

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Frank Grace – interview transcript

Interviewer: Clare Brewer

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Theatre goer. Anna Lucasta; Windsor Rep; The Gioconda Smile; September Tide; The Second Mrs Tanqueray; Oklahoma; Annie Get your Gun; Shakespeare; The Old Vic; Peter Brook; Olivier; Amateur Theatre; Woolford; Look back In Anger; Encore; Theatre Cruelty; Roots; Tis Pity She's a Whore; A View From the Bridge; Censorship; Theatre Clubs; The Bald Prima Donna; Oh What a Lovely War; Arthur Miller.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and thus differs in places from the recording.

CB: How did you first become interested in theatre?

FG: I suppose through [act]ing at school, but in terms of any serious theatre going I suppose it goes back to the late 1940's... interestingly enough, when I re-looked at the [programmes] that I have got, the first play that I saw [in] the West End was most unusual for the late 1940's, it was a play called Anna Lucasta, an American play; what was unusual for the 1940s was that it was an all black cast.

CB: Really...

FG: And it was about a prostitute and my parents took me [laughs] and I think they must have been slightly worried because I was fourteen at the time and it was one of my first experiences.

But that was not typical of the first sort of phase of my theatre-going between that moment in 1949 and about 1951 I suppose and [after where] something dramatic begins to happen, I think. It was classic old style theatre, mainly at the Windsor Rep, we lived close to Windsor, and Windsor was a truly old fashioned repertory company really backwards 1920's, 1910's the sort of theatre where if you look at the programme it asks...it 'earnestly requests ladies to remove their hats whilst sitting in the seats', and then you can order tea for one shilling in the interval, which would be passed to you as I remember, passed to you on a little tray sitting in your seat in the stalls...it's that sort of old fashioned style of theatre-going and Windsor was very typical. They only put on plays that were good, decent stuff...

CB: Right, OK.

FG: So there was that and [also] when I began to go...well not very often, to the West End, it was usually with my mother... a young teenager going with his mother, she used to go off to town shopping and then she would do a matinee, so it was very much matinee theatre that I was seeing in the forties and if I look at what I saw in that period it was plays like *The Gioconda Smile*, *Daphne Laureola* [with] Edith Evans really looking backwards in terms of theatre history...a play called *September Tide* with Gertrude Lawrence was again the old...the oldies that I was seeing and the second *Mrs Tanqueray* with Eileen Herlie so my early theatre going in the West End was more towards if you like drawing room, living room theatre, rather than looking ahead in any sense: of course there wasn't much to look ahead to at that time I suppose... and the other theatre going in the late forties was of course American musicals *Oklahoma!*, *Annie Get your Gun*, *Carousel*. I saw all three of those in the West End and they were amazing to a teenager at that time just after the war you know, all the bright lights and the Hollywood atmosphere and they were really very enjoyable from that pure entertainment point of view as a theatre-goer and I suppose...there is not much else about that period apart from the American musicals, the only [British musical] that I can compare [them] with [was] seeing Ivor Novello in one of his in fact it was only a few months before he died...in his last musical..what was it called...I can't remember what it was called I have it down here somewhere...no I have not never mind it was his very last musical and so it was musicals, straight plays like *Daphne Laureola* was [an important] one, Edith Evans and the older actor and actresses particularly...and that was it really till [I was] about [17]... well precisely it was 1951. Fifty-one was one of those moments [for] me which transformed [my theatre experience]. I was in the sixth form studying Shakespeare seriously for the first time *Antony and Cleopatra*, *A Winter's Tale* were set books, set texts...and it was 1951 which really got my theatre going moving in a serious way. It was the Festival of Britain and for that year there was a Festival of Britain production - the Olivier, [and] Vivien Leigh *Antony and Cleopatra*, and when I look at the programme now it's quite remarkable in terms of the line up of stars that were in that production there [are] not only those two but there is Maxine Oaudley, Peter Cushing, Norman Wool and Jill Bennet, Robert Helpman, Richard Goolden, perhaps some of these names you are not terribly familiar with.

CB: Not all of them, no.

FG: But some of them were... well most of them feel like the older generation of actors and a lot of them I'd seen in film for instance and certainly Hyde-White was in comedy films...but it was the line up of actors in that production, the Festival production which really was an amazing experience for me as a young theatre goer. It was the first time I had seen any of the great actors on the English stage so that was a defining moment....there was again for the festival, and unusually because it was a set book, a production of *Samson Agonistes* by Milton, which of course is not a play at all but it was performed in [St Martin in] the Fields, and I do recall that very warmly because I suppose it was a set text and I learnt something from it but again one of the old school [of] actors Abraham Sofaer was in [it]. At the end of [that] year something else had happened [to me] which really started the ball rolling - we lived in South West Middlesex and so whenever I came to London it was to Waterloo Station and of course less than five minutes from Waterloo station was the Old Vic Theatre, and in 1951 I saw my first production at the Old Vic which was *Othello*. [The Vic] became a sort of Mecca it was easily got to and I saw, well I say dozens, a great many productions at the Old Vic from

1951 right through to 1956 1957, 1958 even, starting with this one..[but] the one I particularly remember with Paul Rogers – again he was really of the middle to old school actors – as Iago and I remember more about his performance than one usually does [rather than] about Othello, and Irene Worth who was an up and coming actress of the time was Desdemona, Coral Browne who was Emilia, other than Iago in that production she was famous for her ability to swear backstage.

CB: Really...

FG: I didn't comment of course on that but Othello in 1951 along with the Olivier Antony and Cleopatra were a great turning point for me as a theatre goer and a student of course...I was overwhelmed very romantically I suppose by literary verse by just listening to a great actors producing great verse in ways which were incomparable at that time...the final bit of the first [eye] opening period for me [were] two productions by John Gielgud, [at the] Phoenix theatre in 1952 The Winter's Tale and Much Ado About Nothing and again the cast list was quite remarkable...the oldies Lewis Casson etc. and what was interesting for me to recollect although I don't really remember the nature of the productions particularly but I did notice that it was The Winter's Tale where I first saw a production of Peter Brook...I mean who could be more important in British theatre since then? But I didn't really recognise it at the time...it was Gielgud who was the greatest of all performers of Shakespeare on stage for me at least... Olivier was great but for me I don't think quite got that thing where he could speak the poetry the way Gielgud could, OK, it's old hat now... perhaps it's a bit old fashioned that style but as a young impressionable youth at that time it overwhelmed me, particularly as I thought I was a bit of an actor too.

CB: You were involved with acting in university weren't you?

FG: Just a bit, yes, and perhaps we should move on because I suppose that was the start of the next phase for me when I went to university in 1953, Nottingham in fact... and began to do more serious drama than I had done in school, in particular I don't know whether I mentioned it when I contacted you first [but] I was lucky. There was a scholar from America named Robert Brustein who was at the university at that time doing his PhD and he did a couple of productions for the DRAMSOC as it was called and it was from him more than anyone else that I began to learn about theatre craft, how one put plays together... well, I looked him up actually on the web and he went on to found the Yale Repertory Theatre Company for instance and the American Repertory Theatre Company in Massachusetts. He has become very big in American theatre since then, but I knew him as a student and he began to teach me a lot more about stage craft and of course made me appreciate stage craft elsewhere much more as a consequence. I have never forgotten the influence he had on me which is very considerable I think... one production was the Philadelphia Story which you might expect an American play and the other was The Alchemist so I began to learn a lot about theatre at the time... at the same time my experience of theatre was beginning to expand enormously, although I was away from London at the time in Nottingham. Nottingham Playhouse was one of the really good reps, bit like the Old Vic at that time, not like Windsor which was a bit too provincial. I began to see the classic drama and largely through Nottingham Playhouse... really until then I had done nothing about Chekhov or Wilde or Shaw, saw [all of them] at Nottingham... all very good. The producer there - they called them producers in

those days rather than directors - was John Harrison and a little bit later [Val] May, they went on to bigger things I think and one of the designers at Nottingham. Voytek also went on to bigger things in the theatre, so it was very good theatre for me to see at that time... and at the same time when I was at home I would go to the Old Vic obviously and [to] see them time after time, but just before I got to Nottingham I went to Stratford for the first time, Macbeth 1952 and I must say I was rather disappointed.

CB: Why's that?

FG: Ralph Richardson was, for me, not a Macbeth.

CB: Really...

FG: It just didn't work literally, so my first experience of the Royal Shakespeare Company - well it was not called that at the time I don't think, but anyway - it was a bit disappointing for that reason. He was not right for it and I never saw the big parts that he took, if I had I would have held a very different impression of him but he remains, unlike Gielgud, not a great Shakespearean actor [for me].

CB: I see.

FG: Unfortunately... and then in [1953] one of the last great figures from the past of British theatre that I came across was at the King's Theatre in Hammersmith in 1953. [Donald Wolfit] in King Lear. [For] an impressionable eighteen year old, Lear was overwhelming and he was always thought of at the time and since then. Yes, perhaps it was a revelatory experience... tears flowed readily as a consequence and at the end of the performance he did his old trick, have you ever heard of it?

CB: No, I have not.

FG: The curtains would close and you would be applauding loudly waiting for him to appear and what he would do is stand behind the curtains and shake them a bit and when the audience applauded a bit louder he would shake them more and he would do this three or four times before he would then emerge to a thunderous applause so he was real old ham... I know we are going on a tour of the old school [of acting] but his Lear was, I still think, probably the greatest I have ever seen. So that was going on and the Old Vic was continuing and then there was university theatre and Nottingham Playhouse and it continued along those lines... quickly run through... another thing I remember about the Lear production was Wolfit always [did] things on the cheap and the stage scenery wobbled, it did not matter he was on stage of course, upstaging everybody, and it did not matter in that sense when you looked at him... there were one or two other actors in that performance that I remember, Richard Goolden because I first came across him listening to Children's Hour on the radio during the war when he played the part of Moley in Wind in the Willows and not again till this production. It seemed so extraordinary to see Moley [as the Fool] in King Lear, you know, but there

you go... there are a [number] of other Old Vic performances that I managed to bag up to 1957: twenty four Shakespeare's of the thirty eight, which is not bad going when you look back on it. So I had a really marvellous upbringing in Shakespearean theatre... the Old Vic, the Royal Shakespeare Company. I was indulging being an actor at that time I was going to... I was going to go on stage, of course I never did I knew that it would have eaten me up had I done so.

CB: I read that you saw Look Back in Anger when it came out.

FG: Yes, you are getting me toward the next great moment.

CB: Sorry...

FG: The biggest moment [in post-war British Drama] of all I think, I suspect not just for me but for a great many theatre goers, [was] the period from [about] 1956 through 1957. That is for me when it all happened...

CB: Really?

FG: I was at that time at university [and] I began to subscribe to a magazine called Encore which was the first to write about and discuss and all the new issues that were coming to the fore of British theatre... Kenneth Tynan, people like that...

CB: Oh yes, I have heard of him.

FG: You have heard of him? Yes he was the great sort of... one of the great promoters of the new theatre... but the origins of my experience of that great moment of change which includes of course Brecht goes back to 1955 in fact and 1955 because I saw again a Peter Brook production of Titus Andronicus in the West End. Sorry if I shuffle a bit here. [looks through programmes]

CB: It's OK.

FG: 1955 though - if I can remember it rather than look at it - was the Olivier, Vivien Leigh Titus Andronicus in London, Peter Brook production and what of course was I think important about that production in particular was the theatre of cruelty element that came into it. I think it had to be Brook rather than anybody else, because theatre of cruelty was just beginning to emerge at this time leading through to the Marat/Sade and all those other productions of the later 1950's. This I think was one of the first productions which attempted to show it... of course Titus Andronicus was a very good play to use, there was blood and gore all over the place.

CB: So you would say there was more violence on the stage?

FG: Again it had a great impact on me at the time, I think it more than anything lead me towards my first big attempt at production at University when we decided a year or so later to do 'Tis Pity She's a Whore.

CB: I like that play.

FG: Again we did it as violently as we possibly could... in fact we were always proud of the fact we noted during the three performances that we did of it we had two people faint and one was sick in the auditorium so we thought we had really got theatre of cruelty there! We used... there is a scene in the play where...its incestuous love as you know.

CB: No it's OK.

FG: I am telling you what you already know... and the scene where the hero... what's his name with his love's heart on the end of a dagger and we used a real sheep heart!
[Laughs]

CB: Wow!

FG: One performance [it was acted] so vigorously that it came off onto one of the ladies in the front stalls which was absolutely marvellous! The fainting and the sickness... we really thought we had made it as theatre of cruelty people, you know.

CB: Did censorship ever affect the showing of violence?

FG: No it did not... the only real example that I came across about censorship came a little bit later when I had left university, done my National Service and was teaching in Ipswich at Civic College where I did a lot of production and it was not I suppose till 1965 that I really came across it in any sense at all...we were doing a production Roots... Wesker's Roots... we were in the forefront by then weren't we?... and the word bugger for instance came into it quite a bit and bloody does a bit and we were pressed by the authorities of the college to exorcise these words from the script.

CB: Really?

FG: And we said we would do so but we did not of course in the production and that was the only time I really came across that sort of censorship... but I did in another sense I was part of this impact in the 1956, 1957 period after Titus Andronicus. My first experience of the things that were happening that were new in British drama was A

View from the Bridge at the Watergate Theatre... nice title that... at the new theatre in fact with Antony Quayle... Peter Brook again as director... and I had to, as everyone else at the time did, we had to join the new Watergate Theatre Club in order to see it... you had to join a club.

CB: Is that how most people got around it?

FG: That's right... you had to join the club and you could see the play and I did... and of course the two males kiss, that was the censorship issue but as I saw it did not affect this [since] we were in a club theatre. So my first experiences of these trends... these emerging trends in British theatre at the time was [not just] of the American impact which was not really the most important one at that time... the other three that come more or less helter skelter at that time were [the] European absurdists you know, Ionesco... Beckett I suppose should be included in a European context... Kitchen Sink was home grown with Look Back In Anger et cetera and the American ones... the one I missed out on because I had no German of course was - well I missed out initially at least on the Berliner Ensemble and the Brecht influence on British theatre... and all these things are more or less happening at the same time in British theatre. It is so important... that is why it is not just all about Look Back In Anger, all these things were happening at the same time.

CB: What kind do you think that they attracted... because especially with Theatre Workshop they claimed they wanted to attract a more working class audience so do you think they achieved that?

FG: At that time... well it was not until a little bit later that I came across any Theatre Workshop productions at all so mainly, apart from A View from the Bridge in fact rather curiously, but interestingly at the time, the first production of The Crucible that I saw in this period was done by The Nottingham Cooperative Society, a very good production if I remember... its impact was very strong... the first production of The Bald Prima Donna by Ionesco which I saw... a fantastic play was at Nottingham Rep and we... again I said I would produce it as a freshers play in 1957... we did not pay any copyright... so we decided to do The Bald Prima Donna and it felt in that sense that I was part of this [movement] as a consequence.

CB: What did you feel about the absurd theatre... what did you like about it?

FG: The absurdity?

CB: Yes

FG: Well The Bald Prima Donna is really saying some critical things about the English middle class and I suppose that was what was beginning to get to me as a student... as a theatre goer... as a drama student as well things were being looked at critically...

knocked over and poked fun at and Ionesco does this marvellous trick of apparently using vocabulary books, taking [phrases] out of vocabulary books and putting them in.

CB: Yes I have heard that.

FG: And it is a remarkable effect, dramatically completely idiotic but...

CB: It works, doesn't it?

FG: It works... so there were all these things happening at the same time...I feel [I'm getting] a bit jumbly can I sort it out slightly?

CB: That is fine.

FG: Through 1956 into 1957 is when I was doing most of my [theatre] at university... but 1957 was again for me a great start of the transformation of Olivier when he went from Antony and Cleopatra or King Lear or whatever to Osborne's The Entertainer... Archie Rice and to see, as I think of them, the old stage actors turning toward the new was a great stimulus in that sense. I think it was the first time he had ever attempted anything outside the classical theatre.

CB: So you saw him in the performance of The Entertainer?

FG: Yes, well there were still some oldies in that production but it was Archie Rice in The Entertainer and then later in 1957 I caught up eventually with the Berliner Ensemble [and] Brecht via the production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle which was done at the [York] festival in 1957. Well what can one say about the impact of this great ensemble work that was so typical of that theatre? All these different [new voices] that were coming to British theatre at the time. Kitchen Sink is old hat in that sense... it was there importantly, but ensemble work and the American influence were... continental influences all at the same time that really did determine me to go on the stage and I suppose that was the great high water mark of my theatre experience in that period. Nottingham still continued and occasionally the West End to see the classics and the more recent straight plays A Day by the Sea, The Hunter what is the one that has just been reproduced, The Chalk Garden, which I saw the first performance of in 1957, 1958 or something with Edith Evans, Peggy Ashcroft and again another host, a small host of the greats. Thereafter from 1957, 1958 onwards it became more straight forward theatre going... but I suppose it was because of where I was at Nottingham University or in Ipswich teaching it was the Reps that introduced a great deal of important theatre... you forget the important role that the reps played at the time... and those two... I do not know many of the others at all, those two were particularly good repertory companies.

CB: I have heard that people used to go to the same repertory theatre week in week out sometimes not so much to see the plays but to see how the actors played different roles.

FG: Yes that is right, you got to know the company that is something that does not so much happen any more.

CB: No.

FG: I mean, in East Anglia there is one repertory company left and we go regularly there for that reason... you see [the company] try out a multitude of different roles and it is a remarkable experience for you, but also of course for them in terms of experience.

CB: I have heard at the start of the week it was quite amusing because people would forget their lines because obviously they were rehearsing for one play and then performing another.

FG: Yes, I did come across fluffed lines... the only thing I can remember in that respect is in Nottingham, Julius Caesar where somebody come on at one point with a message which he is supposed to hand over to whoever... I forget where it goes in the play and of course he came on without the message and had to retire backstage to get it [laughs] so it is that sort of incidental thing which occurs...I had one little experience on the Ipswich Theatre stage at the back end of my 'career' [laughs] when the director at that time Geoffrey Edwards decided to do an amateur production of Cherry Orchard and I was lucky enough to get an audition for it and played the old brother. What was marvellous about working backstage at the Ipswich Theatres that you could not get from stage right to stage left except by going up a staircase, across, down another staircase so you were helter skelter and if you had to exit stage left to stage right at any speed you were in danger of hitting a brick wall within three feet of the curtain. So it was that sort of thing about rep that was... but I think you are right, it was the permanent companies that you saw you could follow their careers. For instance that has just reminded me that at Nottingham I began to see and notice an actor called John Southworth, particularly I remember his [Aguecheek] in Twelfth Night and he did other roles at Nottingham... lo and behold! He turned up at Ipswich beyond the end of our period here in the late 1960's early 1970's as director and played a lot of roles as well. So I got to know John Southworth very well in that sense and there are other actors of that kind that you could follow through their careers from the reps, not of course that I would have recognised many of them at the time and did not but retrospectively.

CB: Would you say that it was a more personal theatre experience?

FG: Did it make it more personal? Yes I suppose it does in a way, not that I noticed it till much later of course, till 1957 when I was in York we saw the Mystery Plays and a really young girl actor at that time played the part of the Virgin Mary... a certain Judi Dench!

CB: Really?

FG: I think it must have been one of the very first things that she did on the stage, but the next year I notice in these programmes that she turns up as an extra at the Old Vic and of course now she is on her way. There are others of that kind, a great many of the lesser known actors even in the Old Vic and the Royal Shakespeare Company, you could follow them through their careers, very interesting. There were some very fine actors and I remember from the Old Vic years, people like William Devlin, William Squire and he usually took the evil parts [or] the Horatio type roles, secondary roles but did them remarkably well. Another one that came up via Nottingham was Derek Godfrey whose career I do not think went particularly happily later on but he did end up at the Old Vic after being at Nottingham... but going back to the Old Vic for a moment I forgot to mention that in 1953 one of the other great experiences theatrically for me [was] the 1953 production of Hamlet Richard Burton... - who is Richard Burton in 1953 sort of thing? - a hugely physical performer, really strong... really came across not only in the verse which of course he could speak marvellously, but the physicality of the man was enormously dominant as part of the production. A little bit later on - I cannot quite remember the year although I have jotted it down here somewhere - I went two evenings consecutively at the Old Vic again when he and John Neville did turn and turn about with Othello and Iago... and I did not see where they apparently came on and began to speak the same lines of Othello that evening and one of them had to correct himself... perhaps it was one of the rehearsals, but you know, to see them in contrasting performances was... well, I think Burton had the edge probably to do with his physicality. Neville was much more discreet if you like... much better off as I remember him vividly, again at the Old Vic as Richard II, much more suitable to his theatrical style... and he of course went on to Nottingham later on but I did not see him there. I remember that production of Richard II in particular. Key moments if you like in theatrical history that stick... perhaps because I was interested in producing plays [for] the opening moments in Richard II they had taken away the orchestra pit and put steps up onto the stage so that the actors entered with their backs to you... and you have this marvellous procession with Richard at the head coming up from the [pit] onto the stage and then he turns at the top and seats himself on the throne. It was one of those sort of magical moments for me... authority, the divinity that Richard has was there and he epitomised that... lots of other moments like that I think that one might recall and I should be able to recall them if time did not press... what else?

CB: It seems that there were quite a few plays emerging like Uranium 235 that were trying to send out a moral message to the audience, did you ever experience anything like that?

FG: No cannot think that I did... perhaps because one was always stuck in the provincial theatres which tended to do experimental stuff only occasionally but not the truly [avant garde] stuff that perhaps you are interested in... Tennessee Williams I have not mentioned for instance, who I caught up with in a theatre in Southsea in Portsmouth would you believe it, during National Service... that was the first time I had [seen] A Streetcar Named Desire on the stage. So [this period] was from the theatre-goer's point of view if you could seize the opportunities an amazing experience theatrically. As I say there were straight plays too. I have not said much about the actors one came across but I think probably, again in retrospect am I right or am I biased? I think that period from 1950 to mid 1960 we saw more great acting of all sorts on the stage than we have done since... you get big names now, but do you get the range of actors that one came across

at that time? From as I say, I keep saying the really old actors like Lewis Casson, Dame Sybil [Thorndike] right through to the Richard Burtons and so on. It was a great age in that respect for me in theatre production... in fact I have written down somewhere lists of the actors that I came across... some great some small, some still familiar, some not still familiar - Alan Dobie never would have [been] noticed in various extra roles till he emerges as Hotspur at the Old Vic... and then of course when I next saw him in 1957 in a touring production at the Nottingham Theatre Royal of Look Back in Anger. I am looking again for theatrical moments and there is definitely one there for me and I am sure we are not exaggerating here that we as young theatre goers were absolutely thrilled by this play: what it was doing what it was saying et cetera... it was preposterous and over the top in terms of what it was saying about middle class England... but there was a moment in the play - I have not seen the text sufficiently recently - where on one of his tirades, Jimmy Porter... hears the church bells outside and he simply says I think 'those bloody bells!'. In 1957 the word bloody... I can still recall sections of that audience which I noted was greyish and oldish, in-drawn breath.

CB: Really?

FB: 'He just said the word bloody! Out loud! He shouted it!', whereas we were saying 'whoopie!'. [laughs] There were two contrasting cultural responses to that and I do remember that in the interval of Look Back in Anger a number of people walked out.

CB: Really?

FG: They could not take it because it was this sort of knocking of the system, knocking of imperialism and the middle class or whatever... whereas we were fully with that... so I think it did a lot to I suppose, if this is the right word, revolutionise younger theatre goers, if I am anything to go by, literally... yes those moments. But some of these actors that I have jotted down... Paul Rogers I saw a lot of at the old Vic but also... because I was taken by the poetry, verse speaking on stage, Gielgud and all the others... the first drama remained quite important. Christopher Fry was old hat but I still remember seeing *The Dark is Light Enough* in the theatre in the mid 1950's and then those other plays, if you like the drawing room plays, that were out of fashion but were still for middle class audiences largely I suppose like *Day by the Sea*, *Chalk Garden*, *Flowering Cherry* with Ralph Richardson as a sort of failed Willy Loman type in *Death of a Salesman*... that is one I forgot - I first saw *Death of a Salesman* as a film with Fredrick March and shortly after that actually at university we did *Death of a Salesman*. I felt connected in that sense and I was preposterous enough to play Willy Loman [laughs] without the beard... yes, that moment going back to *Look Back in Anger* rather like the kissing in *View From the Bridge* which was - OK not in public it was in house - nonetheless shocking for all.

CB: Did it feel like a bit of a breakthrough?

FG: I think it did, it was a slow breakthrough and I think that it frustrated - well, I get the feeling it frustrated - playwrights like Wesker for instance because it was slow coming... all those great companies which were aiming to break through were I think

eventually [disappointed] perhaps, I do not know and perhaps my experience is lesser than others... must be the Theatre Workshop and I only really caught up with them in the early 1960's with Oh! What a Lovely War.

CB: What did you think about the performance?

FG: It was again one of the very first anti-war plays that really caught the English stage alight... and [it] was very Brechtian of course with the newsreel, all the photographs.

CB: Very effective, isn't it?

FG: Very effective, very Brecht, that was 1963 I think... It was probably because I was stuck in Ipswich with a young family, I was stuck [with] rep so I missed out on some of those experiences towards 1963 and onwards but I caught up with one ensemble, it was not really a play, it was a documentary drama I suppose called was it US? Or was it U.S.?

CB: I have just read that.

FG: Have you? Peter Brook again, you see, with the MP for Hampstead.

CB: What was that, sorry?

FG: MP for Hampstead... what was her name? The actress, of dear! Just a minute I will find it.

CB: Glenda Jackson?

FG: Glenda Jackson yes, she was at the centre of that production, it was an ensemble, anti-Vietnam, sort of 'tell us lies about Vietnam'...

CB: What was it like, well it was very difficult to read because it did not read as a script, it had all Peter Brook's notes in it...?

FG: A series of sort of moments highlighted by lighting or whatever picking out elements, a really sort of fragmented production...

CB: What was it like to watch?

FG: Well, I seem to remember it having this enormous drive and behind the fragments there was a drive, which is perhaps Brook in particular.

CB: There is a scene at the end where one of the actors is setting free butterflies, did you see that?

FG: Yes.

CB: He goes to set one on fire and there was a debate, because some of the critics did not know what they were really trying to get from that, because it was obviously not a real butterfly, but they were wondering whether they wanted one of the audience to shout out 'don't!' and that would be really getting to what they really wanted the audience to do, to get a reaction out of them...

FG: Yes, it is very Brecht that... you have got to react to this... I do remember that sequence at the end where you were shocked, or you were trying to be shocked into seeing what we are really getting at here, something politically important, it was political wasn't it that was the point. So it probably was not until the mid 1960's that... does Roots class as political theatre?

CB: It could do I suppose, it has about the Trafalgar Square demonstrations...

FG: Yes.

CB: So did any playwright stand out for you in particular, if there was one in the period?

FG: Well, I suppose because I did some playing and performing, I suppose it must be Arthur Miller... Brecht, it had to be Brecht, because at college we did Caucasian Chalk Circle as I have mentioned and it was marvellous to attempt an ensemble production, we had eighty people involved, backstage as well as front stage... it was marvellous trying to put this thing together, this theatre... I always thought about Caucasian Chalk Circle [that] Brecht was his own worst enemy because he always talked about theatre you have to react to, think about-

CB: Yes you cannot just sit there.

FG: Yes, but Caucasian Chalk Circle completely immersed you in the story, you forgot the importance of the story however... so Miller, Brecht, and possibly Wesker and Pinter, Pinter I have not mentioned at all. I did not come across much Pinter except again at the college I was working at where we did a small play of his called A Night Out which was very early Pinter and then we did one or two of his sketches, one called Last to Go I think it was, which is at a news stand, at a coffee bar, I think it is, and two men are talking to each other, one is the coffee bar owner and one is just standing there talking

about which is the paper that is the last to go. The whole thing is typical Pinter, does not go anywhere at all... and *The Dumb Waiter*, we did some parts of *The Dumb Waiter*... Pinter definitely that is the 1960's... Wesker with *Roots* which again we did and Brecht and Miller were I suppose the ones that really made it for me. But along the way one forgets that one was still going to see Gielgud, The Royal Shakespeare Company, and occasionally till they departed [for] the National, The Old Vic... so I tried to keep it in harness in that sense as a theatre-goer, and a lot of the sort of classic plays did not come into being until quite late in my theatre experience really - Chekov, [the] eighteenth century, well not really... yes *The Country Wife*, things like that.

CB: *The Country Wife*.

FG: Yes, good [production], but you did not see quite so much of at that time... what else can I tell you?

CB: Did you ever see anything else of Joan Littlewood? She is quite an infamous character.

FG: Only *Oh What a Lovely War* unfortunately, no I tended to veer towards I suppose West End and the big theatre companies... I suppose it is one of the things I am a bit sad about now, I missed out on some of that. But it does [all] connect in a way and it does go back to... can I refer to my notes... I am trying to remember when I saw another Brook production and it was Gielgud's *King Lear* in about 1955, 1956, before all this breakthrough occurred...the production of *King Lear* had extraordinary costumes and scenery [by Isamu] Noguchi a theatre designer, he became quite important... totally abstract scenery and costumes. I remember Gielgud's *Lear* appearing in a costume that was full of holes, it was not holes it was ragged. It was a sort of curious experience. All the scenery was cubes and triangles, and totally abstract, almost a surreal experience - I beg your pardon it was not Brook, it was George Devine who went on to the Royal Court. It was Gielgud and Devine's production...

CB: Did you see a massive change in theatre after the censorship was lifted?

FG: After censorship?

CB: With plays like *Hair* being put on.

FG: No frankly. It has to do with the fact that I was stuck in the provinces, bringing up a small family. It tends to isolate you a bit, you try and keep in touch as much as you [can], but I missed out on...

CB: The more shocking performances?

FG: Yes, really shocking stuff.

CB: It seems like they were going all out to shock.

FG: Some of the stuff that the Royal Court did was in a different way shocking... no, I missed that I suppose. So I suppose my theatre experience as a young man was from about fourteen to thirty, it has continued since then but that is where the main changes took place for me. I have always leaned toward the more avant-garde since that period but never sufficiently got in contact with it I think. I mean US was one of the last moments just outside that period, just before the period closed which I saw in London... great Brecht [style] that was, very fine production.

CB: Well we are nearly up so if there is anything else you want to...

FG: Not really but I have not done justice to all those actors and it is only retrospectively that you see these people come from nowhere you know [Ian] Holm for instance [who] I must have seen as an extra, a page, a second soldier before [I] eventually saw him in Richard III in Stratford in late 1950s, nearly 1960, so I saw him although I was not aware of [him earlier]... who else might I draw attention to... some of them are still with us, mostly on telly... Robert Hardy, he was in Little Dorrit as one of those financiers, I saw him a lot at the Old Vic... in fact early on would you believe it I saw him as Ariel in The Tempest, he must have been a lot slimmer then [laughs] than he is now.

But I have not mentioned for instance in mid 1950's not only the influence of Miller, but some revivals of O'Neill's plays two in particular Long Day's Journey into Night with Anthony Quayle, and young Alan Bates - who was Alan Bates? - when I saw him he had hardly emerged at that point, but it was a great production and the other one was Iceman Cometh an American ensemble [production], superb. So the Americans came in quite strongly, not the musicals but the big stuff... we had to wait for Virginia Woolf, things like that. So, too many memories... I saw a lot of the early career of Dorothy Tutin and a lot of the early career of Clare Bloom for instance, a lot at the Old Vic. Clare Bloom usually Juliet, Desdemona that sort of part. She worked with Gielgud in the 1950s, but he did not work at the Old Vic at all, there must have been some tension there between... Peter Brook though I did see some of his earliest experimental theatre; I mentioned A Winter's Tale in 1952 which was very early, Titus Andronicus in 1956, A View from the Bridge, Family Reunion by T.S. Eliot, surprisingly. Again Gielgud's The Tempest 1957 and then US, so I like to think I followed Peter Brook although I do not think I was really aware of it, his work was very influential. Perhaps I'd better end there.

CB: OK, thank you very much.