

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Shirley Dynevor – interview transcript

Interviewer: Rachael Leo

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Actress. Audiences; audition; A Christmas Carol; The Good Soldier Schweik; influences; Laban movement; Joan Littlewood; Ewan MacColl; money; new writing; politics; The Quare Fellow; reinterpretations of classic plays; Richard II; Theatre Royal, Stratford East; television; Theatre Workshop; twice-nightly rep; West End.

RL: This is the interview with Shirley Dynevor on the 27th of March 2008. OK I'll just start. What are some of your first memories of theatre, like, from when you were a child?

SD: Well, I'd heard about the theatre from my drama tutor at the drama school that I went to and so I was very excited when he said that he thought it was the place that I should work. So my first memories are really of him talking about it and the way they worked, what their attitudes were and it just sounded like the most exciting place to be. Because theatre at that time was very... boring in many ways. It wasn't sort of grounded in life's experiences or... It was grand, it was pretentious, it was Terence Rattigan and Noel Coward, really stuff I wasn't that interested in. But from a sociological point of view Joan Littlewood was doing something that I thought was very exciting at Stratford East. So when Brian Way said, 'I'm going to London next Sunday, you've got to come with me and I'm going to take you to meet Joan Littlewood.'...

RL: Oh wow! [Laughs]

SD: [Laughs] I was very excited to go. I'd just finished doing twice nightly rep at Pontypridd.

RL: Oh! [Laughs]

SD: [Laughs] And so to go to this world... Firstly she'd spent months in village halls but in fact Stratford East was a beautiful, late 19th century theatre that was... Oh, it had curved boxes where people could sit and it was like a play, the audience was... It was beautifully set up, but not the sort of thing one expected at all.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And so my impressions were that it was an extraordinary mix of experiences, because in this theatre that was like a children's Pollack's theatre...

RL: Yes?

SD: I don't know if you know those? They're sort of cardboard cut-outs of the theatre.

RL: Oh right, yes. [Laughs]

SD: And you can do your plays and everything.

RL: Yes.

SD: Just magical.

RL: Oh, that's lovely.

SD: And then Joan's realistic and extraordinary approach to drama, theatre, life. It was an amazing experience. So I was introduced to Joan in the foyer, she had her woolly hat on.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And there she was. The most magical and amazing director I now knew in the entire country, probably the entire world. [Laughs].

RL: Ah.

SD: And I was meeting her and Brian Way was introducing and we were chatting, me in complete awe, completely tongue-tied with excitement, expectation.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: Just seeing her was wonderful. And she invited me to go for an audition, very very soon, like two days later.

RL: Oh God!

SD: So I didn't have that much time to even think about it.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: So two days later I went with one of my friends from drama school, an actor called David Mann, and we'd just finished doing a play the term before called Johnson over Jordan. So we did a scene from Johnson over Jordan and then she had us improvising and doing different things and having to sing a song. So I sang 'Strawberry Fair'.
[Laughs]

RL: Oh! [Laughs]

SD: And I expected to hear no more. I was now living in London. I had just been in London for ten days after my audition with Joan. And then my mother says that there's a telegram for me at home in South Wales.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And so she opened it and she said, 'Well, Joan Littlewood wants you to go and work there!' So... I think that's one of the most exciting moments of my entire life. So off I went. I'd been an usherette for nine days at the Curzon Cinema and seen Mr. Hulot's Holiday forty-eight times.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And there I was off to Theatre Workshop [pause] and it was cold. And it was... The weather was cold but the life was just so exciting. [Laughs]

RL: Yes that's really exciting. You said that your drama teacher sort of inspired you...

SD: Yes he was very inspiring.

RL: ...to get into acting but is there anyone else or any sort of experience that made you want to act?

SD: Well, I think I always wanted to make plays and my poor little brothers who weren't at all theatre minded they had to come along with it too.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And the least [Laughs] chance of building a stage and actually making up plays or singing songs from a very young age. I really just... It was the most fun.

RL: Yes.

SD: And I just liked having lots of fun.

RL: [Laughs] That's really cool. So we've gone over how you got into... What sort of productions were you first involved in with Theatre Workshop?

SD: I went there... The first production was A Christmas Carol and that was a lovely initiation because again it was Christmastime and it was... We didn't just play one part, I think I had five parts in A Christmas Carol.

RL: Oh gosh!

SD: Mainly The Ghost of Christmas Past, and then Young Maria but I remember playing a street boy and [pause] I can't remember what the other two were. But you were just involved with everything that was happening on the stage most of the time. And it just... it surpassed expectation of what fun could be.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And... But at the same time we did lots of research into what was happening at the time that the book was written. And so you got a real feel for the period and what it felt like at that time - poverty. I remember the Christmas dinner was extraordinary, because every night we had a goose on the table.

RL: [Laughs] Gosh!

SD: And there was the Cratchit family. There was Harry Corbett and Howard Goorney and [pause] Oh well, it was an ensemble, lots of other people coming in and out. And we were all pretty hungry and there we had a scene with the Christmas dinner and a real hot goose.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And it was marvellous. I think we ate rather enthusiastically because it had to last a long time. [Laughs]

RL: Yes. [Laughs]

SD: And I remember the smell of the goose. And then when it came off for that particular scene all the other actors would be at it as well!

RL: [Laughs]

SD: So we were pretty well fed as the goose was donated, it sort of kept us all going very well. [Laughs].

RL: [Laughs] That's really funny. So you talked about your first impressions of Joan when you first met her, but what were your first impressions of the company as a whole? Like, the different people you were working with and the stage and everything.

SD: Well she chose the most interesting people. [pause] I can't think what it was about them, I think they weren't like the actors I had met before, they weren't all posy, they were... I suppose there was a feeling of everyone going for different things. It wasn't a showing off place, it was a place where you explored happenings and explored how to put those happenings over, where you did lots of research yourself and other people were doing research. It was very scruffy and people were incredibly poor and anyone who had been there for any length of time, they'd not been properly fed for a couple of years. I was quite a well-fed girl when I started and [pause] I noticed as time went on I got more slender. [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs]

SD: But it was a very truthful [place] and a very exciting one. And it explored drama right the way through movement, voice. There were movement classes with Jean Newlove, who'd studied with Laban.

RL: Oh right, yes.

SD: So that even the movement wasn't just pretty stuff where you fluttered your arms and stood on your toes. It was deeply embedded in... well, I suppose the feelings one has in life. It was very truthful and very exciting to do.

RL: How important do you think the Theatre Workshop was to that era and did you feel at the time you were part of something that was going to be really like revolutionary?

SD: Oh yes.

RL: ...and famous in the future?

SD: Oh I didn't think of fame. Revolutionary, yes. I think it was the first theatre I'd come across that did have this attitude that theatre was a part of life, it was really showing life to the other people who were living. I think it is the most important that we've had in this country and I think things like the National Theatre today and various... well, the whole thinking behind theatre owes everything to Joan Littlewood and her company and the people who worked there.

RL: Yes. I'm going to say this before I forget. How was it working with Harry Corbett and all those sorts of people?

SD: Oh. Harry was I think one of the most brilliant actors that I've ever come across. [he] was [great]. And of course being with them one learnt a tremendous amount and you wouldn't even notice. It was just [pause] I think the most truthful start that an actor could have. Well, thinking about the times that we spent doing research, we'd have lots of meetings in Joan's bedroom which was at the top of the theatre, right up into the gods, turn left, there was a little door there and inside this little door was Joan's bedroom.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: It had posters, Modigliani posters on the wall; it had her bed with a beautiful bedcover on that I can remember that looked very very warm and goodness you needed it in that theatre. It was freezing!

RL: [Laughs]

SD: And then we'd sit on the floor and sit on cushions and just talk about whatever the play was that was about to be done and then we would be told to get off to the library and find out what we could there and we'd work from that. I mean, I guess people are of course doing... or at that time would be doing research, but I suppose Joan's research was different, it was really based on the way that the poor were living and of course it was terribly political, I mean, as you probably know.

RL: Yes.

SD: It had socialist roots. [Pause] I mean, I found all that very exciting. Very good.

RL: Yes. It was very new and everything at the time, I should think.

SD: Yes. Because the theatre until that moment had been really very posh, very posh, very posy, very upper class, it was to entertain the wealthy.

RL: Yes.

SD: And this was in the East End of London, and one hoped that the locals would come. They did to a certain extent, but in the end it was the theatre-going people who really did... who were full of enthusiasm and realized that this was something brilliant going on.

RL: That's really good. How was your experience with them different to like a traditional theatre company that you would have worked with? Like you said that you were part of rep in Wales.

SD: Yes. Yes I'd just had three months in rep after being at drama school. That was lovely too, it was at Pontypridd. It was twice nightly, so you had to learn a play every week and then do two performances a [night]. So the sheer volume of hard work and being able to learn the lines and get it done, it was fun in a very different way. [Laughs] It was a very young company. I don't think anyone was over twenty-five there.

RL: Oh gosh!

SD: Except for the director. Who was always threatening to commit suicide, he said, 'Oh you're all terrible, I must go and hang myself!' [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs]

SD: [Laughs] It was really very different from that. But the other one [Laughs] was a very good learning process too. And I remember I had 24 hours to learn Jane Eyre at Pontypridd.

RL: Oh gosh!

SD: Because the actress who had been employed to play Jane, who was quite a well known radio actress, she got a radio part and decided that she'd rather do the radio. So I had to learn it in twenty-four hours and I was up all night learning it, and then had two performances to do. [Laughs] I mean that is unique, a fairly unique experience I'm sure.

RL: Yes definitely.

SD: So it was from the sublime to the ridiculous, because we always had time to explore at Theatre Workshop.

RL: Yes.

SD: Whereas twice nightly at Pontypridd there was no time for anything at all. [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs] Going back to Theatre Workshop, working with Joan Littlewood over a certain amount of time, did she live up to her sort of fearsome reputation that she's got now, or was it really different working with her?

SD: Well it was certainly different. [pause] Well, I've never known anything like her. I think [pause] it was very exciting not only from a theatre point of view but her sort of literary exploration. She was very keen on Marlowe, Christopher Marlowe.

RL: Yes.

SD: And I've funnily enough just discovered letters from her about Christopher Marlowe.

RL: Oh lovely.

SD: And... [Pause] Oh, I haven't got them to hand but I'll show them to you. She was passionate about Elizabethans, about Christopher Marlowe, and her knowledge was so profound and so wide, and so she had her literary background, her art, she was very keen on paintings. Very keen on engineering, she and Gerry used to go off to various parts of the country learning about engineering.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: Her thirst for knowledge and her interests were just very very wide. And all this filters through.

RL: Yes. That's really really good. What do you think made her such a good director?

SD: Oh my goodness! I suppose all these things I've been saying. But in the end [Pause] she made the actor travel to places that you could never had travelled to before. I feel that she did extraordinary things that really have lasted with me all through my adult life, because once you've come across her it is a door that opens and I suppose like a brilliant professor or... And so your values, you examine things in perhaps a different way. So goodness I'm tremendously grateful. And of course I married an actor from the company.

RL: Oh right.

SD: I married Gerard Dynevor.

RL: Yes.

SD: Who was [a brilliant actor and an inspiring man of 22]. I had a baby terribly quickly.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: So there was a pregnant time where it was more difficult and she closed in the summer anyway, so we went off to Northern Ireland and did rep and then came back in the autumn for my baby to be born. So there was a baby, Jonathan Dynevor, and I did do the odd play and I always sneaked into the back of the theatre whenever I could, sometimes with my baby. But in fact the baby was half born in the theatre.

RL: Yes?

SD: Because the night of... there was a Sunday night, special showing of *The Good Soldier Schweik* and I hadn't seen it so I couldn't possibly miss it. And as the curtain went up and I sat in my seat for *The Good Soldier Schweik* my birth pains started.

RL: Oh gosh! [Laughs]

SD: And I thought, 'Well I'm not going!' [Laughs] 'I've got to see this play first.' And it was terribly funny and I laughed so much in between contractions. [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs]

SD: So I managed to get through the play - which was wonderful - and at midnight we drove to Queen Charlotte's Hospital on the other side of London for the birth of the baby and he was born at 10.00 the next morning. [Laughs] It was a very fruitful time.

RL: Yes. [Laughs] How was Joan Littlewood's dynamic with Ewan MacColl? Did you ever work with him?

SD: Yes. Ewan was there the first time I went and of course he was absolutely marvellous on music. Now, I don't know about the time before that because they had done extraordinary dramas together, like *Uranium... 235* I think was the number - and

I'm sure he was very important politically to the founding of the theatre with Joan. But whenever there was music involved, which was really practically all the time, Ewan was there.

RL: [Laughs] Yes.

SD: Teaching us the songs and singing, and I think his songs are wonderful. He's responsible for so much lovely music.

RL: Yes.

SD: Like 'Dirty Old Town', 'First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'. Lovely, lovely stuff.

RL: Definitely. Was there much of a hierarchy in the company or was it very much a community atmosphere?

SD: It was very much a community atmosphere. And the girl in the box office was as important as any of the actors. And the cleaners, the cleaners were all our friends. And I remember when I did Italian Straw Hat, one of the usherettes, Betty, was knitting a suit for Josh, Jonathan, and every night as I was dancing across the stage doing a particular bridal dance I'd just get glimpse of how she was getting on with the leggings.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: They'd grow every night. [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs] What did you think of the new styles of writing that were being developed in that time and did you have any favourite playwrights?

SD: [Pause] Oh [Pause] Goodness. I thought the writing was wonderful, and of course I was able to watch people like Brendan Behan because Gerard, my husband, he was in The Quare Fellow.

RL: Oh right, yes.

SD: I watched it coming together. And I think that's one of the most exciting happenings of the 20th century, things like The Quare Fellow. They were extraordinary and to think that people in a prison yard, imprisoned, waiting for the quare fellow as the man was about to be hanged for murder, could be an incredibly funny play...

RL: Yes.

SD: ...is extraordinary and to watch it unfold was a wonderful experience.

RL: Oh that's really good. Were there any other playwrights that you really enjoyed performing their plays?

SD: Well [Pause] I think everything she did was interesting. Now this is a dreadful thing to say, but some of her sort of local stuff, like Vancall, I didn't enjoy very much and I think in the end that sort of writing that would happen quite quickly and try and engulf the local scene wasn't as successful. I think she was brilliant at the classics.

RL: Yes.

SD: The stuff that she took to Paris was glorious, and Paris was at her feet and they were an enormous success. [Whispers] Could you stop the tape?

RL: Yes.

SD: I'm just trying to think of the name of the play.

RL: I think it's OK just to leave it running.

SD: I can just scribble this bit in my head.

RL: Oh yes that's fine.

SD: [Pause] I've got a list here of plays and there's [Pause] Oh, Shelagh Delaney A Taste of Honey of course was wonderful, later on.

RL: Oh you were involved with that one?

SD: Yes.

RL: I love that play.

SD: Yes, it's a wonderful play. And, Paris Festival [Pause] Arden of Faversham! Volpone, Ben Jonson?

RL: Oh yes.

SD: Arden of Faversham, they don't know who wrote it actually.

RL: Oh right.

SD: Arden of Faversham was a huge delight. Good Soldier Schweik... O'Casey she did, Red Roses For Me, Ibsen An Enemy of the People, and then there's Johnny Noble and The Flying Doctor. Johnny Noble was Ewan McColl and Moliere was The Flying Doctor.

RL: [Laughs]

SD: The adaptations of course were tremendously important. Because for instance Ewan McColl adapted Lysistrata and that was very interesting and exciting. Gogol's The Government Inspector. [Pause] Richard II!

RL: Yes.

SD: Glorious. They actually... The Old Vic did Richard II at the same time as Theatre Workshop, so people were able to compare the two and it was fascinating, the difference.

RL: [Laughs] Was there a lot of difference?

SD: Yes. I did see them both and John Neville was marvellously tight and upright at the Old Vic [Laughs] whereas I think... I'm sure that the Theatre Workshop production was very much more full of blood and guts.

RL: Yes [Laughs]

SD: A thoughtful and political piece.

RL: What sort of practice went into re-interpretations of Shakespeare and the classics? How did you go about re-adapting them?

SD: Well, I think that probably was much discussed up in the little bedroom up the top of the theatre and there would be a lot of discussion and then when you actually got down on to the stage you could... you would go through the thought process of rehearsal and her notes to actors were [very succinct].

RL: [Laughs]

SD: I wish I had put a mark in this book. [Pause] Oh! Shall I read this?

RL: Yes, yes.

SD: I've just come across...I've got Howard Goorney's book on the Theatre Workshop Story and I've just come across a paragraph that I gave to Howard about the research. In this I say 'It was the most amazing world. You weren't just an actress going to rehearsal, learning lines, you were made to take much more responsibility. We would sit in Joan's bedroom at the top of the stairs and talk about the play, everyone would be asked to go to the library and do their own research. We were all part of a whole. She was a marvellous teacher, I never learned from anyone what I learned from her. She had wonderful images. Pretend that stretching out before you is your future, your sons and their sons in a great long line. Behind you is a man with a dagger about to plunge it into your back. And that is how she described to George Luscombe, a Canadian, what it was like to be an English nobleman in Richard II.'

RL: [Laughs] That is very descriptive!

SD: [Laughs]

RL: I did a presentation earlier on in the year on censorship in that period. How did it affect your experiences or how did it affect the Theatre Workshop?

SD: I'm sure it affected them enormously. There was a running battle with the Lord Chancellor, ending with a court case, again it's written up in here [Howard Goorney's book] and I haven't got the details at the top of my head at the moment.

RL: That's OK. [Laughs]

SD: But censorship was a huge battle. I mean not only with Theatre Workshop - The Royal Court, theatre in general! It just had to go. And of course eventually it did.

RL: Yes. I think that it's a good job that it did in the end. Why do you think Theatre Workshop worked so well, what was its magic ingredient in a way?

SD: Well I suppose Joan selected people who she thought would respond to her thinking, and so it was a group of people who were enormously enthusiastic, who didn't mind starving. They'd rather not have starved, but they certainly didn't have a great deal to eat. But it was a glorious freedom and to actually start your [working] life was

amazing. [Pause] And [we] certainly weren't doing it for the money! [Laughs] I mean sometimes the takings for the whole week were hardly more than £10...

RL: Oh gosh! [Laughs]

SD: Per night. £10, £12, £14... Twice nightly, on Saturday, afternoon and evening performance, I think sometimes was £30. But it was a minute sum of money. And so really people who were after it for glamour, honour, glory, wealth, recognition, wouldn't even think about it. So that's it.

RL: I suppose it was more of a learning atmosphere.

SD: Yes, exploring, great exploration.

RL: Yes. What sort of training did you go through with the company? What sort of processes was involved before each performance?

SD: Oh, there was always a warm-up. And that was really important, to get all your reflexes working. And movement, and there'd be music, that was involved in the play say. And you could just move and make sure that your body would respond to whatever you wanted it to do. And there were lots of... well, apart from the preparation for the evening performance - I mean things like throwing a ball very fast is quite good. But the Laban sessions that Jean Newlove ran were tremendously helpful; in fact, I used to go to those sessions for years afterwards, simply because the methods were so good and so relevant to an actor, to acting.

RL: Putting dance into the acting I suppose is... it really helps.

SD: Yes. I think dance was a very important part. Not necessarily pretty dancing.

RL: Yes.

RL: But movement and dance and... it's good.

RL: How important was having a social and political awareness when working with Theatre Workshop and with Joan as well? I mean, you said earlier that it was very central.

SD: Yes. I think it was very important. I don't think an arch-[Tory] would have applied. [Laughs]

RL: No. [Laughs]

SD: Not many Tories. In fact I'm sure the whole thing did have this tremendous political content. And at the time I was there it was a very important [issue], there were tremendously poor people, there were great inequalities. I mean, there still are. Heavens! I don't know what one does about them. But we were [very much] aware of all that, and [it was] an important part of our everyday lives.

RL: Was it using it as a context to put the plays you were performing into?

SD: Yes. Yes that's a very good question. I think it was, it was a contribution. Sadly it reached very few people but from our point of view it was wonderful to be able to do that.

RL: Were you involved with Oh! What a Lovely War? Or was that after?

SD: No I wasn't. Because Gerard gave up being an actor and [we] came to live up here [in Altrincham] and he became a director at Granada [Television].

RL: Oh right.

SD: So we were removed, completely removed from that world and then he was a director at Granada for five years and then he died. So... And then I went back to London but I actually enjoy living in Manchester or the environs very much.

RL: [Laughs] Do you think Oh! What a Lovely War was a very different thing to what you did when you were there?

SD: Oh yes. But I would have loved to have been in Oh! What a Lovely War. I saw it many times and I think it was a brilliant, brilliant production. You just stand back and look at it, what's happening on the stage, the music, the dance, it all seems very frivolous and going across the top are the figures for those killed the day before. And tears would pour down your face. So there was this huge end of the pier presentation and yet it was all so terrible.

RL: Yes I think when I read it, even though it's obviously First World War, it's like it's very relevant to modern times, like the war in Iraq and all those sorts of things. I found it very relevant when I read it.

SD: Yes, yes, yes.

RL: Do you think when the company moved to do some things in the West End that went against what the company stood for, from the socialist aspect of it?

SD: Yes, yes it did. But the sad thing is they desperately needed the money. If they got a transfer to the West End it meant that people could be paid properly and I think people really relished that enormously and when you think about it the actors going into the West End, they then filter out and do lots of exciting work. I mean, all is not lost.
[Laughs]

RL: No. [Laughs]

SD: And we had got the most extraordinary actors. Richard Harris, Harry Corbett, who were out there working and it was wonderful.

RL: How much do you think that European theatre influenced the company?

SD: Oh yes, I think European theatre...yes. And of course her work was so appreciated in Europe and her tours of Scandinavia and the [Swedish] Royal Family came to the plays, they were so acclaimed.

RL: I think it fit what the European scene was doing at that time; more so than what was going on in England.

SD: Yes, yes. That's right.

RL: I was just doing some research on the Internet and I saw that you were involved in The Wednesday Play in the Sixties? You did one episode of it, I think it was? [Laughs]

SD: I don't remember this. [Laughs]

RL: It might just be me. [Laughs]

SD: Oh yes, was it an Alun Owen play?

RL: I'm not sure. But do you think it affected your career and the theatre, do you think it had a big effect?

SD: Well television... I worked in television for a long time because I had two boys to bring up as a widow and I couldn't rely on acting to provide. So I would act whenever I could. I wonder if that was a Lindsey Anderson play at The Royal Court?

RL: Might have been. I'm not sure.

SD: It could have been Progress to the Park by Alun Owen, who was a great friend because... television in fact fed us and brought us up. And now both my boys work in television.

RL: Oh right.

SD: So that's what happened.

RL: What other sort of productions were you involved in at Theatre Workshop? Are there any favourite ones that you were involved in?

SD: Well, I only ever did five.

RL: Oh right.

SD: So it's a very small number. The fact is that I still had a good insight into a lot of other things because I used to sneak into the back of the theatre and see what was going on and of course having my husband work there, Gerard, who was part of the company for several years at that time in the fifties, until he didn't want to be an actor any more. I hope that doesn't... [Laughs] I think it was a very emotionally hard life and I think there is a limit - we certainly felt there was a limit - to how long and how much you could actually work on that level and I know Gerard then went to work with Peter Brooke and I think Peter Brooke made him decide that he never wanted to act on the stage again, so then he directed in television and in the theatre.

RL: Oh right. What was the general attitude to theatre when you were involved? Audiences and the general public, was there a negative or a positive opinion?

SD: When you say the reaction, are you talking now about Stratford East or [theatre in general]?

RL: Both really. Audiences you saw first hand or the general feeling of theatre.

SD: I think Theatre Workshop did have an audience, it had a following of people who weren't working class, who were really... I don't know, artists, writers, who did realise there was something exciting going on there. And it was a small number but it was enthusiastic and supportive. There was a time when we were so poor that a box was handed out at the end of every performance and people were asked to put in what they

could afford. And I remember because we had our baby that we got an extra pound from the handouts. But I don't know if I've answered your question there. [Laughs]

RL: Oh yes! Pretty much. And then theatre in general, including the Royal Court and also the outlying areas outside of London, do you think there was a positive... I think positivity was growing at that time towards the theatre but do you think there was still a negative view attached to it in a way?

SD: Yes. [pause] I don't quite know how to answer that. [pause] In fact could you say the question again? [Laughs]

RL: [Laughs] Yes sure. Do you think theatre had a negative stigma or a positive stigma attached to it?

SD: Do you mean theatre in general?

RL: Yes.

SD: Well I think theatre was essentially, in the fifties, entertainment. You'd go there, and you'd see the latest play, you knew what to expect and... so for the theatre-going public I'm sure the West End was full. And you were entertained and amused and that was absolutely fine. I suppose to get a political company coming through would attract very much a different kind of person, and then as it gained more acclaim theatre-goers came out from the West End to go to the East End and see what was going on and a lot of it was wonderful. So eventually Theatre Workshop was poached and put on in the West End. And became interesting stuff for people to go and see. It must have changed people's attitudes I feel.

RL: Yes. I should think so. My attitudes would have been changed by it, I think, anyway. How do you think theatre had developed since the fifties and sixties? Do you think it's very different now in modern times to how it was then?

SD: Yes. I think theatre is very good now. What I see at The Royal Exchange is very good. I'm sure that Joan's attitude has seeped into lots of places [Laughs]. She's still very much admired and her process of working very much admired. So I'm sure she had a tremendous effect on the entire theatre world of this country.

RL: I think she probably has. From your experiences do you think it's important to get theatre to all areas of the UK? Like outside of London.

SD: Yes. Yes, I think it's good if people can see plays. It helps you stand back and look at life.

RL: Yes. When I was younger I used to love my mum taking me to The Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton.

SD: Oh yes!

RL: And even if it was only like the pantomime, at Christmas, I used to love my mum taking me.

SD: Oh that's lovely.

RL: Just all the singing and dancing, and now I love seeing classic plays and others as well. [Laughs] Are there any productions that you've actually seen over the years, not necessarily been involved in but just seen that stand out for you?

SD: [Pause] Hmm...

RL: I know there's a big range. [Laughs]

SD: There's such a lot to look at. [pause] I'd really need to think about that. [pause] I think I'm often disappointed. [pause] I'd need to think for quite a long time so I don't think we should waste the recording on that one. [Laughs]

RL: Well that was my last question. Unless you've got anything else you want to talk about?

SD: I think we've covered a lot [Laughs].

RL: We have covered a lot of things! [Laughs]

SD: I'd like to be able to say that there's something that has really really stirred and shattered. [pause] The terrible thing is that television had really taken over. I see things on television that shatter. I don't now struggle to get to the theatre as I used to. I used to have to go down and see things that... but now I don't feel that much stirred that I have to get out see it. And of course it's a bit of a fag from up here to go to London.

RL: Yes [Laughs]

SD: [pause] Yes. No I can't think of anything.

RL: Well I'm sure you've seen a lot of great things over the years.

SD: Yes I have. Which is why...I've shut that door you see. Trying to get into the Theatre Workshop door I haven't thought about modern, or the last ten years, or twenty years what has really moved me.

RL: I think nowadays... Obviously there are a lot of new things, new plays coming out but I think that in the fifties and sixties it was such a revolutionary time of new things coming out but lately... I don't know there just seems to be a lot of 'oh, we're going to redo Shakespeare and we're going to redo Chekhov and we're going to redo whatever' nowadays, that's what I think anyway. Even though all those things are brilliant but I think there should be more new things coming out, in my opinion anyway. [Laughs]

SD: [Laughs] I think I have a funny attitude. The theatre is not an important part of my life now. Having said that, I have five grandchildren and I'm sure one of them is going to be an actor. I think her plays are very good, Phoebe, who's nearly thirteen. She just adores acting, and plays and writing.

RL: Ah that's lovely. Carry it on in the family [Laughs].

SD: Yes.

RL: That's it really. Thank you very much.

SD: Great pleasure talking to you.