

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Francis Reid – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Raymond Aherne**

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Lighting Designer. Actors; Aldeburgh Festival; Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT); Stanley Baxter; Jack Bradley; critics; directors; Carl Ebert; 1947 Edinburgh Festival; European Theatre; Flashpoint; freelancing; Glyndebourne; Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh; opera; pantomime; Pelleas et Melisande; repertory; Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts; Royal Court; Rules Club; stage management; stage management education; Strand Electric; technological advances; Tonbridge.

RA: What was your first experience of British theatre?

FR: Well it was Scottish theatre – as I grew up in Edinburgh – and the first experience was pantomime, and in fact my biography for subsequent pantomimes in the King's Theatre, Edinburgh where - my programme biography used to say, 'Francis saw his first - had his first - theatre experience at a panto in this theatre, and a life in the theatre became inevitable'. [laughs] And that stuck in the biography, long time.

RA: How did you first start getting involved in theatre?

FR: Involvement was at school - very lucky, I had a brilliant director; just how brilliant he was I didn't realise till I'd met, you know, a few professional ones. He was a former pupil of the school, and he subsequently became Head of Children's Radio in Scotland, and he could get performances out of the most unlikely... It was an all-boys' school so he decided to do St Joan, you know, not obvious choice, and then, and I saw this and thought, 'I want to be a part of this', you know, about 14 – 'want to be part of this'. But I didn't want to act, I wanted to be backstage, obviously. But they said, 'No, no, you're not in the woodwork class' - typical education, maybe not now, but then – 'but you can act', so I acted to get in. And you know that was the introduction I think, and I started going to the theatre, my parents took me to opera, they liked theatre, we went to odd shows, you know, when on summer holidays we always went to the end of the pier and saw that. My father always wanted to take me to Aida – he thought the world began and ended with Aida – but it was too big for wartime, so my first opera was Faust. But the real take-off point was the Edinburgh Festival. If it hadn't been for the '47 Edinburgh Festival you and I wouldn't be sitting here having this discussion, it's that simple, you know, but '47, I was 16, we'd had a war, everything was bleak, miserable and so on, but then suddenly '47 everything descended on Edinburgh. Jean Louis Barrault from Paris, Gustav Grundgens from Dusseldorf, the Old Vic came, Glyndebourne came, the Vienna Philharmonic was reunited with Bruno Walter and I was there, you know, that was a

night. And I saw a few shows there and it started to take off, and indeed I think it was either that winter or the next that I booked a season ticket for the rep Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, the Wilson Barrett Company every Saturday night in the gallery, one and six – seven and a half p. They don't use the gallery now, nobody would sit up there; my old – I went to see my old seat recently and it's occupied by a spotlight, but I saw lots there, went to things, started going to theatre – this was in my sixth year of school, final year of school – and I got kind of hooked and hooked and hooked, and ever since, I'm afraid. It's a terrible drug, can't... never really been able to shake it off. So that's how it started.

RA: You did National Service in '52.

FR: I did my National Service. I mean I was exempt first, went to university. I really wanted to work in the theatre, but at that time there weren't theatre courses in universities – you know, they were a bit toffee-nosed about theatre. There wasn't anywhere to go, and anyway I would have had my parents' support if I went into theatre but I felt, you know, 'Come on Francis, get yourself a proper job', you know, and I read science, mostly psychology which has been very useful. And I spent four years in a three year degree and never graduated, and went off and did my military service. Very lucky – the second year was spent in Germany going to the opera basically! And I got to know the repertoire, and I got to know a lot of exciting developments that were then happening in Germany and weren't going to happen here for a few years, you know. So then I came out... I suppose I could have – it wouldn't have taken much more to finish the degree I guess – but I decided to give theatre a go and joined up with two characters who you'll find in this archive, Donald Sertain and Jeremy Young in Tonbridge, the tattiest of tatty reps. We sometimes did... out of tat... some wonderfully surprising things can happen, occasionally.

RA: You saw a lot of opera in Germany, and you've worked across a lot of Europe, did you find that impacted British theatre post war a lot?

FR: You mean did it impact on post-war?

RA: Yeah, and on the way you directed.

FR: Well, I don't know that it, the impact was coming. It probably... I mean, you know, the big German impact on British theatre of course was the arrival of Brecht's company in London, that had a huge influence on us all, but also some of the advanced things – I mean, they hit me personally in the working conditions in Glyndebourne because I... I'd seen the Hamburg Opera at work as a student – in fact I'd been an extra, I'd walked on in several of the operas – and then when I was in Germany I spent two months in Hamburg and went to the opera you know about five times a week and I got to know Rennert's work, and then he and I started in Glyndebourne on exactly the same day, and he brought ideas that I was familiar with with him, and I was immediately starting to work on them, so yes, yes, there was some importing going on.

RA: What was it like first starting at Tonbridge?

FR: Wonderful. I remember – wonderful – I got out of the train and there was a big poster on the platform, and I was going to do that show, you know? And I found the theatre, they didn't have a stage door - not one that opened, anyway! - and I went in and there was a man in a white boiler suit up a ladder fixing a border over the stage and he came down and he said, 'Can I help you?' and I said to him, 'Well yes, I'm looking for Mr. Jack Bradley', who was the producer that worked for the company and he said, 'Oh, that's me'. You know, and I got a contract for £4 a week as Assistant Stage Manager, and he said, 'I'm afraid we haven't got a Stage Manager or a Stage Director so you'll have to be them all', you know. So I was just thrown in at the deep end, and we rehearsed for a week and my first night paid as a professional in the theatre I had to put my makeup on, my bit of costume, while running up and down to the stage to change gramophone records every three minutes for the audience coming in, and I had to play the Queen and check all the props, do all the usual things, and I didn't take the – and set the lights – but I didn't take the curtain up because I was discovered on in the comedy role, you know, of which I didn't want to be an actor but you know, everybody acted, and that was it. And it was wonderful, and it was terribly good that I did that because I learnt something of the actors' problems and angst, you know, to be in a... to be in a dressing room with people who were feeling somewhat jumpy because they don't really know their parts – well why should they? They only had four days to learn them – and you know, but I got to learn about that, and got the feeling for it. So it was, it was a good kick start, and then we did... I stayed I think, I stayed for five, six months or something. We did a new play every week. And £4 a week was fine, because at that time there was a terrible kind of thing, which is almost returning now with internship nonsense not paying people, that you would pay a rep company £50 premium and they'd pay you back say £2 a week for 25 weeks, but this job I'd got paid, I was paid £4, and digs with full board at that time were £2.50, I had thirty bob in my pocket and beer wasn't much more than a shilling a pint [laughs], so it was... it was good, and I got in there.

RA: Did the fact that you had to start out doing lighting and all kinds of different things, do you think that impacted on you later career?

FR: I don't know that it did. Well, I... it confirmed my belief that anyone working backstage in the theatre has got to be a jack of all trades and a master of one, you know. At that time I was just a jack of all trades. I suppose I viewed myself as a potential director, I think we all did, you know. I soon gave that up after some experience of being an assistant director. I'd gone in thinking I was going to be a stage manager, because I assumed - not knowing different - that the stage manager created magic and all these sort of things. It didn't take me long to find out that a stage manager was kind of a nurse-maid to the actors, you know, and I wanted to be something a little bit more creative than counselling actors, actors who understandably have a tendency towards a certain self-centre-ment perhaps, and working in an industry that forced a neurosis, you know, so I felt that, you know, I kind of, determined to become more of a technical stage manager which was... but not before I'd learnt a lot about how to deal with actors from some brilliant stage managers, that I was later to assist.

RA: Was it, when you first started out was there particular aspect of theatre you enjoyed? Was it mainly the practical...

FR: Well I've always... I mean, I'd always hankered for, for opera, but, you know, I just wanted to be part of theatre, you know, we, you know, it was almost a spirit of, you know, what you do and I said, 'Well what needs doing?', and, you know, I've never been very keen on the boundaries, there were, you know, there weren't boundaries when I start – in the kind of theatre I started in.

When I came to work in the West End, it was a little bit boxed, in a way that it isn't so much now. There's much more, I think it was about twenty years the term 'generic technician' was invented and I've been rather keen on that, I never had any ambition to be a lighting designer. I became a lighting designer, but I've always enjoyed something of a love-hate relationship with, with light. I became a lighting designer, I'm not quite sure how or why, I'd obviously – when you're working with small companies you... if there's nobody there to sort of get organised – organise the lighting – you take it on. Otherwise we'll never get out of the theatre and into the pub, you know!

I had, I learnt a little bit about it and I remember in '50 – must have been the Christmas of '58/'59 – I was stage managing Stanley Baxter as Mother Goose in the King's Edinburgh and I got a letter from Glyndebourne saying, 'We're creating a new post called 'Lighting Manager' and we think you'd be the person for it – are you interested?' And I wrote back and said, 'No, not really, I don't want to get interested in light, lighting's not my job, I'm technical director currently of stage technical director for the Aldeburgh Festival with Benjamin Britten and we're doing exciting things there'. That was fine. I used the letter to get an extra pound out of the Aldeburgh Festival, mind you, on my weekly salary. And as my weekly salary was only about £10 that was a good addition. Then the... that was in January, and in April I got a phone call from Glyndebourne saying, 'This job is still vacant – any chance you might be interested now?'. And actually by then I was, partly because the wonderful tour of Europe by the English Opera Group had fallen apart, and mainly because I was feeling miserable because I had a dental abscess, and I thought, 'Well maybe, you know – I don't want to be a lighting designer, but it would be a nice summer in Sussex, you know – might be'. So I went for an interview and I was offered the job and I went. And then of course you see I discovered that what this job did, was it gave me a seat at the production desk, next to the director with the designer behind me. You know, I was in there, I was party to everything that was happening there. And then I found it: here was a medium I could use. I couldn't act - which was fine because I didn't want to be an actor - couldn't dance or sing because I didn't want to do any of these things, didn't really want to spend the rest of my life being nice, calling shows and all that [as a stage manager]. I couldn't draw, couldn't paint, but here was a medium I could use, I could use light beams you know, it was something I could do, and I kind of started to veer into that.

And of course it was happening, it was exploding at that time, and I - like every young student including, I hope, your good self - had been reading Edward Gordon Craig, and Adolph Appia, and all the old works of the twenties, thirties, but that too especially who were looking towards a new theatre in visual terms, and – but something they couldn't bring forward a little bit because of the lack of technology available, but mostly the attitude. But suddenly - and this is crucial to this fifties, sixties period - suddenly attitude changed. Directors became different people. Up to that point - my early time in theatre - not all directors but 95% of directors worked like traffic policemen stopping the actors bumping into each another, bumping into furniture – but now we had all the young Peter Halls and so on coming forward – and they... their qualification wasn't that they had spent thirty years as stage managers and as not-very-successful small-part actors, now they'd be allowed to direct, they were new fresh guys with ideas, and so they were open to everything and they wanted a creative team around them. And they wanted a...

they, you know, some of the old directors, it was quite easy for them to do the lighting design because they didn't do anything else. I mean they... once they got the actors moving in the right direction, that didn't have much left for them to do, so they could do all the technical things and do the lighting, but now of course they were really working in depth with the actors, so they wanted to delegate – so they wanted someone to take care of it, and that's when the creative teams started to flourish, the lighting designers, then the sound designers, and it all, you know, came to pass, and, you know, there were a small group of us around then almost inventing a new profession. Joe Davis was doing everything from Tennent's, Charlie Bristow was – and we all had power bases – Joe Davis had a power basis in Tennent's, that was the biggest power base in the land because Tennent's really controlled London, Charlie Bristow had a power base at Sadler's Wells, John Bury was between Stratford - between both Stratfords: he was with Joan Littlewood in Stratford East, and he was up in RSC Stratford, so he had a two-prong thing. Bill Bundy at the Opera House, there [was Eric Baker then Andy Philips at the Royal Court and Richard Pilbrow at Theatre Projects Ltd] – and I had Glyndebourne, and you know we were – and to give us all credibility, there was Michael Northen, the ultimate freelance, who had done some lighting at Glyndebourne, various places, RSC, everywhere, but he was freelancing, and we started to develop.

We became known as the 'Rules Club', because that's where we had lunch. I don't think lighting designers can afford very much to go to the 'Rules Club' – to the Rules Restaurant – but they could then, not because they were earning big money, but because Rules was then cheap. And it was an exciting time, the formation of the ABTT - the Association of British Theatre Technicians - and shortly after the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers, Stage Management Association, and the ABTT was really a big huge energy source. When you got your new diary every year the first thing you put in was the last Friday of every month for an ABTT meeting in King's Street at five o'clock, and then any... if you lived out of the London, worked out of London as I did, everything was worked so that you would get any other appointments you had, to make sure you got in London on that day. And we'd have a discussion, maybe a little talk, about how the latest theatre had been screwed up architecturally, and you know, we'd be, you know, how somebody said, 'You could use the back wall as a cyclorama', but they'd put a radiator in the middle of it, and the Belgrade Coventry had a paint frame which was two feet shorter than the size of the backcloths required, and all this went on. And then afterwards we, we would drink wine, and eat what was known as 'ABTT pie', which was veal and ham pie, with the elongated egg right up through the middle slice of veal and a glass of wine, and we would talk for the rest for the evening, and sort things out, and that's when – it's appropriate that we're sitting in the Theatres Trust, it's appropriate we should be discussing it here – because that was the moment when the architects and all the users of theatre started to come together, and it was from then on that theatre consultancy became established and, people, there was a dialogue, and theatres started a move towards being more practical than they had been, and that was an important thing of the sixties, particularly, that theatres would become more workable. But the powerhouse was 29 King Street in the basement of the then Strand, that they let us use for these meetings, because there was a whole, I mean we... All the movements that were going on like the Royal Court and the rep – the huge expansion of rep – that took place, particularly under Jennie Lee, as – I can't remember what she was called, it wasn't called Minister of Culture – but that's how she was, but she extracted big money for the arts in a way that - and gave it out to the right people without the wrong strings - and let them... and that was another movement that was going on. And there was this backstage movement centred around the ABTT and was connected with the architects.

RA: Did it really feel at the time that things were changing – developing rapidly?

FR: It was so [inaudible]. It was exciting. There was a huge battle going on, there was the 'Down with the Proscenium' movement. One was practically manning the barricades, you know, it was a great time of excitement... There's nothing like it now. We're very sedate nowadays, but we... And of course technology was happening, and it was happening - the technology was happening - here. The technology - which in the thirties and so on in lighting, had stemmed from Central Europe - was now stemming from here, I mean the, the electronics, the use of electronics, thyristors, all that kind of thing, computers, was led from the UK, we were even ahead of America on it. And the reason we were ahead was because there was a dialogue between the makers and the users, whereas in Germany and America, the manufacturers say, 'We know what you want, this is it'.

'61, Glyndebourne needed a new lighting system. It had a very good '33 German system, you know, but that was a long time ago, and things were happening, and I – was wonderful, wonderful bit of education for me – Glyndebourne gave me an open air ticket, and enough cash to spend nearly a month in Germany, Belgium and Austria, going round theatres. I had introductions from top directors so I could get everywhere, saw the manufacturers, saw what was happening, came back and ordered the equipment in London because it was running about three years ahead. So we had that technological powerhouse going. There were things we were doing with profile spots in Glyndebourne that, and elsewhere, you know that directors and scenographers coming overseas were saying, 'How do you do that?' or, 'I saw something in a show in London last night, how did they do it?'. 'Well it's the technology, you know', 'ah'. The control system that we put into Glyndebourne in '64 - built here in London, to a spec jointly between me and the manufacturers - was labeled by the visiting Italians 'machina fantastica'. So it wasn't just Look Back in Anger, [laughs] you know, it was biggest pincer movement, that, that we've known, and it was wonderful being at the hub of it, you know. You... it was quite difficult to keep up, and we didn't have the kind of exhibitions of new equipment we have now, so one was... there was a... it was a grapevine operating, and, and of course we had you know extensive reviews in newspapers - Ken Tynan, Hobson - and this was really serious stuff, and they'd tended then, they... my memory of press critics of that late fifties, early sixties period, my memory and backed up by my own press cuttings book is that the press were taking a much more realistic approach to theatre than they are now. I think it was easier, they were given more space than they often get now.

FR: And, of course there weren't so many distractions, not so many theatres, television was only a few channels, television companies even liked to do arts programmes, it was... and there was no nonsense about you know, ticking boxes and cultural -and some of these awful expressions you get, "cultural industries", we didn't have any of that, we just did it. And we didn't repeat the shows. I mean, I... walking round past the theatres there and all these wonderful things, they're all repeats, you know. I saw most of them in their originals. OK, so that doesn't stop, we repeat The Marriage of Figaro many times, but we tend to do it with new aspects, new ways of looking at it, where I mean, I keep reading in the papers that we're currently going through a wonderful phase of theatre. I think we're in the doldrums, compared with what I've known. But I would say that! I mean, when you get to 78 you're an old man who thinks it was, you know, I can remember when I was young and though it was. But there isn't... there was

a mood for change, we threw babies out with the bathwater - boy and how! - you know, because we were saying, 'Look, it's a load of rubbish, let's get going again', and we, we threw out babies that we've had to resuscitate, particularly in theatre architecture, the hanging of audience on the walls, which we lost all that kind of thing, but yes it was an exciting time and yes it was across the board.

RA: Do you think that being freelance changed the way you experienced...

FR: Well I've never been anything else, so I don't know. I never had a job, that's why I'm actually planning to retire next month at 78, because I never had a job to retire from earlier. I've been on a slow fade to black-out. I mean, I had occasional jobs. When I say... I mean, there was a time when I was... I ran Bury St Edmunds for three years, so I was more or less there. I managed to get out and do a couple of shows in the middle of it, and so on, and I went into education for five years, and, but that was fine. Education was lovely in the eighties, a contract in an arts school, I was... One of the bizarre things that happened, I - because head of theatre design at what is now called Central St. Martins, and I was there, we weren't teaching lighting design, we were teaching set and costume design, it was - I was invited to apply on the basis that all the designers teaching there didn't know how other designers worked, because there's only one designer in a show, knew how lots of directors worked, but not how other designers worked, whereas I - as a lighting designer - had worked with lots of designers and had learned about design, and I went along with that, and it was rather nice, because a contract in education then was for four days - four days a week, for 37 weeks a year, and you were absolutely encouraged to be a practicing professional. Education now has too many tick-boxes for that to happen. But what I did find [was] that having a job and a salary was very much easier. When you reach five or six o'clock and there's still stuff in your in-tray, you could leave it there till the morning. Whereas if you're freelancing you are probably going to go on until four o'clock in the morning until the thing is done. Because it's got to be like that. But theatre is freelancing, it's freelancing for most, for most things. There are many more people now employed because the... when, you've got to remember that this period we're talking about we didn't have arts administrators, we had a theatre manager. It was much easier to get paid, because you could put a bill in and you could get a cheque almost immediately, whereas now it's got to go through so many people who have got to sign it, put it in books, and so on, it can take longer. And you know, the growth of arts administration since then has been quite enormous, so has the decline in the number of actors we put on the stage, we, we can't afford that. We can afford the administrators - no don't say that Francis, that's being bitchy! [laughs] It's a changing world, and it has to develop, and it has to evolve, but... and it's nice to see there are pockets of growth; I mean, I've just come back from Hong Kong from the Academy of Performing Arts, - boy, you know, there's a frisson in the Far East, of development that is a little bit akin to the great days of, the great days that we're talking about!

RA: What was it like teaching in the, for example the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts during that period?

FR: RADA?

RA: Yes.

FR: It was great. I learnt, I learn some more than the students. It was typical, how did one become - I mentioned this 'ABTT pie' and wine on Friday nights. Well, the director of stage management training, the one and only, the great Dorothy Tenham who invented stage management conservatoire-style education and her production manager Peter Woodham, came up to me and said, 'You know, we've got problems at RADA because everything is going so fast that, the developments are so fast, we can't, we feel we can't teach it internally any more because we can't keep up with it. We need someone to come in hotfoot from rehearsals and teach it'. And I said, 'You don't teach lighting, you do it', and Dot says, 'Well, we've got two theatres, you know, we can use these, and do it with the students'. So I, I wondered and then I discovered that they were paying two guineas an hour and I thought, 'Well now, that's something because there's two things about this, £2, two guineas and two shillings, that's two £2.10, that is more money, that's a much better hourly rate than working in the theatre currently and it's in guineas. And at that time you got to see the sociological context that guineas were what doctors, dentists, accountants, surveyors, lawyers got, they were paid in guineas, it was a hint of professionalism and we were trying to build a profession', so I thought, 'Well look, I'll give it a go', and we did arrange it. I used to go in most weeks for a couple of hours, and it was great because I walked in there and I suddenly found I was learning, partly the questions, but mostly because I'd be saying something and then we do this and then we do that and then stopped and I'd be thinking, 'Well why do we do that?' And, you know, I'd never really analysed some of the things we were doing, and the students were great because they were pleased to have me coming in because I often came in during rehearsal, I just came from rehearsal, I was going back to one, and we didn't in those days have to have curriculum, syllabus with a learning outcome, tick the right box, we could teach what we liked, and it varied, and I taught them what I was doing that week, you know. I had a framework obviously, as I said, but I drew all the examples from what was happening. So it was a huge learning thing, and I developed - I think it was during - I developed a desire to simplify, to de-jargonise as much as I could.

Strand had a little magazine called Tabs, and they commissioned me to do a few articles, which they paid in guineas, and then ultimately I became editor of the thing, and then I started doing books by what we now call cut and paste from old articles and things, well. I had this obsession, I really wanted - because I believe that everyone has to understand about everything in theatre, and if one particular branch hides behind jargon and obscure language, then we don't go forward, we've got to clarify everything. I mean the best, some of the best directors I worked with, are, were ones who were old and knew something about lighting, and, you know, that was, my guru was the great Carl Ebert, who had started Glyndebourne in '34, and he was retiring when I left there but I did two, three shows with him, and he was wonderful. He was the guy who first taught me to listen for the light. It's much easier - much easier - lighting on musicals and operas because you can hear, you can hear the light, not so easy to hear the light in a play, when the need for change and atmosphere and so on. So I was lucky with my teachers, and then I... I... I went on to teach quite a lot, here and there, and I, in my sixties, particularly, I spent a lot of time for the British Council, going round the world, which was great because I got to see all these theatres. So you know, I reckon I was dead lucky, I managed to survive, it's not easy surviving in theatre. I wouldn't dream of trying to freelance in lighting now, because there's just too many people... many of them with much more talent than I've got, you know, so I wouldn't want to do it now. I'd find something else to do, probably mixed up in theatre, you know. But there's no doubt about it, teaching is the best way to learn, it, it throws you in. But I gave up, I lit



my last show, when I got through to being 70, and I gave up then, I thought it was time to leave it to the boys, particularly after doing a show with a choreographer who had so little respect for his own choreography that all he wanted me to do was to provide him with a disco. And, but then after that I've, you know, been doing a bit of teaching, a bit of writing, assessing, and so on.

RA: What was the... like, before about '70, what was the most memorable play you worked on?

FR: Right, the... I think there's two I often think of. The play, the most memorable play and of course I can't remember what it was called [Flashpoint in 1979]. What I was particularly pleased about, we did it in, there's a little theatre in the Mayfair Hotel, it's actually called the Mayfair, it's not public theatre any more, but it was then - I think it's now used for conferences - and I wish I could remember what the play was. The director died recently, and I've forgotten his name, see this is part of the thing about being old. But it's in, maybe you can fill this in by looking up, [Anton Rodgers] it's listed in my book, my memoir book, and what was wonderful about that was that I felt I'd really got it right because on the final dress rehearsal, the director went round everybody - we were in the bar - went round everybody and he gave quite extended notes to people, and the he got finally to me spiral notebook, as they all used, started flicking the pages over, and he said, 'Francis, I'm terribly, terribly sorry, but I didn't notice the lighting tonight', and I said, 'That's fantastic', because that's how I'd wanted it to be, I'd integrated it, it was absolutely integral to the action to the extent that he hadn't noticed it. And there were a lot of lighting cues that indeed some were pivotal to the action of the play in fact, and if they had gone wrong the plot would have fallen apart, and that was one good moment.

A good moment, a wonderful moment in the sixties, working with my guru, Carl Ebert, we did a Pelleas et Melisande at Glyndebourne, the conductor was Vittorio Gui, was then quite old, the Italian maestro, and first night Gui had this habit, he always came onto the stage and a chair was placed for him at the side, he sat on the chair and all the singers went up to him one by one and sort of bowed and said good evening and so on and had a word with him and I was on stage, he was waiting to be called into the pit, he'd seen all the singers, he saw me and he beckoned me over to him, and he said, 'Francis, you know that as a very young boy I worked with Debussy on the world premiere of his Pelleas et Melisande. So I think I know what he wanted, and tonight we are giving him it'. Now it was that 'we', I was inclusive in the team, and that was a wonderful, wonderful first night. And the wonder went on the next morning when Andrew Porter gave me a mention in the Financial Times, and I was immediately going from my car to the stage door from the car park, I was stopped by two different directors of the Glyndebourne company who I'd never really spoken to before, who mentioned it, you know. That didn't matter, that was just a little bit of icing on the cake. It was all about the 'we'. These were the moments. In '70, Sleuth. I've always had problems reading plays, you know, my mind tends to wander half-way through reading a script for the first time, I mean I remember being riveted on Sleuth, and that, you know, went very well, yep. I'm the guy who never worked in the Royal Court, I'm the guy who never worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company, I'm the guy who never worked for the Royal Opera House, but I did most of the other people. I was interviewed for the Royal Court by the great George Devine, and to be DSM, Deputy Stage Manager on, oh... I can't remember the play, it was around about '58, it just. I knew it a moment ago, but it's gone out of my head. The interview was going quite

well, until he said, 'Do, you know, what was the last job you did?' and I said, 'Well I've done a pantomime', and he said, 'Oh you poor thing that must have been terrible', and I said, 'No, no, no, no, no, pantomime is absolutely the core of British theatre, this is the moment when we meet our audiences, this is the moment when we do that', and the great George sort of lost all interest in me at that point. And I must say I'd seen him as something of an idol at that point and I continued, but I mean he dropped down to 90%, you know? I mean, if the Royal Court couldn't be inclusive enough to include Stanley Baxter as Mother Goose, then, you know, I had no part in the Royal Court. Yeah.

RA: You did a lot of pantomime in your career, was that –

FR: I did about 60.

RA: Did that, was that, did you enjoy that the most?

FR: I loved it, because I mean... I'm not saying it's the thing I loved most, but it's great every Christmas to sort of, it's like letting your hair down a bit, but it's also incredible hard work because they're done in very short range of time. I mean, I often did four in a month, going, you know, getting in on a Sunday, opening in on a Thursday night, going to see a run-through the next Friday, and then on to the next night, and I've done four of them. But you have to get it right, because you're very much conscious that an adult audience will forgive you in a way that children won't. And it can be the child's first visit, and you could be capturing them for life, or putting them off for life, and so the burden is quite heavy, in a good production team you... you really feel this. But again, you see, these were the great days of pantomime, nowadays you get a chorus of four or something, but in Glasgow Alhambra, we would have two dozen dancers and eight singers, you know. And the Coventry Hippodrome - Sam Newsom's Hippodrome with Pauline Grant - we'd have this huge chorus and everything again, with lots of people and lots of things, lots of splashy things, new scenery, top designers all the time and new sets, and I was lucky I worked with some great [inaudible]. So it was always fun to do, and the other thing was that it was good money. And come Christmas time, a freelance has to be doing something because there are no plays in January. Or at that time there weren't because the pantomime season would roll into February, you know, you had to make a bit of cash around there, because then you could slide forward into the next thing, because you've got to survive. Which I did, I'm still married. I married a stage manager - which I always recommend, because stage managers expect rehearsals to overrun, they expect you to be late for your meals, they expect sudden changes and everything, and so they, they're, it makes a good partnership, and we've been running for, gone over 52 years together now, so you know and, that's quite good for togetherness, we survived, because that's, you know, that's your ambition on a theatre career, is survival, you know, and I thought, I always expected not to survive. When I started I thought you know, 'OK, I'll do a year, and if things are going all wrong after a year I'll go back and try and finish my degree'. If not, at the end of the year, if it was going OK, I'll give it three years, and then I'll give it five, and after ten years I'll make a commitment for life, and you do have to do some planning like that, and I survived. Probably more through luck than anything, because there is a huge amount of luck, and there's a lot of nonsense, absolute balderdash talked about it's not what you know it's

who you know, and that is rubbish, but what is very germane is being in the right place at the right time, you know, then things can click, and that's key I think.

RA: Thank you, thank you very much.