

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Barbara Silcock – interview transcript

Interviewer: Rebecca Speight

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RS: Ok so the first thing I wanted to ask you was about your first sort of memory of the theatre, whatever aspect of it, I mean maybe you saw something with your family when you were a youngster or...?

BS: I would think that the first thing that I really remember was a sort of little concert party, in a probably a church hall and you could tell the era because they would be singing 'the sun has got his hat on, hip hip hooray' which is a typical concert party thing.

RS: Yes

BS: And then I would imagine it would be pantomime time first of all because they're what you're taken to as a child aren't you? And remember we're talking about sort of post-war years aren't we? 1945, I was four years old then so it would be pantomime things that I would remember...

RS: And that was here? [Sheffield]

BS: Yes that would be in Sheffield, yes because Sheffield was the biggest town to go to and it would be going to the panto with probably aunts and uncles and cousins.

RS: A family affair?

BS: Because you tend to do a family affair don't you? My father worked away, worked abroad a lot so it was just my mum and I. I was an only one but this is the way life goes... And we would go to pantomimes and of course, that is so glamorous and exciting to a child isn't it? All these beautiful costumes and...

RS: And where were they staged then?

BS; They were probably at The Lyceum and there was a theatre called The Empire in Sheffield and post-war, sadly it was demolished because it got neglected and they were my first memories; the chorus girls were wonderful and all the slapstick of course appeals to a child doesn't it? And the outrageous costumes...

RS: Yep

BS; And they were very sort of big pantomimes in those days. You know, you had a large cast and you had Cinderella with a coach and a pony, just wonderful for a child wasn't it? So I thoroughly became hooked and they would be the main ones I would think and probably it would be amateur things that we would go to. There was a little theatre in Bradwell, out by the Hope Valley, oh what was it called? Something like, somebody called Peach used to do plays out there. So a lot of it was amateur theatre you see first of all, apart from like the high spots but as you get older both mum and I loved opera, father did but as I said he wasn't there all that much opera and ballet we would go to when we did the little presentation, I suppose you would call it, at the end of last year, we worked on with Emily of course, the lovely lady who organised it all and we worked out a little sort of scenario on our memories and my abiding memory is of going up the back stairs into the Gods in The Lyceum and there's a smell about the theatre isn't there?

RS: Oh yes...

BS: I'd be perhaps fourteen/fifteen and going up these, what I think were stone or brick built stairs. I think some of them are still there now but we don't use that entrance and there's this damp, slightly damp, slightly gassy smell but you're all keyed up with the excitement of going to the theatre

RS: So you don't even notice.

BS: So you don't really register and then you're in the theatre and of course its such a beautiful little theatre even when it was not, you know, being run down and [you were] sitting on what were benches. I'd never manage to get up the stairs properly now, benches and then sort of being caught up in the whole euphoria and empathy and escapism; the theatre is such a wonderful escapism isn't it? And this is what I remember very much about that time and of course [before we had The Crucible], we had The Playhouse - have you heard of The Playhouse?

RS: Yes

BS: which was just an amazing place again and so many famous name went through there; Paul Eddington and chap who's on Coronation Street..

RS: It's not a woman is it? It's a man...?

BS: It's a bloke, curly-haired bloke, been in a variety of soap and things and one of the shows I really remember and I think it would be just about within this time that you're asking about was *The Stirrings* in Sheffield on a Saturday Night, which if you were a Sheffielder was just a wonderful production and partly why I remember that particularly would be the fact that sadly we'd lost my father and an aunt, well I call her aunt but some friend of some vague relationship had come up to cheer mum up a bit and we'd gone and it was the first time mum had laughed again after, you know, really had a good laugh again after Dad had died but it was just such a terrific production and...

RS: Where was that?

BS: That was at The Playhouse. But it was ballets and opera that we saw mainly at The Lyceum or The Empire and pantomimes when I was a child and then of course, The Crucible opened and that was fun but that was later than you're asking me about. As I say the biggest memories are of that and of local theatre, amateur dramatics, sort of going down to, I suppose it would be the village hall wouldn't it? And watching plays and pantomimes and musicals and the drompfit (?) of course, has much expanded now but the drompfit (?) light opera would give us great great fun...

RS: And were you ever involved in the acting side of things, or...?

BS: I was more, I was more sort of involved in backstage being the prompt because although I can talk for Christendom and although I went on to become a teacher, I was really quite, in a way, shy I think, self conscious perhaps and so I was happier you know helping round the backstage and of course there were amateur productions on at the theatres too so you were involved with those and of course there was the Montgomery Theatre where you went to shows and the Library Theatre, I mean you forget in a way how well-endowed a sort of area it was for theatre-going and of course you go in, you sit on your seat, 'course as you get older you can actually afford it perhaps, because you're doing Saturday jobs aren't you? Actually afford to go and sit on a proper seat rather than on the benches and you sink in and it's escapism and you get that feel and the buzz and the safety curtain rises and the curtains go back and you just sit back and you can lose yourself and after you've worked as a waitress all day Saturday and your feet are killing you, this is only part time work of course, you just get lost in it don't you and this is the joy of the theatre.

RS: And would you say that you preferred watching lots of different productions and soaking up the atmosphere as opposed to being backstage, behind set, helping out?

BS: Oh I would say if I'm being selfish, I would prefer to watch and get involved with it that way although it is fascinating to be behind the scenes because there you are at the front and you get all this – well it looks glamorous doesn't it, should we say, from the front? And then you go backstage and you see that it is very unreal and often looks

quite cluttered because somewhere like The Lyceum or backstage in amateur dramatics you've not much room and yet you've got to be organised enough to make sure your props are there and to have enough room for the prompt and of course if it's at The Lyceum and it's a musical they're got to take seats out to be able to have an orchestra. So both sides are fascinating because it's nice to know how it's working and how these scene changes take place and how they project their voices or how they all have to be miked up, I mean both sides are fascinating and there's a feel isn't there? As I say you sit down and the people on duty are just going up and down aren't they making sure everything's sorted and there's a rustle of sweet papers and then of course it happens doesn't it? The curtains come back or the safety curtain comes up and you're transported into a different world which means you know, if you've had a rough day, its like art isn't it? You can splash away on something and get rid of all sorts of problems, so both!

RS: How long were you working backstage for? Did you do that for a good couple of years or...?

BS: Well you do it on and off, when you've got a bit of time, of course if you're at school and you're eighteen and you're involved backstage, I was never very keen back then on, I'm still not very keen on being... I think I can't get rid of the self consciousness enough necessarily to act. Pantomimes – that's different isn't it?

RS: Because that's overacting?

BS: Because that's overacting you see. So if you sort of overact or over-emphasise something, that's different. But I, you look at somebody like Derek Jacobi and he was in a play about the, I call The Enigma, The Enigma Files [Breaking the Code] the secret work that went on to break the code.... Do you remember that one?

RS: It is Enigma.

BS: It is Enigma isn't it although the Enigma Files were...

RS: Yes I think I know what you mean.

BS: You know what I mean? It was wonderful, and you can suspend belief because there is this adult man and he is standing to the left hand side of The Lyceum and I'm out of era by the way now, but he was standing on the left hand side of the stage and he was a twelve-year-old boy and he was just, it just shows his brilliance, he was so believable and that's great acting isn't it? And then he goes through the phases of that particular story and then becomes the adult and it just, it just amazes me and very often when you meet them, I mean he was [very] fluent but he's very shy and very self-effacing almost and yet he can stand there and be so believable in something like Don Carlos [and everything he does].

RS: Like he had a different mask on?

BS: You just are amazed that they can do this and I don't do that and yes, I've played the angry school marm, well I'm not going to name if it's going on there (points at recorder and laughs). But that's different to holding a character for the length of time they need to hold for a play or television or whatever – or film, or whatever they're doing. I just think, well, its an art, it's a talent and an art and you just come out, and you're just blown away by it aren't you? And I just think its so amazing that they can do this, and often you meet them and they're often quite shy people themselves, but they can get into that character and make you really believe and it is just wonderful to share it, that you're out there and you're sharing it.

RS: And do you remember if you traveled outside of Sheffield to see other theatre? I mean did you go to Manchester or Birmingham or even as far as London to see anything?

BS: I would be, when I was down at college of course, we went to The Everyman Theatre, which was getting going in Cheltenham so of course we saw productions there and we went up to Stratford which of course, well that again, you suspend belief don't you, because good Shakespearian actors are just....

RS: Was that a theatre workshop?

BS: No, this would be actually to go up and see a production and we became a bit involved with seeing a friend in the fifty-three group who, and they put plays on in The Library Theatre but again, mainly it was to go and actually watch them, you know, working or acting and it was an English teacher who worked [with] my husband and [he] was a very talented actor, and again it just amazes me that people can do this because as I say, I must be too self-conscious or something, selfish in a way, but you know what I mean, I can't quite suspend enough, I always feel as though I'm stiff or too artificial, but I just am absolutely blown away by the talent that they – you see and that they can give so much pleasure and [also] angst because sometimes, you know, it's such a deep thing that you really get caught up in it don't you? And you're weary almost at the end of it. I don't remember in that period going down to somewhere like London or Manchester or Birmingham, it's only recently – well not recently but you know...

RS: In the later years?

BS: In the later years that that we did all that, so...

RS: And did you ever see anything that was done through Joan Littlewood or anything like that? Or was it mostly all done in Sheffield?

BS: Now wait a minute, I'm trying to think who produced these amazing pantomimes that we had in Sheffield and that name Littlewood comes in but I don't know, I don't think that you'd probably have to check this for me as to who the productions were by I mean I think that what I'm remembering is what appealed to me, to know then, particularly when I was a child who had done the productions, you know when you say it's produced by such-and-such a person or it's a certain production, oh The City Hall of course, we used to go to things at The City Hall...

RS: such as...?

BS: Such as ballet I think, I'm sure they had ballet there...

RS: And so were you the only one, I mean were your friends sort of interested in it the same time as you were in the same sort of things as you were, I mean did you go in sort-of groups?

BS: We would go from grammar school in groups, sometimes you know organised through school, and as I, often, of course but again films were a terrific interest of course because again then there it's the same escapism isn't it? So you'd go to films and there is a little theatre in Chesterfield – of course, as I say we're just talking about that particular period – which is now The Pomegranate, of course, and I clearly remember going to see either Hamlet or Macbeth at The Pomegranate, we must have been doing it for O-level or A-level and whether it was a touring company or whether it was like the rep that was there, it was really awful [laughs]! It was one of those where the scenery was not very wonderfully fixed and instead of dimming the lights so that the poor dead soul could creep off and you're suddenly aware that the person who has died in this terrible duel just gets up and walks off and well of course, adolescents very thoughtless you know, you laugh don't you when you should have kept quiet because but it is just something that sticks in your mind and we were probably very unkind about it but of course you have to write it all up afterwards don't you when you're doing school things don't you and you remember the daft things don't you? I mean you've probably seen far superior productions but you don't remember as well as the ones where you get the hiccups as it were....

RS: Very interesting.

BS: Very unkind I think really but...[laughs]

RS: You sound like you're obviously still a theatre-goer...?

BS: Oh yes, we've got a seat in The Lyceum that's got our name on it. [laughs]

RS: So would you say that you have noticed a lot of things that have changed from when you sort of first started going to now, is there a difference in the type of audience

that are attending the theatre, the type of acting - has that changed, the themes? And obviously the censorship...

BS: Oh I should think things have changed considerably, as we're talking about my childhood era, you would tend to go to things that were suitable for families until say you were sort of like sixth form or when you were at college, then you'd move onto to stuff that made you actually think rather than just entertains, in the sense that it's escapism and nowadays of course, I mean I suppose some of those pantomimes were very politically incorrect, I mean the innuendos and so many things now they can't do, can they? And of course, I think the style of acting has changed as well because you had these beautiful BBC type voices didn't you that had to enunciate very clearly and then they weren't very keen on people with different accents, you know regional accents, you know, if you were northern it was usually implied that you were thick and stupid and southerners you know were always cockney or they were country burr from you know sort of Devonshire, Gloucestershire, Cornwall weren't they? And so yes, I think it's changed considerably, the sort of attitude and the fact that sort of now they can do sort of much more explicit things, not the business of having to keep one foot on the floor type thing when they were trying to show a sex scene or something [laughs]. You know, they would have to be gymnasts wouldn't they? And the fact that, as I say, certain things they could be racially terrible couldn't they, and very sort of hurtful I suppose really but....

RS: But the theatre did start to become more about the everyday man?

BS: Well when you're getting things like A Taste Of Honey and things like that, I mean it just blew your mind away because suddenly you've got this sort of kitchen sink type drama that is showing a life that you didn't know anything about really, I mean you know comfortable little well-loved child in a little suburban area and suddenly you're getting things like this, really gritty stuff.

RS: Did you see a production of that?

BS: Yes, oh yes..

RS: In Sheffield?

BS: In Sheffield, but as I say, but whether, I think that would be after the era that we're talking about but it was certainly on in The Crucible and of course, the films that came out then became much more gritty and realistic didn't they? Because we had all the sort of escapism, all the lovely musicals straight after the War because people needed the boost didn't they? And then by the sort of late fifties we were getting I suppose, well I don't know whether the term method acting is there but you know much more gritty and much more realistic and regional accents were then much more acceptable and there was quite a lot of anger about I think as well wasn't there? Because they had gone through a War, they had gone through the terrible period, they'd gone through the rationing and the role of women was changing so the fact that that it was the woman,

you know the scarlet woman, who she was the one who was pregnant, you know it was completely forgotten that it was actually, you know like Alfie, he could happily go round and sow all his oats couldn't he? But, let you sleep around as a female and you're a slag or a slut or whatever awful term, far worse than that that they used don't they? But these were acceptable as plays and it was far more thought-provoking...

RS: Did you ever see a production of Look Back In Anger By John Osborne?

BS: Yes...

RS: What were your thoughts there?

BS: Well again, you just realise, you come from a fairly sheltered background and suddenly you realise the difference in lifestyles, I mean this is [different] from the escapism of theatre, you know you are made to think more aren't you? Which is good about different viewpoints and different styles...

RS: Was that seen as quite a turning point?

BS: That was a turning point wasn't it? Did that come before A Taste of Honey?

RS: I think it did, yes.

BS: But – oh – yes you suddenly get the gritty realism and well, it's good, isn't it?

RS: Everyone's identifying with the characters on stage because they recognise them?

BS: They recognise them and the angst and the problems and the frustrations that come, and of course, you know a lot of the plays were – before that were sort of upper class and these lovely enunciated [voices] by great actors and actresses, I'm not blaming them, but suddenly, as I say, you get the realism and you can empathise – and as I say, your mind is opened to quite a different viewpoint of life...

RS: So did you notice the audience starting to make up of the everyday man? It was pulling in, you know...

BS: Well as you grow older, you go to different types don't you? So you're not quite getting the family audience because some of that would not be suitable for younger children would it? So you're getting a much younger audience in the sense that they're younger people, you know teens and your age and then, then you have a sort of lull don't you? You know after the fifties and sixties I think...

RS: Mmmmm... But now it's quite...?

BS: But now, it's terrific isn't it? To go and it used to be great at The Crucible because the students were getting sort of reasonably priced seats so you get all these young people and us old fogies saying sometimes, 'Oh we can't move for all these students', but you think, 'No! Great!' Because they're the theatre-goers of the future, they go while they're young and enthused and then they bring their families and then there are bottoms on seats and it keeps it all going doesn't it, which is great!

RS: Do you think there's very much a different feeling about the theatre?

BS: The fact that bringing in a younger audience is a wonderful thing and remembering the things that you saw when you were relatively young and it was so different was just true, you know, you were sort of 'phew!' you know, 'Fancy doing that and saying that and showing that!' But...

RS: What was the most shocking thing perhaps that you saw on the stage?

BS: [laughs] I know that I must [have] closed my eyes in a production of Hair and missed the one nudey [both laugh]. It's not, it wasn't so shocking I suppose really because I think by then I'd been married, and I'd gone to a co-ed school so everything was not so shocking because you know what you do in sixth form, you sort life out don't you – and you're perhaps, I dunno, you're more outrageous than you really are and you say things just to see what effect it has and the theatre was a bit like that, you felt that sometimes they'd put stuff in to shock but even so they were getting this sort of other world message over, and it did exist and these problems were there and perhaps in a way it could alienate a so-called middle class, I'm not calling us a middle class but you know what I mean... There was a certain audience and then suddenly the whole empathy business was going, wasn't it? Because you didn't actually empathise with these people and then you did because if it was well-portrayed, well you do empathise with the situation don't you? And what would be the most shocking? I think some of the swearing, and I'm just trying to think how much was allowed and how much wasn't, because again, even by, you know, the mid-sixties, it wasn't as open as it is now where they can literally almost say anything, can't they? But suddenly to hear all this torrent of abuse and the fact that they they were beating women up – and I mean it's no different from Shakespeare in a way because he portrayed such gritty realism, but of course the language is different, this is everyday language and without the beautiful modulation that if it's done well Shakespeare just grabs you, doesn't it?

RS: Does that make you think that in some ways censorship was a good thing?

BS; Well, only if the playwright has something good to say, well, it ought to be said, and to get out of your comfort zone is not a bad thing, is it? But getting the point of 'how far do you go?', I mean, people, we all have a bias don't we and we all have sensibilities and some people are terribly upset if it's very blasphemous and depending on their

religious backgrounds, or – so I think you need a little censorship but I do think that if an artist has poured his soul into something and then the producers and the actors and directors have come out with a play that is really getting a message over, well to start chopping bits out spoils the flow, doesn't it? Spoils the message, but equally, you know, as I say, people have different sensibilities, don't they?

RS: I agree with you on that one. So just going back to when you were doing backstage things just for different companies or just in Sheffield...

BS: Just in little bit of local things and of course school things you [did]...

RS: In sort of the local things, were you aware of what the sort of rehearsal schedule was like? At what point did they get the script, have to learn the lines, have it ready, do a costume run through - do you remember how quick paced it was?

BS: Well if you're in, if you're – if you're thinking about local rep, they worked at such a pace, I don't know how they managed it because they were doing one play while they were sort-of rehearsing another play weren't they, and it was all such a quick changeover that it must have been terrific stress, and yet I suppose a very good grounding for the pressures that you're under when you're in a play, or a film, or some sort of production. If there were amateur things, well you've got to remember that people were doing jobs and then rehearsing, and doing the production as well as – so the pace is often quite frantic, and the same with touring companies, I mean one week they're here and the next minute they're up in Sheffield, they can be up in the north, in the middle of Scotland can't they? But for some reason they'd dive down to Cornwall, the pace of not being at home, living out of a suitcase is – and I used to have the lads from The Northern the Central Ballet School because they used to come up and do workshops, again I'm slightly out of era but that amazed me, the fact that these lads would do a production and then they'd be up again, which means they're high when they've finished, haven't they so they go out, they have a meal and are still on a high adrenaline flow and yet they're up and off at nine o'clock and they're there at the practising and doing the warm-ups and I mean it's, we know it's a job but the pressure is incredible and then equally there may not be another job next week because the security's not there so again there's a lot of pressure, isn't there, on them! And you're very aware of this, I think that you appreciate it even more when you meet people through this theatre exchange and these folk take time out from a production to come and talk to you, you know, almost little followers we are, I suppose, you know groupies or whatever? Seeing *The Everyman* develop up in Cheltenham and productions in school, you just know how much work goes into it because it isn't just the actors, it's the all the backstage, it's the production of the lighting, the costuming, the makeup; a terrific amount [of staff] and when people say, 'I don't know why it cost so much...' and then you say, 'Well they've brought an orchestra, you know they've got several large pantechinons of scenery and costumes and somebody has to organise all this and the turnover is fantastic, isn't it? You know, they're working through the night to clear out one show and put up another and that's the cost, isn't it? Equally I'm biased - you know to my mind I'm, I just love the theatre...

RS: And can you remember how much it cost to go to, say, The Lyceum to see a production of something?

BS: Well I think now we talk in pounds and I think in those days, as a child you know you spent ten and six and that was probably a very dear seat because now it's, well twenty pound easily, isn't it? So you're talking as I say in shillings whereas now you would talk well into sort of tens of pounds wouldn't you?

RS: But do you remember it being expensive for you at the time?

BS: It was a real luxury. It was not like [now when] I generally hope to be going to The Lyceum and Crucible when it's open at least once a week and sometimes you have to do the two once The Crucible's open, because you've not organised yourself and you've got to do the two in the week or something. So yes, it was, to my mind, it was quite expensive because you had very different salaries and as I say if you were at school you just, you were working for pocket money or what your Saturday or part time job would use and so when you're a student well, you know, it's bound to be a lot different now to how it was in my day, yes but equally you see somewhere like the gods up in The Lyceum, if you're prepared to be packed in and prepared to queue - it still was worth it but because that was... you know my father used to speak about going to music halls and things like that and course it was a very different atmosphere then, pre-war and stuff so...

RS: And I suppose I've got to ask you really about your favourite theatre and your favourite production of something?

BS: Oh... Well I think The Lyceum and The Crucible, and The Playhouse because they're where my greatest memories are and the little Pomegranate in Chesterfield and the production, oh wow! I love the range, as I say going with my mum when I was about the age of fourteen and going to listen to probably a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta or going to watch the ballet - they stick really into your mind. I love musicals for the escapism even though something like Carousel can be quite dark, West Side Story has got quite a deep meaning and plays that blow you away like I say Don Carlos and when you see really great actors...

RS: Did you ever see a performance of Waiting For Godot?

BS: Mmmm... I went to see that down at Stratford, probably with that fifty-three group, I'm sure it would be at Stratford. Well first of all, in a way not understanding it because part of the time they are almost poking or if not poking fun they're deliberately stirring aren't they to make you think, and you'd think, 'What on earth have I come to see? I don't get that!'

RS: Is that when you were younger you saw that?

BS: I would be probably in my twenties, yes I think, I'm sure we were early married and I think this group, the fifty-three group went down to Stratford and it was really quite mind-boggling, you think you've seen other things but it was quite [different], it just gradually begins to dawn. Sometimes it's better to have read the play before you see something and sometimes it's better to be presented with it with [something to make you think], isn't it? And... oh, who's the bloke who does the Birthday Party?

RS: Pinter. Harold Pinter?

BS: Pinter! Because he's another one, if you just read it flat as it were, like you read a book again it's, 'What on earth is he saying?' Why is he suggesting that?', or, 'Why is that character doing this?' But if it's interpreted well when you see the actual production, well then it begins to go into place doesn't it? But, but what's my most memorable [production]? Goodness me! I've seen so many gorgeous things, amazing things - what I do remember particularly as I say is, think I'm out of era but well I must be because it was at The Lyceum but certainly out of era, the Derek Jacobi [plays] I remember and, as I say, I know I come back to Stirrings but that was terrific, equally, when it was on at The Crucible, it was terrific and when the children in It Was a Bit Noisy Outside, so some of our children were involved and to see a difference in a child that sometimes just didn't cope with school and yet give them a stage and there they come into their own and it's terrific, isn't it? And for children to use drama to work out a lot of angst and you know, when you were doing a [cover for an absent colleague], you ended up having to do drama classes and [you] see the entire different side to children so [it's] an education thing. It's, I think, it's wonderful! What did I really, really remember? Just as I say, so many, musicals, opera...

RS: Did you see anything like Miller or Arnold Wesker, anything like that?

BS: Yes, I suppose I must have done, but I've a feeling that sometimes those were the ones where I must have thought 'I don't understand that, I'll have to think about that.' But you come out sometimes don't you and you're you are intrigued, baffled, but then when you go away and think about it, it clicks or sometimes it would click while it's happening but as I say, I think the grey matter is going a bit and I'm probably not remembering very clearly for you...

RS: So do you think that perhaps the aim of theatre should be to have an emotional effect on you, where you do go away and think about what you've seen or do you think it should be just a bit of a sort of light-hearted song and dance to allow you to escape?

BS: Oh I think you need both! I think you need both because as I say the grey matter is going, and ... there is a place for a whole variety isn't there? Thought-provoking, light-hearted escapism, an educational tool! Oh yes, I mean the theatre's got so much to give and if you've got people who are talented in all ranges because it's interesting, isn't it, to see, like I say, to read a play flat as it were, just as you read the script and then to talk to somebody, either a playwright or a director and see how they'd look at it and see how they'd bring out different angles that just on a straight reading you don't see straight away because that's their talent, that's how they mould it together. I think theatre

should appeal to all types of people and all ranges and yet, you see when you look at the audiences and depending [on the production], it is still perhaps predominantly an older group of people unless it's something that really grabs the youngsters. As I say *The Crucible* was particularly good, I think at the moment *The Lyceum* is working on, well it's got to keep the income going so it's working on [bottoms] on seats, isn't it?

RS: And do you have any memories of anything that did really affect you emotionally? Anything where you came away feeling very emotional about it, something very thought-provoking?

BS: Well yes, I say, I'll go back to *Stirrings* again because it was [about] the city that I live in, that I'd known mostly because I was only away from Sheffield basically three years. I'd been away three years and of course [in] those three years, you'll know, won't you, that as a student you change dramatically in that sort of era, don't you? And I was probably still arrogant and precocious enough to think that I could change the [educational] world and then as I say, seeing something like *The Stirrings* because that showed how people were so badly treated in the work they did, I mean the Sheffield [grinders] had a life expectancy of about thirty-two years because the bosses had no concept of health and safety, so they were inhaling all this filth and they took to the theatre to escape. Then the trade unions [helped]. Although there had been things like the different workers' groups, the fact that they had to fight so hard for men's rights, for human rights; so I think that will always stick in my mind, thought-provoking and yet entertaining and giving some of the history of our city, so yes, that is one of the things that I would say, I really, really remembered for such a variety of emotional things like my mother, at one point really had a good laugh and [we] were seeing the gritty realism of folk who'd worked and built the city and the contrast between the workers and the ones who lived in the 'posh' houses out in the south west of the city.

RS: Have you seen anything similar in style to that since or...?

BS: Oh dear! Yes I'm sure I must have – yes, a different style - *The Folk in the North*, it was a TV series about the north east and the corruption of these councillors and builders who built shoddy, shoddy housing and there was a terrible scandal wasn't there because they were eventually found out. So that was a sort of, but that didn't have the escapism in the same way that *The Stirrings* did but *The Stirrings* was more of a musical and this was a play [on at *The Lyceum*].

RS: What about the introduction of television and the impact it might have had on the theatre world? [What] do you think that it might have taken away?

BS: I think it took away an awful lot because there you were, you didn't have to bother going out into a cold winter's night and you didn't have to fiddle about on public transport, you sat there and you had that little box in the comfort of your own home and I think there was a severe dip in theatre audiences because they had to struggle, didn't they to... We all had to struggle to make sure *The Lyceum* survived because it went through such a... well it was nearly pulled down, it took a great fight by some very dedicated people to make sure it survived and the Empire had gone, I mean there used

to be far more theatres in every city, didn't there? I mean little music hall type theatres and, as I say, we lost our other theatre, The Empire, and The Playhouse went, as I say we're very lucky with The Crucible because we get this thrust stage type production, you know where you're on there sometimes and you're with them, breathing with them and you're part of it and you come away and you've gone through it, and again the production *It Was a Bit Noisy Outside*, it was based around the Blitz and again you forget, as I say I was four when the War ended, you'd no idea of the horrors that people went through in that era and then some of the... Of course I'm in more recent times. aren't I now? You know we've seen the ones that have shown some of the – how am I going to phrase this politically – people who are immigrants and the problems they've gone through and the plays they've put on...

RS: Did you see much representation of the War? I know you've talked about people feeling more angry but did you see any productions of say *Oh What A Lovely War*?

BS: Do you know I've never seen that and I meant to go when The Pomegranate put it on. I must of seen clips of it on television and I mean again that's another way of looking at something so grim you can't believe how terrible it was and yet they make a light-hearted, apparently light-hearted look at it don't they? But that's the way you survive don't you? And yes, even the *Mrs Henderson Presents*, that type of thing was another one, wasn't it, that was looking at the War era and of course Judi Dench was in the television play, wasn't she? I love Judi Dench, she was so beautiful when she was young, wasn't she? What a terrific actress...

RS: Did you ever see a production of *An Inspector Calls*?

BS: Now that was a brilliant production. Yes, that is a mind blowing one, isn't it? Because the way it was crafted and styled, it's just fantastic isn't it, those plays that leave you, that are open-ended in a way: who is the inspector? And how much people reveal to a completely... well, an unknown person and we've all done it, haven't we?

RS: Where did you see that?

BS: I would see it at The Lyceum with that amazingly staged house wasn't it? And I've seen it done as an amateur production...

RS: Do you ever wish that you had seen things in London because it has such a theatre prestige... Do you feel like you ever missed out?

BS: Oh yes! I mean I've gone down to London to see productions with our little theatre crowd, they've got this Donmar at Wyndhams tickets, I suppose you'd call them, where you get the full production and and that we came out of the Wyndhams, October 1st and we were just, you know... It just was so amazing, I mean *Ivanov*, it was just like a *Russian Hamlet*, wasn't it? So much introspection and it was just just fantastic and equally when you go to all the London theatres because there's an even greater, in a

way, cross-section because a lot of foreigners will come, won't they, and see [productions]. Oh yes, a London theatre is fantastic, it's just expensive, isn't it, because you add on.. I remember at Donmar at the Wyndhams, you got a deal so for say a hundred pounds a day, we got out first class tickets down and... we must have had our lunch and, of course you get spoilt to death going first class on the train, but I mean you could spend that easily just on your tickets, couldn't you? I always work on the principle if you don't put bums on seats in provincial theatres, we could lose them - we nearly lost The Lyceum but the London theatres are terrific, but the funny thing is, as you go on holidays and things and you've met Londoners and they've said 'Have you seen such and such a thing?' and sometimes you'd be lucky enough in Sheffield to preview something and we'd say 'Oh yes, we've seen that' before it had, you know... Terrible, isn't it, it's just a bit, you know, bla bla bla, showing off – but it is terrific because that area is just fantastic, isn't it in London and all those theatres but [there are] terrific amount of musicals as opposed to straightforward plays. I mean you can understand why because it does put bums on seats again and brings in the money. You know we are missing The Crucible in Sheffield because we're not getting those sort of thought-provoking plays...

RS: That's my favourite acting and drama, no songs, no razzmatazz, straightforward, give me the story, none of that jazzy stuff. I mean obviously there's a time and a place where I like that. You see less and less of straightforward....

BS: We're getting less and less plays, aren't we? And as I say that was, that's something we really do miss because amateurs put them on and that sounds unkind because I've seen some wonderful amateur productions but equally to get it in the proper theatre, what I call a proper theatre and you see a good play with a jolly good story line and that makes you think and takes you out of your comfort zone or just a jolly good play that tells a jolly good story is wonderful, isn't it? I mean as I say, I just love the theatre, but, the theatre, has to I think, offer different types but I think a good play with a good story, well produced, well acted is a joy, isn't it?

RS: During the time, was it obvious that theatre companies were, that theatre managers were picking and choosing things that they knew were going to pull in the punters as oppose to things that they might have been iffy about?

BS: Well I think, trying to remember as you grew up after the War, I think there was the phase of doing things that were escapism so light-hearted farces and musicals, but musicals cost, don't they, to put on so there was that. And then of course as you got into the sixties you got into the more thought-provoking and getting out of your comfort zone err so yes, definitely a change and then I think at the moment with the recession I think that musicals are going to take over again for, well they appear, they have done in the West End, haven't they? It's just, you know the nice little Wyndhams, beautiful little theatre and it's designed by the same bloke who designed The Lyceum...

RS: Oh really?

BS: Yes! That's S-P-R-A-G-E, I think, SPRAGE but you know, we're lucky that we've got such a wide range, haven't we? And..., I remember going to Bristol at one point...

RS: You saw something in Bristol?

BS: Mmmm, a long time ago though you see, this was it, because you know you're on holiday so it would have been something very light-hearted...

RS: Did you ever see a production of Uranium 235?

BS: No, I don't remember that at all, I'm sure I would have remembered that...

RS: Because that was again much like Oh What A Lovely War, very light-hearted and comic representation of....

BS: Nuclear War or something... Yes, it would be...

RS: Oh that was brilliant - everything we've got there was absolutely brilliant!