching is not just the performers but also everything that's going on around the performers. So take the sets away, take the props away and just look at the studio walls and, once the novelty of looking at bare studio walls has been absorbed, I think most of the audience would go elsewhere.

Going back to John Osborne and playwrights who have a message to convey, who want to change society, etcetera, etcetera ... I certainly would not knock them, the actors who faithfully follow that type of culture. No, they have my admiration, but I don't think that that is what mass audiences want, and neither do I think that theatre has changed. I

just think that theatre has moved from the proscenium arch theatre as we know it to the proscenium arch theatre that sits within peoples' living rooms.

CCP: That's great. Thank you very much for your time. Thank you.