

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Tony Richards – interview transcript

Interviewer: Shandin Rickard

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Theatre-goer. Attercliffe Palace; Billy Liar; The Birthday Party; Crucible Theatre; The Entertainer; Empire Theatre, Sheffield; Harold Pinter; Inadmissible Evidence; Lori London and Edna Savage; Look Back In Anger; Lauri Lupino Lane; Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield; Me and My Girl; nudity; pantomime; Questors Theatre; repertory; Sheffield Playhouse; Stirrings in Sheffield on a Saturday Night; theatregoing; Twelfth Night; variety theatre.

SR: First of all, what was your relationship with theatre during that time period? Were you a theatre goer, did you work in theatre?

TR: Mainly a theatre goer. I've never worked professionally in the theatre, but I've done a bit of amateur work in theatre, but mainly my experience is being in the audience really.

SR: Ok.

TR: I'm worried if that's round enough. [laughs]

SR: What kind of amateur experience? Acting?

TR: Yes. Oh, I've done a bit of acting, I've done a bit of stage management.

SR: Oh, ok.

TR: About 1968 I did a stage management course at an amateur theatre in London called Questors - which is still there – but as amateur theatres go, and went, it was and I think still is very good really. We had a lot of people who were members who used to work for the BBC so they got kind of like a professional interest in entertainment or the media of one sort or another but used to belong to the theatre as, to Questors as, amateurs.

SR: Ok. So what did you do as a manager then?

TR: Stage manager?

SR: Yeah.

TR: An assistant stage manager. Well, the usual sort of routine stage management things; you'd do anything from a bit of walk on parts, to making sure the actors were there in the right place, to scene shifting, to getting cues right, and in rehearsal as either the ASM or stage manager you'd be on the book and would be responsible for plotting moves and making appropriate - well recording moves - yeah plotting, yeah I suppose the director plotted them - and recording moves, and liaising with the other technical departments; the sound, lighting, props, and what have you really, making sure that - largely responsible for making sure - the get in went alright for getting the sets into the theatre, and then organising getting out afterwards, getting the sets out, and that was it generally. I did a stage management course with them, they used to have an acting course for their members and the stage management course, and I did the stage management course with them. So that I suppose got me really to learn about, a lot about theatre, and I felt reasonably skilled in doing stage management either from the ASM to the DSM or whatever.

SR: So -

TR: But that, as I say, was toward the end of the period you're interested in; that will be 1967-68.

SR: So what first got you interested in the theatre then?

TR: Well it is where I was brought up, in Sheffield - I was born in 1944 - but where I was brought up in Sheffield, in Attercliffe, which was a very working class area; lots of old terraced houses, and nearly everyone who lived in Attercliffe worked in the steel works, but there was a variety theatre there, which closed in 1955. And although now, as the generations change, people are forgetting about the Attercliffe Palace, in its time and the years afterwards it was quite a focal point, a social point, and to people who lived in Attercliffe they were quite proud of it really; having your own theatre, so its reputation lives on. And I suppose in a way one thing - and I've been doing a bit of research into the history of it over the past few years, so some of the things I can remember about it I can remember from my own personal memory but some of it I've filled in bits with research I've done - but I think what is a shame there is actually very little recorded of it, there's quite a bit of anecdotal stuff but very little recorded. And I think - I don't know whether it could even be part of your project - but before everyone who worked there has died, it would be nice to try and somehow contact somebody who was there who could tell you, if you want it, a bit more about what it was like to work there backstage, and you know, put it on record both in the University and for the city. But I did read about three or four years ago that the owner, who I think was in his nineties, died. So he would have - well he's not there anymore, but somebody might be still - but anyway I've got memories of it from an audience point of view but, I think what is quite

interesting is that I must have been going on my own, as a child, when I was nine or ten years old.

SR: Really?

TR: Well, as I say it closed in 1955 so, I would be 10 years old. It closed in July '55, so I would go, as a child, on my own, and – I lived not very far away – and I think people felt a bit happier about their children going out – because I would go at night, when I'd go – they had Twice Nightly Variety – I don't know whether you know what that is, Twice Nightly Variety.

SR: I don't know what that is, but it sounds good.

TR: Well, I suppose the American equivalent would be vaudeville really, but the British version was Twice Nightly – was variety. And most variety theatres – I mean, there was the Empire, there was one in Sheffield at the time – had Twice Nightly Variety; so there were two performances each evening; about six o'clock and 8:30, so the show would be about two hours. So I would go to the first house as a child, and... I just got fascinated by the mystery of the theatre really. And of course the other thing that – would it be? I don't know how it would be viewed these days – but it wasn't a smart place by any means, it was very – even what I remember of it – it was very plain. But the other feature of the variety was more like - what in America you'd probably call - burlesque: which featured nudity. The other theatre that was famous for it in Britain was The Windmill, in London.

SR: So as a child, that was –

TR: So as a child I would go and there were no restrictions, there was no - I mean I don't know, a child of ten probably wouldn't be allowed to see nudity in a film these days, it would probably get a 12 or a 15 certificate – so I would go, and I don't think anybody would think about anything of it really. I mean not that I particularly went for the nudity, I just - it didn't mean very much - well I knew that it was a bit daring – but of course that was only part of the bill; and the rest of it was, you know, comedians and singers and acrobats, that's what variety was. I even remember one act was a woman who used to do paper tearing and made things out of all sorts – I can't remember what things she made but – she was quite famous I think as a variety artist at the time. So you get all these speciality acts as well on the bill, so as I say if you want to compare some with American it would be like – I don't know whether you've ever seen Gypsy, the musical Gypsy?

SR: No, I haven't.

TR: Which is the story of Gypsy Rose Lee, who was an American...

SR: I've heard that.

TR: She called herself an ecdysiast, but she was a stripper – Stephen Sondheim wrote the music for it, so that's one of the early Sondheim's - so that kind of recorded burlesque in America... but it was something like that that would be the staple diet of the Attercliffe Palace.

SR: So were there lots of children going to this?

TR: I don't think so.

SR: Oh, ok.

TR: I think it was when it was in its dying days, because it would have been the last year of its existence, so I don't think it got many audiences at all. But on the other hand I also remember once going to a pantomime, they used to have – well presumably you know what pantomime is?

SR: Oh, right! There was a lot of that in Sheffield wasn't there?

TR: Oh yes, every theatre: the Lyceum and the Empire, would have pantomimes every year. But the thing about the ones at the Palace, they were twice nightly pantomimes, and sometimes three times a day; they would have a matinee. I remember once going to see a pantomime there, but I also remember they had something that was called the fol-de-rols – now again I think a very British – the fol-de-rols were traditionally performed at seaside resorts, on the beach, and they had a sort of standard costume which was like a white silky – the men and women wore silky tops and like silky pantaloons with pompoms on – and they were a type of entertainment that was known as the fol-de-rols and they appeared at seaside resorts, usually performing on the beach, on a temporary stage on the beach, or sometimes perhaps on the pier. But when the summer season ended sometimes they would go on tours to the provinces, at least this is what I remember of the one at the Palace. I remember they put on a special matinee for children, and I remember going to see that. So sometimes they would cater for children's shows as well, in between the staple diet of this variety. And not all the shows were nude shows, sometimes they would just have a variety bill without, and make a point of it, you know, 'We've got a good, traditional old fashioned variety bill.' So they would have... and I also remember as well, they had a repertory company visit, and they did a three week residence of plays and a different play each week. And I remember going to see one of the plays, but I also remember the third week was adults only; so they had a sort of risqué play... and that's something I've been doing a bit of research in, and though I can't remember very much about the productions at the time, I do remember them coming. Since then I found out they were a company called the Frank Fortescue Players, which I think were quite well known in the north of England - and as I say they had this three week residency there... and again I think repertory is something that's – I mean we could perhaps go into it a bit, although it's post-1968 – but repertory is a largely British institution I think, where a company of players would perform either with

a company that would tour but usually they would be based at a theatre and the same company would perform a different play each week – it's what eventually went on to become the Playhouse Theatre in Sheffield, which we could perhaps talk about a bit later if you want – and then it became The Crucible – but the thing is it was –oh I think the American equivalent was probably stock companies, I don't know whether you've heard of them? They call them stock companies.

SR: Oh yeah, the repertory.

TR: So yes, so that was one of the things that the Playhouse – sorry, Attercliffe Palace would also do.

SR: So was that very common then? Did you get the repertory groups coming in –

TR: No, it was very rare. I think – I mean part of the research I've been doing – they only actually visited the Palace some four or five years earlier – in fact, I have been doing a bit of research from the war years – but I'm only aware of them visiting the Palace once, so I don't think they toured an awful lot. And certainly the repertory company that used to be at the Playhouse was a permanent Playhouse company; they didn't tour. So I think it was a bit of an exception for a touring repertory company to come in...but I actually know this company was based in – well, I say I know – yes, they were based in Manchester I think, at a theatre – I think it was called the Hulme Hippodrome – and I only know that because I remember once reading a biography of Arthur Lowe, who was a well known British television actor; he used to be in something on television called Dad's Army, and I don't know whether you've heard of that?

SR: I've heard of it, yeah.

TR: He was a well known television and stage actor as well, but he did a lot of television – he was in Coronation Street in the sixties...And I remember reading his biography, and he started his career with this Frank Fortescue company, so it got a mention in...so that's how I know a bit more about that company, and about him as well.

SR: So, you said the variety is kind of what sparked your interest as a child –

TR: That sparked my interest in the theatre, and the curiosity, and just fascination with people performing live on a stage really.

SR: So is that what you originally wanted to do then, the performance part? Or were you just interested in getting involved?

TR: No, I think if, I suppose [pauses]...perhaps I did sort of have a desire once-upon-a-time to become an actor, and when I became a teenager I did a bit of amateur acting.

But I think I came to the conclusion really that I wasn't terribly good at it, really, I was always very self conscious, and I kind of decided I really belonged on the other side of the footlights really. And although, you know, I'll always have a curiosity about the theatre, and I'll always welcome an opportunity to go backstage to theatre, or to talk to people from the theatre – in fact, I belong to – maybe this is how you got in contact with me – because I belong to this group at the Lyceum Theatre, a supporters group really – so I do firmly believe I belong in the audience really, not on the stage. But that doesn't mean I don't have quite a curiosity... but on the other hand I also quite like, when I'm in the theatre I like to concentrate on what's happening on stage, but I'm still always a bit curious about what's going on behind the scenes. No, but I think really I belong in the audience rather than on the stage.

SR: So what did you do when that closed down then? If that closed down in '55, then you had to find a different place.

TR: Well that closed down in 1955, but as I got a bit older – and I suppose as I became – I always remember there was a rule in my family that you weren't allowed to go to the city centre on your own until you were twelve. And I think, when I was perhaps about thirteen or fourteen I would go to the Empire occasionally, which was a variety theatre, and to the Lyceum, which... probably in the early years it would be to the pantomimes; I think they were my first visits to the city centre theatres, were to go to see the pantomimes. But I also remember occasionally going to the Lyceum to see... they had a repertory theatre, in the summer, when audiences weren't terribly good, and when they couldn't attract perhaps touring shows – because I'm talking now about late 1950s into the 1960s – well 1958 in fact, I did just have a look at the – as I sometimes do – well when I woke up in the middle of the night, as I tend to do, as one gets older – and I thought, 'Oh, I'll just have a check' – because I've got my little programs – what the dates were, and in fact we are talking about 1958-59 – the Lyceum had a repertory theatre, for a few years, every summer, and they did twice nightly repertory, and changed the production every week, so the company would be playing a play one week while during the day rehearsing for the play the next week. And generally it was the same actors, more or less, who would play week after week after week – I mean, quite a famous British institution, and I don't know whether it happened anywhere else in Europe or whether it happened to the same extent – but I think it, as theatres tended to go, some theatres tended to go from twice nightly variety, they took on these twice nightly repertory productions... although the Lyceum did not do very much variety – it was the Empire, the other city center theatre that tended to do the variety in Sheffield – the Lyceum tended to have the slightly more classier shows; touring shows, with the plays and musicals, and it perhaps considered itself rather a cut above the Empire; it was a little bit posher; I always seem to remember the Lyceum used to have presentations, which seemed to make it a bit more classier really. So that would be the pantomimes at the Empire, and the occasional variety show at the Empire. I don't know whether – I mean the variety show at the Empire – I think the only person – I remember seeing a comedian called Hilda Baker, who people of a certain age will remember very well – she was a Lancashire comedian, and one of the few women stars to perform – as a relic, I suppose... I remember seeing her in variety... And I remember once seeing a touring production of a musical called *Me and My Girl*, which keeps cropping up even today, but it was – well the original star of it was somebody called Lupino Lane, and his sister Ida Lupino – who I think went to America, and made a few films in America – and it first appeared perhaps in the thirties, late thirties early forties – but I saw this touring production – and it would have been about the late 1950s – and it still had – what were

the names I just said? – Ida Lupino – I can't remember, I said his name and now I've forgotten it – Oh! I think it was Lauri Lupino Lane – yes I'm getting my names confused. Lauri Lupino Lane, I think – I don't know whether he was the one who was in the original or the son of the original, but he was in it, Lauri Lupino Lane was in it – the one that came to the Empire – and a comedian called George Trussie. But that was one of the first shows I remember – one of the only shows I remember – seeing at the Empire, apart from the pantomime. The only pantomime I remember seeing there was Babes in the Wood, with a couple of teenage singers who were very popular at the time, called – I think she was called Joan Savage – and again I will remember his name eventually... no I can't, I've got the programs at home, the names might come to me in a minute – but Babes in the Wood: they were two teenage, very popular teenage singers - Lori London, I think, was the boy, and I think the girl was Edna Savage.

SR: So with this summer repertory, did it seem like –

TR: The Lyceum?

SR: Yeah.

TR: Sorry yeah, that was the Lyceum and they had the summer repertory company.

SR: Right. Did you notice a lot of people going, week after week? Was there much interest?

TR: I don't think so, I don't think they got very big audiences. I always remember in those days the Lyceum – I would probably sit in the balcony, because they were the cheapest seats – and often I would get on the front row. And the Lyceum in those days seemed to sort of echo when it wasn't very full, and I can always remember sitting up there and kind of like getting this echo from the theatre – and it not been very warm either – and as I say it was twice nightly, so twice nightly shows were always cheaper than the once nightly. I can't remember any big names being in them, but I would go – I didn't go an awful lot, but I did go from time to time... They were called the Windham Players.

SR: The Windham Players. So did you get to know them very well then, like seeing the actors in different roles?

TR: Well I got to know some of the actors – yes, as a member of the audience, I mean I never met any of them personally – and that was quite nice, I used to quite like that, and that's why, probably, I then eventually moved on to the Playhouse; because I actually quite liked seeing the same actors playing different roles, it's a pity that doesn't happen any longer really; even the Crucible today has its own productions, they tend to have a new company for each production. But I used to quite seeing the same actors performing different roles – not necessarily week after week because I didn't go ever week – but I probably saw three or four, perhaps five productions a year. But that would only be about '58-'59, and then I think for whatever reason they – well I can't remember actually when the Lyceum ceased to be a full time theatre – but I think it sort

of struggled on with touring productions and I remember going to see one or two touring productions there – but they would be in the early sixties, and I don't know whether you want me to talk about any those or not...

SR: Early sixties, yeah definitely.

TR: Let's see if I can do it a bit chronologically, I probably can't. I do remember seeing – I'll tell you about some of the productions I saw – I think the most memorable was a touring production of a play called Billy Liar, which was one of the early roles of Albert Finney in the West End, and then Tom Courtney, took over the role – but when it came to Sheffield it came with – the actor playing the role was an actor called Trevor Banister, who was then unknown, but he later went on to do quite a famous British sitcom on television called Are You Being Served?, which I think did get some showings in America which actors – quite a few people who became staples of British comedy after that: John Inman and Molly Sugden – but anyway, so Trevor Banister, at that time, was unknown, but I do remember his performance, and he was excellent. It's not the sort of role he became famous for doing, he became famous for doing these kind of stock comedy characters – but I remember he was in Billy Liar, and I was really impressed with the production. The other person who was in it who was unknown at the time, was Lynn Redgrave - who was one of the family of the famous Redgraves, the Michael Redgrave family: daughter of Michael Regrave, sister of Vanessa Redgrave, who I think went on to marry – she was in a film called Georgie Girl – but she was unknown at the time, but I remember being very impressed with her performance as well. And I just remember being impressed with this production of Billy Liar and I think – the other thing which I suppose it kind of might a bit relate to them is – I'd not done any stage management in those days, but I'd done a bit of amateur acting – but I always remember at the end Billy, he runs away to London with – he has three girlfriends in the show – and he runs away to the one that, I suppose he really loved – but he agrees to run away to London, and he goes off to the station to meet her, and he gets cold feet, and the play ends with – he's left to go to meet her at the station – and there's a silence and an empty stage, and I think there's the sound of a train going out, and he very slowly wanders back, and he just copped out of - he hasn't got the courage to do it. And [chuckles] one of the things that... the company he worked for – he stole a load of calendars, their business calendars – to take to London, and then he comes back, with his calendars, and starts pushing and shoving them into the sideboard – and all very low key and very sad really – and that was the end of the play. But when the curtain came down, it just came down very slowly – it was a bit like going to a concert with very slow music, with a very low key ending – and the curtain just came down very slowly – and I was so impressed by that because it just reflected the feeling of the play and the audience and – as I think about it now I can feel that sadness really – and it just stuck in my mind, as a very theatrical thing to do, but I've never seen it before, to me, the curtain was just something that came down, but here it cam down in a way that fitted the mood of the play... so that was one of the most memorable productions, for all different reasons really.

SR: How was that in the audience then? Did anyone else seem to –

TR: I presume so. I mean, I wouldn't notice any more than that, but I presume it would be effective; I can't see how it wouldn't be. I mean these days I would actually take a

note of whether the audience started applauding too early, because that's the kind of thing I'll have a bit about – sometimes concert audiences, particularly for sad pieces of music – and even sometimes theatre goers – they won't allow that silence at the end, they all start applauding too early, which I think often is a shame. [Long pause] Yes, I'm just going down a slight – because I don't know whether you've seen a – musical called A Chorus Line – that ends very low key, and sometimes the audience don't quite get it; because it's a musical they all start applauding – but that doesn't quite go in your period because that was about 1974 that I saw that in London – but it was a Broadway musical... So yeah, these things, to me, I think are quite important...

SR: Oh yeah, definitely.

TR: it works...But no I can't remember whether the audience – I think they must have felt it, because I certainly did so, I think I would have noticed if perhaps other people hadn't.

SR: Well, were you ever part of an audience where you could feel what the people around you were thinking? Were there any productions that really seemed to affect you and the people around you?

TR: Well, again, probably only more recent ones – again going out – I do remember a production that the Crucible – although I've talked to some people in recent years who didn't like it – and it was a production of Twelfth Night. At one point – I can't remember an awful lot about – well I've seen the play several times – but I know at one point – I can't remember which characters – the two lovers – and I'm pretty sure it was Twelfth Night – were meant to be on a moonlit beach, and the Crucible gradually flooded the edge of the stage as a tide came in, and all you could hear was this very gently rippling water – and of course the actors delivering their lines – and I noticed the silence in the theatre, which I thought was quite remarkable because you could hear this water gradually lapping up onto the stage – I don't quite know the mechanics of it – but I felt that worked quite well with the mood of the audience. But I suppose there must be lots of other examples that don't particularly come to mind, but I do find it's – to me that's part of the attraction of the theatre which the cinema doesn't have – music has it – which is that interaction really, between the audience and the performers, and the other members of the audience, because it's more of a shared experience I think.

SR: Yeah it is.

TR: So I think that's one reason I get much more pleasure out of the theatre. And probably theatre more than music, because of the performer's – I know the voice is an instrument, but actors as actors the performance is still very much about the individual, using nothing else other than all the, you know, lighting and scenery and what have you – but basically using the voice of their bodies and interacting in it – and it's live, and whilst it's happening in front of you it is quite important really. And again the other thing – which I've done and I might tell you a bit more about if you want to go on about it – is, I'm quite fascinated when things go wrong as well – and that to me is the important part of live theatre.

SR: Oh definitely, yeah!

TR: This goes back to the Palace at Attercliffe, I always remember a comedian doing his routine: standing in front of the microphone telling his jokes, and I suddenly became aware that there was something going wrong, and all of a sudden he just collapsed and fell over with his microphone, and I don't know whether he'd fainted or whether he'd – I think the explanation – I don't remember being given an explanation – I think someone explained afterwards that he'd got flu, and just collapsed with exhaustion – but, he just keeled over sideways.

SR: What did the audience do?

TR: Again I can't really remember, I think I was so [shocked] I suppose is the word, that this would happen. And I also saw it once happen at the Lyceum, where an actor collapsed, and they just – well eventually the curtain came down – but it was a bit chaotic before it did, because I also heard later that there was nobody actually backstage at the time who knew how to bring the curtain down; all the stage hands were across the road in the pub... and eventually the curtain came down – they resumed the performance afterwards with the Assistant Stage Manager reading the part, because they had no understudy – that was a touring company... So that kind of sticks in my mind as well: this actor collapsing. And I also remember the – it was a bit panicky, nobody was sure what to do I don't think, because as I say, really the curtains should have come down – but, well the reason was I believe nobody knew how to bring it down – and I remember one of the actors called out 'Doctor, Doctor!', because one of the performers was – one of the characters was a doctor – so the character playing the doctor came on, and he sort of looked at this person who had collapsed, and had no idea what to do [chuckle], but it was just this... I mean it's lovely when things – well, a good production and everything's really spot on – but not many things go wrong...

SR: That's exciting.

TR: And I always remember – well it will probably just come into the period – I remember there was a very long production called – an Osborne play – called Inadmissible Evidence, at the Playhouse; repertory. And the lead role is a very demanding and long one, and the actor there – and I think there was actually some publicity about it in the paper first, I suppose to kind of warn people, and they decided to – but I think it was just too much for the actor, the role was just too much.

SR: Really?

TR: And I remember him having to take a few prompts, but I went kind of expecting that because I'd read in the paper that it might happen. It's not very often that you see an actor forget the lines, although it happened the other week at the Lyceum but, that's too recent to go into... So yes I might remember another few examples of when things went wrong – but they always remind me – because the other thing academically I've

done, a bit of sociology – and I don't know whether – and I can't remember which theory it is, but there is a theory in sociology that says that to really understand society you need to look at when things go wrong. And I don't know – again I can't remember whose it was but – there was an experiment done where – a (inaudible) of sociology – where a family, people who live in families, mainly young students, were asked to go home and behave as they were a guest in the house: and sort of say, 'is it alright if I get a drink from the fridge?' And, it was meant to test how a family responds to this familiar member of the family behaving in a very unfamiliar way – and I can't really remember what it showed, but it was a theory that if, you know, if you really want to understand society, disturb things a little bit. And in a way I kind of see it – sometimes when things go wrong in the theatre it kind of helps you understand how the mechanics work, or how they don't work, and things have to suddenly change to make it work. And I suppose it just overlaps a little bit, I'll just mention that there's an American sociologist called Erving Goffman, who – I think it's called ethnology – who studies people in their natural surroundings, and he says, 'this is how you understand society' – but he wrote a book called – again I can't remember the title, Erving Goffman, it will come back to me – *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is the title – and he compares particularly working life a bit like a theatre, bit like a restaurant: where there's a backstage performance that people put on, but when they come out into the restaurant where the customers are they put on a different performance. So that kind of, is an interest to know that like in my life, between –

SR: Just, it shows how important theatre can be really, doesn't it?

TR: Well yes, it relates theatre to life, and relates sociology to theatre I suppose, yeah.

SR: With this John Osborne role then, was this one of his – because I haven't actually heard of this play – was that one of the 'Angry Young Man' roles?

TR: Well yes – no, he wrote – I don't know as I can remember an awful lot about the play – but of course he wrote *Look Back in Anger*, and that was his first play. And of course the other John Osborne play, which has great relevance, was one called *The Entertainer*.

SR: Right.

TR: Which – have you ever seen or do you know anything about it?

SR: I haven't seen *The Entertainer*, no.

TR: *The Entertainer* is about a failing variety artist, who is performing in the sort of show that I used – that I was telling you about – that I used to go to see at the Palace. And in it, John Osborne – in the play *The Entertainer* – it's about his own, it's about the actor's – I suppose own disintegration, his relationships with his family and – he has a mistress and -his infidelity to his wife; and it kind of...you know, the sort of breakdown as variety

became to struggle and it tried different things. And a lot of the play *The Entertainer* is – Archie Rice is the lead character – is performing his variety act – it was made into a film with Albert Finney, Albert Finney was in the film... So that has always been quite an interesting play for me – I think I've only seen it twice.

SR: Did you see –

TR: No it wasn't Albert Finney in the film, it was Laurence Olivier in the film.

SR: Oh, ok. Did you see that as part of like the first breaking out of the play? Did you see that in the early days?

TR: No, *The Entertainer* I think I first saw – I would have first seen that perhaps now – I think it was first performed in the seventies - I think it was the National Theatre - performed it in the seventies, the 1970s. And Laurence Olivier was in the stage production as well... No I – the first production I saw – and I think it was the only production – I've seen the film – it was the only stage production I saw was at a theatre in somewhere called Westcliff-on-Sea, in Essex, and that would be about 1974-75 – but it has always fascinated me because it is a play about the dying days of variety – I mean it's set in the early 1960s I would think. I mean if you ever get the chance to see it, if there is any interest in theatre, it certainly would be well worth seeing. So yes, so that was John Osborne – but I can't remember - *Inadmissible Evidence* I think came - it must have been in the sixties when I saw that, so *Inadmissible Evidence* must have been after *Look Back in Anger* and before *The Entertainer*.

SR: Did that one get very big then?

TR: I don't think so, I think it was – I don't know whether it was produced by the National Theatre – and I think it was quite controversial, probably because it was not considered one of his best plays, and it certainly doesn't seem to have – well *Look Back in Anger* was a play that changed the theatre really; it was the first of the 'kitchen sink' dramas. I have a feeling I did see it in London, and I've a feeling I saw Jane Asher in it, and that would be the late sixties, early seventies – Jane Asher I think was in it when I saw it, who – well, she doesn't like being famous for it, but I suppose she first came to fame as being a girlfriend of Paul McCartney's – but she's become an actress in her own right, and she's a fairly well respected actress now, not a big name, but – to most British people of a certain age – would be well known; Jane Asher.

SR: So where did you see it in London then?

TR: I think I might have seen it at the Royal Court Theatre, but it wasn't the original production I saw, because that would be 1956-57.

SR: How did that go down with the audience? Was that – because it did, it supposedly changed the theatre, and it was a massive –

TR: Yes, yes. I mean I can't really remember an awful lot about the production, I can't remember an awful lot about how it went down with the audience... I mean it was very controversial. I suppose – I might just talk about another couple of things while we're sort of on that... style of theatre really [long pause].

SR: Do you –

TR: 'Angry Young Men', that was the phrase that tended to be used about those writers; John Osborne was the first of the 'Angry Young Men'.

SR: Right. Kind of stirred the pot.

TR: Yes, and certainly, you know, brought about a change in theatre. I mean up to then – perhaps not entirely true but – most of theatre up to then was very much middle-class, and you know the Terence Rattigan and the Noel Coward, and the typical play had French windows and someone would come in through the French windows and say, 'Anyone for tennis?' in a very posh voice, and that was kind of – which I don't necessarily dislike, I mean I still love to see a good production of a Noel Coward play or Terence Rattigan play... but it did become a bit stale I think – so along came John Osborne and other writers like Arnold Wesker, and perhaps Keith Waterhouse – there was something that came along called the Theatre of the Absurd, which I vaguely remember – and again, I might come back to that if I can think a bit more clearly about what I can remember about it. But right, so there was this new wave of dramatists who really shook up theatre, and were very controversial because they presented more – although *Look Back in Anger* was not working class really... I mean the characters in *Look Back in Anger* were quite – but it presented a different side of the middle class - I wouldn't describe them as being working class.

SR: It brought a new attitude out.

TR: Yes, and a new style of theatre. But the other one was Harold Pinter, and that's what I was going on – and again, not particularly – ah well yes, his characters were more working class – the first Harold Pinter play I saw was at the Playhouse, and it was *The Birthday Party*. And although I didn't understand it really, at all, I appreciated the performances. I particularly remember – I can't remember the actress who played the role, I don't know whether I've got the program – but I particularly remember the woman who played Meg – oh I remember Christopher Wilkinson played Stanley, the boarder – I don't know whether you know – have you seen *The Birthday Party*? – But it's basically the story of a middle age couple who run a boarding house, and Stanley is staying there as a sort of semi-permanent resident, and two men turn up and start terrorizing Stanley, and Meg is the rather simple woman who runs the boarding house and although – very simple character I suppose – but I do remember the performance was so good of her, and as I say – but I do remember the reason I remember Christopher

Wilkinson, is I think he's still around, not as an actor, but he's still around in Sheffield... because now and again I hear his name mentioned. So that's quite nice, there were one or two people who I do remember from the Playhouse whose names still crop up every now and again... But I just remember it being such a good production, even though I didn't understand the play. And that's the thing about Pinter. It doesn't bother me now, when I see Pinter now I think: if you don't understand it, don't worry about it. And don't try to understand too much, because I think if you don't try to understand too much, a lot of it then becomes revealed. And, I think, as Pinter once said, 'When you go to see a drama – sorry, 'When you walk into a room with people, they don't start explaining things about their past history, you just pick up what's happening', and I think he once said, 'Well, that's what happens in my plays; people don't start explaining things, because people in real life don't do that, you've got to work it out for yourself.' As I see it, he's saying 'I don't have to explain that to you, you work it out for yourself', although he will give some clues about the past. So now it doesn't annoy me, and I did see a production of *The Birthday Party* about three or four years ago, at the Crucible, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, and over the years have got to, perhaps, to understand and put my own interpretation of it – so that was really good. But yeah, so that was one of the first plays I say of the new wave, at the Playhouse, and even though I didn't understand it I enjoyed the performances; I enjoyed the acting, and you know, I still found it frightening that you know, that these two men terrorizing Stanley and you know, we didn't know why.

SR: So you definitely noticed a change then, after that?

TR: Oh yeah, I mean that – I think that was one of the first plays, I can't remember which order they were, but I think that was one of the first plays of the new wave. But I also remember at the Playhouse – and we are talking about now the 1960s: '62, '63, up to '66 – perhaps just a couple I'll mention: a performance of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the Eugene O'Neill play, where again I was so impressed by the performance of the mother, who was an injecting – she was a drug addict, injecting drug addict – and I can still remember – I think the actress' name was Rosemary Towler – and I was so impressed by her performance – an actress, I don't know what she went on to do, but I remember her name because the performance was so good. And often, there were plays that I didn't really understand, but I remember the performances. And I'll go on to another one in a minute, but we'll stick with the Playhouse... And I also remember seeing a production there of *Under Milk Wood*, which, I was very impressed with that – and in fact I remember Christopher Wilkinson was in that, and also an actor called Peter Penry-Jones, who later married someone called Angela Thorne, and their son I think is a quite well know actor called Rupert Penry-Jones, so whenever I see Angela Thorne – occasionally on television, although she doesn't do very much these days – or the son, I link that with that production of *Under Milk Wood*. And of course, it was originally written as a radio play, so I was quite fascinated – although I didn't know it was a radio play – I was still quite fascinated to see it as a stage play, and that kind of had some significance for me. And the other production I really saw – and in 1966 it was – something called *The Stirrings* in Sheffield on Saturday Night, and that was kind of like a new kind of theatre; something called 'drama documentary' or 'musical documentary', which I think started off – well, one of the theatres that did it before Sheffield was a theatre in Stoke – but it was a so-called 'drama documentary', and it was based – I think it was set in the 1850s – on, I suppose, the rise of trade unionism in Sheffield in the cutlery industry, where a lot of cutlery makers either worked for themselves, or worked for small companies, or bosses who were quite severe. And it was about the – I think it

was as much about the – rise of trade unionism and the battle between workers and employers, which got very violent, and didn't necessarily always present the trade unions in a good light – but it was based on what happened in Sheffield, so it was documentary. But it also used comedy, and there were some, to me, a bit like sketches, which were related very much to variety. But it also had songs, some songs that were written for the production, but also included some songs that came from the old days of music hall; of the period. And I always remember the actress called Dorothy Vernon, and she sang a song, a music hall song: 'She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage', and that was kind of part of the whole production and I was – that was again, a new type of theatre to me but –

SR: That sounds quite political.

TR: It appealed – it was quite political – but it appealed – and as I say it was based – in fact, I think it was... the University played quite a big part in advising of the historical accuracy of it – but it combined like all the things that I'd known from variety theatre, and it had music, and had references to variety theatre, and had comedy sketches, but also had a very serious message to it as well: of really how grinders – that's right, it was mainly about – there was a song called 'To Be a Sheffield Grinder', it was written by one of the company called Roderick Horn, and that's another name I remember from the period. So, a bit difficult to describe, but again, for a lot of people, theatre goes in Sheffield, that was a momentous point really, because it was very – it was a new thing – and it was a very successful production. I think it wasn't a great success straight away, but brought the audiences, and then I think they brought it back two or three times, for two or three years, and I think it was also performed at the – well, it was performed at the Crucible in the seventies as well. And I know, there's a presenter on radio Sheffield called Rony Robinson, and now and again he hints that he would like it to be done again, so...

SR: So it was really popular then, especially in the area –

TR: Oh, it was very popular as a show, and I think because it was very local; it was about local issues and things that are very important to Sheffield, certainly the rise of the cutlery industry, and you know, the rise of the trade unionism, and the conflict between trade unions and the methods that were employed, which were quite violent. There was a public inquiry at the time, and that was also included in the show – well I call it a show but – in the production... so yeah that was very good.

SR: Did that spark any kind of similar play-making?

TR: I mean I think the Playhouse did go on to do one or two more historical documentaries; I think they did one on the Plague. But then I'd left Sheffield, I wasn't living in Sheffield, I left Sheffield in 1967, so I didn't see them – and I think it took up in quite a few places around the country and - not something you see very much now, but it became quite fashionable at the time.

SR: What about the reviews, and critics and stuff, can you remember much about –

TR: I can't. I didn't read the review, I think it got quite a good review, but I think it – I also remember reading – and I think it was part of the British Library Project, and it's on the internet and available through the British Library on the internet – an interview with Colin George, who was the artistic director of the Playhouse at the time... I think, if I remember right, he said he felt it was a success right from the beginning, so perhaps my memory is a bit – but perhaps I went to a preview, I don't know, I don't know whether they did previews – but I remember him saying the first night was very successful; perhaps I went to a preview before that, because my memories a bit – it wasn't all that big an audience – but anyway, whatever. Anyway, it certainly was a big success – soon big, if it wasn't a big success immediately, it soon became a big success, because as I say, they brought it back the following year, and I don't know how many times after that. The other – kind of quickly if you want to mention it, I don't know how long you want to go on, I could go on forever – is I do remember once going to Rotherham to see the Civic theatre in Rotherham, which is still there, and they used to have a visiting touring company, touring 'rep', and I remember seeing a production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and that was a very memorable production, particularly the actress who played – I can't remember, it's George isn't it? And what's his wife called? – The wife anyway, it's about an old couple. But I always remember – I think she was called Irene Inescott – her performance was quite magnificent. I remember being very impressed – as a, perhaps I was a teenager, or in my early twenties – by a good strong performance.

SR: Did you travel much then? To other –

TR: No, Rotherham was the furthest I would go, I'd occasionally go to Rotherham to see a production there. But no, my theatre going in those days would be the Playhouse or the – just to put on record, and I'd forgotten about it, but just sort of as I was looking through the programs: occasionally there was a very big cinema in Sheffield called the Gaumont, which was in Barker's Pool, which was quite a grand cinema, built in the 1920s, but demolished – I don't know when, perhaps demolished in the late sixties, early seventies – it's where now – I don't know whether you know, there's a nightclub called Kingdom – do you know John Lewis' in Sheffield? The department store. You know the Town Hall... anyway, it's in the city centre, most people will know – in Barker's Pool, the Kingdom nightclub – that was a cinema, but they occasionally would have variety shows in the 1960s: twice nightly variety. So it still kept reappearing, twice nightly variety, in early 1960s. And I remember seeing a comedian there called Bruce Forsyth, who's still around; he presents something on television called *Strictly Come Dancing*, or something, and another comedian called Charlie Drake – but they had occasionally had variety bills, I think probably only twice as I remember, perhaps two, three times, separated by perhaps six months to a year. So that suggests they weren't terribly successful, but they did try out twice nightly variety, as well as having occasionally one night concerts with people like Shirley Bessey. But that was a huge cinema-come-theatre, I mean in its early days it probably did cine-variety – but that's probably just worth putting on record, that they did the occasional variety performance.

SR: I'm very impressed that you kept all those programs.

TR: Well I didn't – I used to have a lot but I threw quite a few out because I decided they were all getting too many, but I still kept one or two. Now and again, if I need to just find something, to make sure my memory is working, I've got them there to refer to.

SR: [Chuckle] Right. Just real quick –

TR: Right, you're getting to the end of the time, yeah.

SR: I'm kind of curious about what your feelings were about censorship at the time. Did you notice the effects of censorship?

TR: No. I did see Hair.

SR: Oh, ok.

TR: That would have been the 1960s, which was the first show to be presented after censorship. No, I wasn't aware of it at the time; it's only since that I've learned about the Lord Chamberlain and – I think that's where they – sometimes if somebody is rude, it's said to be 'blue', a 'blue' joke. And I think it comes from the fact that traditionally the Lord Chamberlain used to use blue pencil, and if he thought it was something that was unacceptable, he would mark – so all scripts had to be submitted. And I think – I can't remember whether I had any views about whether censorship was a bad thing, I mean I certainly think it was – it was a bad thing. Although, sometimes I think things do happen on television, not so much in theatres, that are unacceptable...

SR: Yeah. Did you notice a big change after that then?

TR: I don't think I did really, although Hair was a big change, I mean – well that was the thing, because the old nude shows, they weren't allowed to move – but with Hair, then nudity became permissible, and the actors could move. So, I was aware of it being quite an important change in theatre, and I suppose I was quite curious – novelty of seeing people with no clothes on and moving – but I remember not being particularly impressed, because I think where I was sitting it didn't make an awful lot of difference whether they had clothes or not because it was a big theatre. But, I mean that's the thing that struck me about Hair, is even though it was this bold, radical new musical, some of it was still quite like old variety; people still performed the songs and came to the front of the stage and talked to the audience, and it still had elements of variety in it, even though it was this radical new musical.

SR: So the variety shows when you were young then, you said there was quite a lot of nudity then, but that was stand still?

TR: Well, not a lot, there would just be one four or five minute scenes of just the women posing – it was always women, never men posing nude, always women – but they were not allowed to – I think they still had to – no, I think they could bare their breasts, but I think they always had to have some cover of the genitals. So they would have a pose that, you know, so the genitals weren't exposed. The curtains would open and there would be this – usually they tried to be tasteful – this brief pose, and then the curtains would close again, and that was the nude scene –

SR: And that was quite effective –

TR: And it only probably just three or four minutes of the whole variety show of the evening really, as I remember it.

SR: But then it got a little bit ridiculous? In Hair and afterwards, when people took advantage –

TR: Well it was silly. Well, I mean I've heard stories have – I've never seen it happen, but I've heard stories how sometimes, particularly young men, would go and release a mouse on stage, or throw a firework on the stage, which would –

SR: [Laughing] Trying to get around the censorship!

TR: [Laughing] Trying to get, yeah – so it would frighten the girls, and they would have to move, but I never saw that happen, so yeah. But yes, I certainly wouldn't want to have censorship back, and the things that tend to offend me tend not to be in theatre, they tend more to be to do with violence really. I think it's nonsense some of the things they couldn't say or – and of course some actors and plays managed to get round it.

SR: Of course, yeah, with their little tricks.

TR: Yeah. Anyway, let me give what's left over to any questions that you still might want to ask if there's time.

SR: Did you ever see anything by Samuel Beckett? Waiting For Godot?

TR: No, but I did once stage manage a production of the play Happy Days, at Questors, and again, I don't think I understood, and I still don't understand very much of Samuel Beckett. And I haven't quite got the same affection for him as I have for Pinter really. The same with Ionesco – because they were the Theatre of the Absurd, that's right, that's where the Theatre of the Absurd came in really, I think... And one or two other plays, but if there was a production I would go and see it, but I still find I'm still a bit puzzled by much of that really radical Theatre of the Absurd.

SR: What about Uranium 235, did you ever see that?

TR: Never heard of it, no.

SR: U.S.? By Peter Brooke?

TR: No. I did once see Peter Brooke's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I quite enjoyed, that was – they used trapezes, it was all white set, and it was a very popular and very well received production. But I haven't seen *U.S.*, no.

SR: Were you very into reviews? Ever pay much attention to what the critics were saying?

TR: The theatre reviews?

SR: Yeah.

TR: As opposed to review as a type of performance, because review is also a type of theatre.

SR: Right. I mean like –

TR: But reviews- I would also read the critics if I got them, but not as enthusiastically so as I do today. Although I find a lot of theatre criticism today not very good.

SR: Yeah. Well, I mean names like Harold Hobson, Kenneth Tynan, were you aware –

TR: Yeah well occasionally, I mean I know of him, oh yes I was aware that – I wouldn't often read his reviews because I tended not to read newspapers, so I wouldn't. But I knew of him, and I knew his name, I knew who he was.

SR: Ok. Well, I'm going to stop this.

TR: Alright.