

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Jacqueline Glasser – interview transcript

Interviewer: Tom Atkins

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Theatregoer and Literary Agent. Audiences; authors; critics; Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies; Sir John Gielgud; Golders Green Hippodrome; Old Vic Theatre; Sir Laurence Olivier; John Osborne; National Theatre; Royal Court Theatre; Shakespeare productions; star casts; H.M. Tennent; theatre-going; theatre magazines; ticket prices.

TA: How did you initially get interested in theatre and start attending theatre on a regular basis? What captured your imagination?

JG: To begin with I had parents who had been keen amateur actors and theatre-goers. They weren't poor but they weren't well off either. I remember my mother telling me about the absolutely heart-stopping moment in Romeo and Juliet with Gielgud and Ashcroft, and she said they came on to the stage, either side of the stage, and just looked at each other. She said she'd not known anything like it before – it was complete magic. So things of that kind, they talked to me. My mother used to read me sonnets when I was about seven and make up little plays with my father. Then they had a box of their programmes and – there wasn't television then – I used to love going through them when I was about nine or ten, just looking at them. So I got interested.

When I was at school I was a member of the drama society and was in some school plays. There was also quite a lot of local theatre. Not local theatre, but there were local theatres where productions would arrive before they came to the West End. I lived in North London. Golders Green Hippodrome - long since gone - was a tremendously rich place to go to, and if you're around 14 and have friends interested in theatre and ballet, that sort of thing, it was easy to go. It was like going to the cinema, it really was. I can't think what it is in new money... present money... but it was one-and-six to go the cinema and one-and-six to sit at the top of the Hippodrome.

TA: So there were equal amounts, there wasn't any competition...

JG: Absolutely. And that's why I think it's terrible nowadays for younger people. Think of the cost of going to the theatre... But in those days, in the fifties, there was no difference in the cheapest seats between going to the flicks and going to the theatre. And then in Harrow, which was nearby, there was the Coliseum and productions went there. School took us to one or two things, and it sort of gradually built up from that I think.

TA: There is a big difference now, even in the galleries you're paying £20 for a seat whereas you can go to the cinema for £8. There is a significant difference now as you rightly say.

JG: Yes, indeed.

TA: From your early theatregoing, what were the big standout memories for you? Either productions or –

JG: Well, very early I do remember – leaving aside the odd pantomime I was taken to but that didn't happen very much, I think there was an aunt who took me occasionally to a pantomime – I do remember and have never forgotten going to – I was 14 – going to a production of Don Giovanni at Sadler's Wells and being completely swept up by it. Then, I think the first play I saw... I think the first one, going by the programme, was King Lear at the Old Vic.

TA: What year was that?

JG: That would have been... [picks up programme] That was 1952. Lear then – I have seen Gielgud, I have seen so many Lears – Lear was someone called Stephen Murray who I haven't really heard of since. Cordelia was Daphne Slater. It was a production – André Morell was in it who was a good actor but there wasn't anybody particularly... Oh, I know! No, Stephen Murray couldn't do it so it was somebody called John Colicos who I have heard of. But I don't remember much about that...

TA: Perhaps that was his 'star' moment when he stepped in...

JG: Well possibly, yes.

TA: Where did you see the Gielgud Lear?

JG: Oh, that was later. I'm not sure whether that was at the Old Vic... it's in one of these programmes. There are so many things, it's difficult to remember the who-what-where.

TA: How often were you going to the theatre then?

JG: Well, this is... [looking at programmes] that goes up to 1955. I wasn't going so much then - I probably couldn't have afforded it. I'm sure I couldn't have afforded it! But that's right, in '52 I saw Katherine Hepburn and Robert Helpmann in The Millionairess which was incredible really, seeing that sort of cast. Sometimes I went twice and have two programmes! The Romeo and Juliet that year was with – Alan Badel was

Romeo and Claire Bloom was Juliet. That whole season was Michael... maybe it wasn't then, I don't think they had started doing the five-year thing. But how many times did I go? Well I suppose during that year I might have gone just a few times. '53 I was going to Merchant of Venice at the Old Vic once, maybe twice. I might have gone about 16 times over the year. I was still at school. Murder in the Cathedral, with Robert Donat... just incredible productions.

TA: So was the Old Vic a particular favourite?

JG: Yes, yes, I fell in love with the Old Vic and the whole sort of ethos of Lilian Baylis, I was very attracted by. It's a lovely theatre and I'm just so pleased it's survived. But again, I suppose I was very receptive at that age but I've never forgotten that production of Murder in the Cathedral. It was just stunning with Robert Donat, very stark and wonderful.

TA: I guess when the National Theatre was set up at the Old Vic in 1963, when Laurence Olivier set it up, did that renew your interest in the Old Vic?

JG: Funnily enough, not so much then. I don't know why, it was probably because I was doing other things. I wasn't not going to the theatre but I don't know. I don't remember going a lot then.

TA: Do you remember it being announced in the press?

JG: Oh yes, I remember it being announced in the press and that it was good we were going to have a National Theatre but I don't think, to be honest, that I was that excited about it one way or the other at that time. I was just more interested in what I was seeing and where I was going... There were interesting things going on at the Royal Court and the Theatre Royal, Stratford and there were the theatre clubs –

TA: Of course, because the Lord Chamberlain was still in –

JG: Yes, so I'd sort of moved on to other things by then.

TA: And the Royal Court was going through an interesting time in that period –

JG: Oh yes. Osborne, Wesker, Ann Jellicoe... lots of things. I have to jog my memory by looking at the programmes!

TA: As a theatregoer, were you aware of the managements behind these productions?

JG: Yes.

TA: Who, in your eyes, were the big players?

JG: Well, the big player was Tennent. There was always this rather sniffy view of Tennent that they did all the commercial stuff. The plays they put on – Aunt Edna wouldn't like it! I was very aware then that there were changes afoot in the theatre and that there was exciting writing. We all sneered at Terence Rattigan and Noel Coward; now, I think very foolishly.

TA: They are those classic names now, aren't they?

JG: And also, seeing a play like the Deep Blue Sea – which I saw at the Almeida with Penelope Wilton – is a play with great depth to it. It's not the sort of Aunt Edna/while-away-the-time sort of play. But I think the Tynans of this world were very dismissive. So yes, I was very aware of Tennent and very aware of what George Devine was doing and what Joan Littlewood was doing. It was Michael Benthall at the Old Vic, that's earlier during this five year period... So from the production point of view, I can't think off the top of my head of any other producers who were particularly big names.

TA: So you didn't go to see particularly one area of theatre – commercial West End or the Old Vic – you kind of spread around London?

JG: I went to – [looking at programmes] – I don't like Gilbert and Sullivan, I think I was dragged there... No, No, Nanette at Golders Green Hippodrome, A Woman of No Importance at the Open Air Theatre. I loved the Open Air Theatre so that was an easy place to go to...

TA: At Regent's Park... still going strong.

JG: Gielgud was doing that season at the Lyric Hammersmith, Venice Preserved. A Woman of No Importance at the Savoy. Oh that was Tennent's so they weren't doing solely commercial stuff. [looking at a programme] Which Hamlet was that? That was... Richard Burton's Hamlet and Ophelia was Claire Bloom. [taking another] What's this one? See, I don't remember a thing about this play. It was on in Harrow at the Coliseum, A Question of Fact by one Wynyard Brown. Don't remember anything about it. Pamela Brown was in it, have you heard of Pamela Brown?

TA: I haven't myself, no...

JG: She was a very, very good actress – she had a very husky voice. Paul Scofield was in it, Gladys Cooper was in it and it was directed by Frith Banbury, and it was a Tennent

production! [laughs] Frith Banbury Ltd and Tennent Productions. So that's 1953. Do you know Paul Rogers? Michael Hordern?

TA: Yes, I know of Michael Hordern, fantastic actor.

JG: He was 'John'.

TA: So among your peers, was theatregoing something which you all did or - ?

JG: My closest friends were as keen on theatre as I was. I would say that at school I was probably in the minority but my close friends – we gather together because we are interested in the same sort of things – and even when I went to Guides there were a couple of other girls there and one of them was potty about ballet. So we'd go to the ballet together and go to the theatre together, we went to lots of things together. But I think it was a minority taste to be honest.

TA: As it is now really. It's interesting that it has always been like that...

JG: Yes. I'm actually amazed – I knew I went a lot but when I went through all these programmes, I found out just how many I had got, I must have been saving pocket money like mad.

TA: So is buying a programme something which was part of the experience for you?

JG: Oh yes, one or two of them are autographed but I think I always had my autograph book with me. There were groupies at the Old Vic and you were either a Richard Burton groupie or a John Neville groupie.

TA: Which one did you fall into?

JG: John Neville.

TA: And how big were the groups at Stage Door?

JG: Well it's not like The X Factor! But there were maybe 20-30 girls swooning. I got grounded at one point because I was coming home so late...

TA: Because you were staying after the show at stage door...?

JG: To get autographs, yes. I was told I could only go to matinees for a while. Jean Anouilh – Time Remembered. The Taming of the Shrew. Interestingly, I didn't remember this... Have you heard of an actress called Ann Todd?

TA: I have, yes.

JG: Now, I really identify her with being a film star. But she was in this, she was Katherine. And Paul Daneman, do you know him? These were just wonderful, wonderful actors. Paul Daneman, Alan Dobie, Laurence Hardy, Robert Hardy, Michael Bates... They were part of that company. John Woodvine, Rachel Roberts...

TA: Ah, John Woodvine... an RSC actor.

JG: Yes, and Paul Rogers. I don't know when he died but he was a stalwart of that company.

TA: Were these people household names or was it very much if you know and go to the theatre, you'll know those people?

JG: You know, I can't tell you that. The people I mentioned became household names up to a point. But they weren't household names in the way that Edith Evans, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies or Sybil Thorndyke and Lewis Casson were household names. Like Gielgud, Oliver or Helpmann or Katherine Hepburn. People who go to the theatre would have heard of those people. [looking at another programme] This is another stunning production... Peggy Ashcroft in Hedda Gabler at Golders Green Hippodrome was just another stunning production, she was wonderful in that.

TA: A lot of the theatres which existed in that period – some of them aren't there anymore. Golders Green Hippodrome has been one which you mentioned. What year did that disappear?

JG: Well I don't remember but I think it was in the sixties. It's absolutely disgraceful that it was allowed to happen but I think it must have been in the sixties. I got married in 1965 and already I was living in St. John's Wood so I wouldn't have been going there anyway. But I think it did happen in the early sixties. These plays would be on tour so they would go there before they came in to the West End. George Devine was in this [looking at the Hedda Gabler programme] – he was Tesman. Rachel Kempson was Mrs Elvsted and Brack was Noel Willman who you probably might not know. He wasn't a household name but the people who went to the theatre in those days would have known him. He was a good actor.

TA: It's interesting how you were talking about tours stopping off at Golders Green before coming in to the West End. London seems a lot smaller in that respect now because you don't have those large theatres in other parts of London except for

Wimbledon which gets the big No. 1 tours. I guess there's not that kind of circuit any more in this city?

JG: No, but I think when they tore down the Hippodrome they just thought, 'Well the land is valuable... it's not making that much money.' The same with the Coliseum in Harrow. I haven't got my head around the fact that it was possible for me and my friends to go to the theatre on the sort of basis I mention, compared with cinema, and you can't do it now. I don't know what it is that's changed. It's strange.

TA: Do you remember any other theatres that you visited which don't exist any more? What kind of theatre was the Hippodrome?

JG: Well think sort of Hackney Empire but not as elaborate. That old fashioned, ornate theatre. In my experience it's those two and now it looks like the Hackney Empire is going again. But you go around the country and look at rep – a lot of the theatres have gone.

TA: Looking outside of London for a second – or a few minutes – is that something you did? Did you get out to the regions to see shows?

JG: No, no. I was still at school then. I went to Stratford upon Avon, I think a couple of times, but that was a school party – something like that. But what I did do was go to the Theatre Royal Stratford, and funny little fringe theatres and odd little cabarets on at odd little places. There was enough in London to keep me occupied. Later on, when I was married, we had friends in Oxford and I occasionally went to the Oxford Playhouse.

TA: But mainly focussed on London?

JG: Yes.

TA: What were the fringe venues that existed in London at that time?

JG: Well there was one in Notting Hill somewhere. I've forgotten what it was called, stupidly, but it was tiny. A bit like The Bush.

TA: Was it The Gate?

JG: Oh maybe it was The Gate, that's right. I don't have programmes for that, but I do remember going there. Hampstead... I think the New End is more recent...

TA: It's interesting how there was a fringe scene which existed even then.

JG: I don't think it was as big as it is now though.

TA: You were talking earlier about being aware of a change in theatre in that particular period. Could you perhaps elaborate on that? Where did you think that change happened – was there a specific point with a particular play or production?

JG: I think there was huge excitement around the Royal Court and what George Devine was doing. We used to feel that anything which was on there, we'd go and see it. It felt as if it was groundbreaking. To some extent with the Theatre Royal in Stratford, but not in the same way. The way he was encouraging new writing and putting on plays that probably wouldn't have seen the light of day a few years earlier. I was so interested in theatre – there was a magazine, probably all my copies got thrown out, called Plays and Players – have you heard of that?

TA: I have. When did that title - ?

JG: When did it die? [laughs] I don't know, because I think by that time I'd stopped it - I had got into my early 20s or late teens and was no longer so interested. But Plays and Players talked about everything that was on, about the actors and producers and directors and everything...

TA: All the inside gossip!

JG: Yes. There was Plays and Players, Music and Musicians, one for films... It wasn't like the gossip column in the Evening Standard, but it just had all the stuff you might want to know about theatre. One of my friends - my very close friends - she actually went to Central, so we were all part of this – I wasn't doing professional course but I did do a course at Morley College for two years – and we were always talking about what was on and what looked interesting, you know. When the New Watergate Club set up, it was tremendous and seemed tremendously daring and exciting, so I was very aware of that.

TA: Where was that club based?

JG: The Comedy Theatre. They worked out of there.

TA: Was that the one which Hugh Beaumont was involved in setting up?

JG: He might have been involved. It was to do with getting around the Lord Chamberlain.

TA: Yes.

JG: Just, all of that. And when you say particular theatres, I went to see Salad Days and The Boy Friend. I was crazy about those. In fact, I'm going to see Salad Days – a real nostalgia kick – in a couple of weeks with a friend. There's a production at the Riverside [laughs] by someone called Tete-a-Tete. I don't know who they are... but anyway! So I wasn't only going to serious things but I think we were more interested in what appeared to be groundbreaking.

TA: And being at the beginning?

JG: I don't think it was particularly thinking, 'Oh, this is the beginning.' It was just that, 'This looks really exciting and interesting', and we wanted to go.

TA: Was that a new style of theatre being presented there?

JG: Oh yes, oh yes. Well the Court was very much... With Osborne and Wesker, it was much more realistic and naturalistic in the approach.

TA: I guess it connected more with everyday people and situations...

JG: Yes, I think to some extent when something takes off it is a matter of the time. One of the writers I dealt with was John Braine for instance – this isn't theatre – I read Room at the Top when it came out and thought it was a terrific novel. Re-reading it a few years later I thought, 'Well it's good, but it's not that good.' Like the Angry Young Men. At that time, it was just the right time for it.

TA: Just looking at H.M.Tennent again, there's a lot of people who suggest that the advent of this kitchen sink drama and the Angry Young Men and the work at the Royal Court starting pushing the more traditional drawing-room plays out of the West End...

JG: I don't know, they were still being put on. It's true that The Entertainer went to the Palace, but that was probably because it was Olivier. But it had probably always been difficult to get serious plays on in the West End. I don't think anything had changed.

TA: We've talked about some of the greats, the Gielguds and Olivier. They were big back then –

JG: Huge.

TA: What was it like sitting in an audience and seeing this big, huge names playing in front of you?

JG: Well I think they were such superb actors that while you were watching them you didn't think, 'Oh, it's so and so.' You were just so swept up with the play and what they were doing. It was thrilling. In a way, I'm more thrilled now when I look back and see who I saw. Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontaine – I saw them in a production. Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud, I saw the Moscow Arts Theatre in *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*. Okay, I didn't understand a word of Russian but I knew the plays. Thrilling, absolutely thrilling and really exciting. So what did it feel like? I suppose at the end you were just thrilled that you'd seen whoever it was in whatever it was. But because they were so good you didn't think, 'Oh, it's Gielgud playing this.' or 'That's Edith Evans playing that.'

TA: But presumably that was a draw for you as well?

JG: Well yes. I was a complete Gielgud fan! [laughs]

TA: Just staying with that experience, we've talked about ticket pricing and how that compares now. Did you have any sense of particular classes going to the theatre, or dress codes or social situations?

JG: Well, no. I was always up in the gods. They've actually closed most of the galleries, do you know that? At the Old Vic, they have actually closed the gallery – it no longer exists. There's an Upper Circle but the gallery does not exist.

TA: With the standing room at the top? It doesn't exist any more?

JG: No. It's the Upper Circle, the highest you go. The last time I was there, I went up the stairs and there were more stairs and it said 'Upper Circle'. So I said to somebody, 'It's Upper Circle there, it's Upper Circle there – what's happened to the gallery?' – 'Oh they've cut that off.' And I read somewhere recently in some of the theatres like the Duke of York's, they've cut off the gallery.

TA: That's something I've heard lamented over – the fact that the galleries doesn't exist anymore. At the *Night With The Impresarios* event there was some discussion over that fact. The fact that those cheaper seats and ordinary punters who would be very vocal about whether they enjoyed a play or not. Was that true? Were there boos if the play wasn't good?

JG: I never experienced that with the theatre. I know that's happened with opera, but I've never experienced it in theatre. Although I might be tempted to do it when there're people like Tom Hardy on stage! I remember that thing – I think somebody's already mentioned it – where you'd queue up for the gallery and pay your sixpence and put a little stool down and come back.

TA: Oh you bring your own?

JG: No, you didn't bring your own. You paid somebody sixpence and then they'd put a little stool down and that would keep your place for later in the day. You'd queue up and get the tickets there and then.

TA: First come first served?

JG: Yes, you'd get there early and buy your little stool for sixpence – which is about... I'm so bad at this... two-pence I suppose...

TA: And that would save your place?

JG: Yes and then you'd go back and then there'd be the buskers going along. It was great! It was a very good atmosphere, a lot of camaraderie there.

TA: Among theatregoers?

JG: Yes. I knew that opera people dressed up and all the rest of it, but I wasn't in that league. Even later on, going into the sixties – you say up to '68? –

TA: Up to '68, yes.

JG: - I suppose by then, yes, if we were going to the theatre we'd be going in the stalls. I'd sort of just dress reasonably, not dress 'up' as it were.

TA: Just touching on that '68 period, right at the end of the period we're exploring, obviously that's when the Lord Chamberlain's office stopped censoring plays. Looking slightly beyond that, what immediate effect did that have on theatre? Presumably the theatre clubs which existed didn't have to be clubs any more.

JG: Yes, they weren't needed any more of course. Now that's a period – I was out of the country, we were living in Italy for my husband's work. I just remember reading about it and thinking it was terrific. I don't know whether a lot more serious theatre was being put on though, by the Tennents of this world. Maybe they were, maybe they weren't.

TA: So there wasn't a kind of noticeable change for you?

JG: Well no. To be fair, I wasn't here then – that was a little period when I wasn't around.

TA: Of course. And with the theatre clubs that existed before that date, what was the set up for you? Were you paying a - ?

JG: I'm trying to remember what happened. It was a theatre club so you paid a shilling or whatever it was to join and then you got your tickets. There was nothing the Lord Chamberlain could do about that.

TA: So essentially you were paying for the tickets anyway but it was described as a membership to a club rather than as a face value on a ticket.

JG: That's right. It was like paying a pound restoration fee or something. Except it was that.

TA: Quite a simple double cross really then!

JG: It was.

TA: And we've talked about the National Theatre a bit. You said it didn't have a big effect on how you viewed any changes but was there any increase in theatre because of that in that period '63 to '68?

JG: Increase in what way?

TA: In discussion about theatre and also productions themselves and interest in the National Theatre and presenting those types of productions.

JG: I think there probably was. I never went to the National Theatre when it was at the Old Vic. I can't quite remember why now. There was a period when I wasn't going quite so much... there were theatres like the Lyric Hammersmith which were doing interesting productions and the Riverside but maybe that was much later. Anyway, we'd go there so I didn't take that much notice of it when it was at the Old Vic. Then when the National Theatre actually opened...

TA: This is the South Bank...

JG: South Bank, yes, which was sixty... what?

TA: I think it was even later than that actually.

JG: Well I was having my children then and frankly I wasn't going to the theatre that often! We went occasionally to things, but we seemed to be going to more concerts at that time for some reason. And then later on I started going again.

TA: Classical music concerts? Where were they?

JG: Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, Kenwood...

TA: I've worked through a lot of my questions, but are there any particular subject areas which you are interested in sharing? When did you start working as an authors' agent?

JG: Oh right, well I started at the end of the fifties. I became the assistant to the managing director of an agency and then into the sixties I started taking on my own authors, so I've been an authors' agent for a very long time. I finally stopped work in March. I do remember the very first job I had with another authors' agent actually. He represented Willis Hall and I do remember going to the first night of *The Long and the Short and the Tall*. And that was, again, quite – not exactly revolutionary – but so different from how theatre had been presented before. As I said, that naturalistic approach. And that was exciting. When I actually became an agent myself as opposed to an assistant, I was dealing with all sorts of writers. Fiction, non-fiction and some also wrote plays. John Osborne was a playwright where I dealt with the publication of his plays and the publication of his memoirs. I used to go down and see him – he was living in Edenbridge. It's sad in a way what happened to him. I don't think he got a very good press in later years, it was all a bit unfair. I expect he brought it upon himself to some extent. Like a lot of these people, when you see them face-to-face, one-to-one, they're very different from the public persona.

TA: Yes, particularly with big names like Gielgud, Osborne or Olivier you do put them on this kind of pedestal and suddenly if you're working with them or face to face with them it can be a whole different feeling that you get.

JG: With Osborne, he always had constant battles with the critics and could be very unpleasant. But in personal relations he was always fine, unless you were Jill Bennett!

TA: And did you want to be an agent because of your connections with theatre?

JG: No, I just fell into it the way you often do with these things.

TA: And just stayed with it?

JG: Yes, yes.

TA: So you weren't ever interested in pursuing a career in the theatre or - ?

JG: Well I was. I was when I was leaving school. I wanted to go to drama school and my father couldn't afford it. He said, 'If you want to go to theatre school, you can save up and go.' So I went to Morley College instead.

TA: And this was a performance course?

JG: It was a two year course, three times a week, run by Rupert Doone who had been the main mover and shaker of Group Theatre. So he used to do a certain amount there. Archie Harradine who was with the Players Theatre did movement. So you did movement, I think voice with Rupert. And then Frank Drew who taught at Rose Bruford. No, Frank did voice, that's right. I know we did movement, we did voice, we did singing and we did improvisation. And some of the people did go on to try and get into the theatre profession.

TA: So by going there were you wanting to do that or was it just a hobby?

JG: No, it seemed to me that this was going to be possibly a way of going for – because I couldn't afford... it was two evenings a week and a Saturday afternoon. I worked at Harrods on a Saturday morning to pay for the fees and my fares. Harrods closed at lunchtime on Saturdays in those days. But there were people there – there was somebody called Ellis (I've forgotten his surname) who was a nephew of Margaret Rutherford's! And I did see him in very, very tiny parts in B films occasionally after that.

TA: Was there a social group which came out of that then?

JG: No, not really. There was one person I remained friendly with. But I then went along to the Tower Theatre, Canonbury and by then I was getting interested in my work and my social life had developed a bit more. They were very cliquy and I could see I was never going to get a part, all I was going to do was be backstage which I really wasn't interested in. It reminds me – slight digression – but Daniel Radcliffe's father worked for me as a Dictaphone typist for a year! [laughs]

TA: There's a claim to fame!

JG: Alan came to me when he was about 28. He was an actor and his wife Marcia was a theatrical agent, and he said 'Look, I realise that I've got to 28 and I'm not going to be Kenneth Branagh and so I think what I want to do is be an agent. Have you got any work?' So I said, 'Well you can come and be a dictaphone typist for me but on condition that you stay a year.' So he came and he actually picked up, he always said, a huge amount. But towards the end of the year someone at the William Morris Agency needed an assistant and he said, 'It's ten months and I know what you said...' but I said, 'Oh go on, go and take the job.' He was the one, I think, who discovered Matthew Warchus

and was his agent, but I think Matthew then left him. Alan then became Daniel's manager.

TA: And still is, isn't he?

JG: Which is a bit of a sad thing I think. Don't you think it's a bit sad? You wrap yourself around your child's life and the point will come when his child will say, 'Thanks but no thanks.' And what have you got left. Anyway that is a bit of a digression.

TA: Interesting stuff!

JG: So all I'm saying is I got fed up with the Tavistock and then I joined another theatre group, which was just an amateur group, and did lots of things with them. Then got married and didn't have time, and we travelled and did different things.

TA: But kept the theatregoing up?

JG: Yes, I mean obviously when I was abroad I wasn't doing that. And my husband – he enjoyed going to the theatre and he'd gone a lot when he was at Oxford but at that point he was really more interested in film. So there was probably a period, back in London, when we were going to the cinema – the Academy cinema which used to be down in Oxford Street and seeing interesting, obscure foreign films.

TA: London is said to be the theatre capital of the world. You said you went travelling a lot – was there that sense of London being this Mecca for theatre?

JG: I think London had always been that. It was interesting, because I used to go to New York quite a lot, and I do remember... I saw Glynis Johns in *A Little Night Music* on Broadway and I saw, I think it was Jean Simmons here. But I tended to feel with New York... Musicals were terrific but nothing beat London when it came to serious theatre.

TA: Of course, H.M. Tennent transferred lots of musicals from Broadway to here. One of the last shows that Beaumont was doing was *West Side Story* and *Oklahoma*... *My Fair Lady*.

JG: They're great! There must have been some serious thing I saw in New York that impressed me, but I don't remember. I do remember going to see lots of musicals and loving them but... I think that we've got a much wider breadth of theatre here. I do. I think it's a bit of a shame though that there isn't quite – my son goes to the Barbican a lot and he actually did a MA in Theatre Lighting Design at Central. He was in Paris for ten years and is a freelance translator, and does lighting design for small companies. But he does go to some things at the Barbican quite a bit I think. It seems to me that those foreign productions which come to London and I was seeing... I don't know whether

anything like that is going on these days. I did go to the Barbican about two years ago and saw the best production of Twelfth Night that I've ever seen, in Russian, which was directed by – now do I mean Dominic Dromgoole? Cheek by Jowl?

TA: The guy who's at the Globe at the moment – artistic director?

JG: No... That's Dominic Dromgoole is it? Dominic... Who's Cheek by Jowl?

TA: I should know this... I'll find out.

JG: He did a joint production with Moscow Arts and he was directing this all-male cast and they brought it to the Barbican. They used the stage as the amphitheatre – they cut off the theatre completely. It's a very deep stage, so you had seats, a backcloth and the actors.

TA: And that was it?

JG: So the actors, in other words, had their backs to what was usually the auditorium. Right? It was the most riveting performance I've ever seen of Twelfth Night. You completely forgot it was all-male. Now and again they put up the surtitles, but if you've seen the play a lot, you sort of know... And Malvolio was the best Malvolio I've ever seen. [laughs]

TA: I notice that a lot of your programmes are Shakespeare titles – is that a particular love of yours?

JG: Oh yes. Well particularly then, but remember these early programmes were when they were doing this five-year plan to put on every single Shakespeare play. But yes, because when I was seven my mother would read Shakespeare sonnets to me. So I was very aware of Shakespeare from an early age.

TA: And it was the Old Vic behind that five-year plan – is that right?

JG: Yes, they were all at the Old Vic. Michael Benthall. It was brilliant. When I think of productions now – I do think that some of the productions on now are just amazing in terms of the imagination, what you see, and of course they cost. But I mean a lot of those productions, it was very plain and bare and perhaps backcloth but that's all. But I saw a wonderful production of Coriolanus with Richard Burton as Coriolanus, Fay Compton as Volumnia and it was all done in pink and purple. Just the backcloth and everything else was pink and purple. It was just riveting, just imaginatively done. No, I think the Shakespeare is because of that particular period when they were doing the five years. [flicking through programmes] That's Henry IV – two programmes for that one – Tiger at the Gates (Giraudoux). You don't get much in translation now do you? Do you

get much in translation? Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall did Dario Fo I know that but you don't get a lot put on in translation... Barbara Jefford – do you know Barbara Jefford?

TA: No.

JG: Michael Redgrave?

TA: Of course! [laughs]

JG: He was in that. Yes so that was good. Robert Shaw?

TA: Yes.

JG: He was in that.

TA: These were all -

JG: Diane Cilento. Twelfth Night at the Old Vic. Keith Michel... was at Stratford. Angela Baddeley. Vivien Leigh! I saw Vivien Leigh in that, I'd forgotten that. She was Viola.

TA: All those names... wow!

JG: I know! She was Viola. Michael Dennison was Aguecheek, Laurence Olivier was Malvolio. Trader Faulkner – have you ever come across him? He was a really good classic, you know, he never had big parts but he was one of those actors you'd hear even if you were at the back...

TA: He popped up.

JG: Patrick Wymark was the Priest. So this is Shakespeare I agree. This is that Coriolanus [handing over the programme]. Tempest... which Tempest was this? So many Tempests... [looking closely at programme]. Yes, Claire Bloom was Miranda, John Neville was Ferdinand and Prospero was Michael Horden. Charlie's Aunt... those are concerts... Oh yes, that was fun – we went to that... [hands over programme]

[Interview paused]

JG: It's funny because when I look back at my programmes, I think 'People I've never heard of again' you know and I do remember that this production of Saint Joan was

Siobhan McKenna and she was quite recognised as being quite a consummate actress. But I don't know whatever happened to her.

TA: [flicking through programmes] That's so interesting, all these revered names...

JG: Yes!

TA: It's not so long ago that they were in their golden age, their heyday.

JG: Exactly, you say this. I think it's not so long ago but it's '54 so over 50 years! I can't bear it! [laughs] See, this is the other Hedda I saw. Once again, Peggy Ashcroft was Hedda. This was directed by Peter Ashmore, but Michael MacLiammoir was Brack, George Devine was Tesman and Rachel Kempson - Mrs Elvstead. That was just a brilliant production and he was the best Brack I've ever seen. Just great.

TA: How full were the theatres those days?

JG: Oh, they were full.

TA: Because in the West End now you tend to see a lot of empty seats...

JG: Those theatres... You see, I don't know if the back of the stalls was full or not because I was right up in the gods at the Old Vic but that was packed. And I remember standing – this was a few years later – at the back of the Old Vic. I must have been crazy... I wasn't crazy, just wasn't as old! [laughs] I stood for four hours at the back to watch *The Oresteia*.

TA: That's commitment for you!

JG: That was commitment. I think at the time when you said, 'What do I feel about seeing them?' I knew the actors I liked, the ones I was keen on. But I probably didn't particularly – at the age of 15 or 16 – really know quite how great they were. When I look back and there was Edith Evans in *The Dark Is Light Enough*, Peter Bull, Peter Barkworth – do you know those names?

TA: These are all names which you kind of know in the back of your mind and you've heard all these names said in reverence before...

JG: Yes, exactly.

TA: I guess it would be a similar stage with actors who are working now in another 50 years...

JG: Yes, yes. [indicating programmes] These are all the Old Vic. I think this is another Romeo and Juliet... Romeo was John Neville and Juliet was Claire Bloom. The Lark... Again, you just don't have these sorts of plays being put on now.

TA: So do you think there was a broader range of work –

JG: Then?

TA: Yes.

JG: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, look at all these revivals we've got. A View From The Bridge, everything. Then taking films and turning them into – like Breakfast at Tiffany's et cetera. I mean, who would want to go and see on stage The Shawshank Redemption?

TA: Which has just posted closing notices...

JG: I'm not surprised. It's one of the best films ever. Why on earth would anybody... And there're all these writers trying to get their stuff on – maybe it's not that good, I don't know.

TA: That's really interesting particularly in relation to - although the Lord Chamberlain's office was in effect, you feel there was a broader range of drama happening and more exciting stuff happening at that stage.

JG: Well there was. I mean this is presumably toward the end of it, but they got away with the dodgy stuff by the clubs. But, you know, they were bringing in Russian companies, French companies, French plays in translation. [finding another programme] This was another sort of stunning production – Gielgud as Benedict and Peggy Ashcroft as Beatrice in Much Ado which was in 1955. It really was just superb. Julius Caesar, Lear...which Lear is this? They're all from different Lears. Oh, Gielgud was Lear!

TA: That was the one.

JG: Yes, that was the one. And who was Cordelia? [reading] Claire Bloom was Cordelia.

TA: Claire Bloom seems to have featured quite a lot in the programmes you have there...

JG: Well she was part of that company, you see...

TA: For the five years?

JG: Well, on and off, I mean yes she was. Burton was and Neville was... [looking at another programme] Charles Gray, you know Charles Gray? Yes. Moscow State, Merry Wives of Windsor, Hamlet – which Hamlet was this? I even cut the reviews out as well! I must re-read them sometime. The Hamlet was Paul Scofield. And if you asked me 'What was it like?' I would have said it was good because I was just impressed with everything I was seeing there.

TA: Yes.

JG: I have to say I didn't want to see Jude Law and a friend of mine had a couple of tickets because her son-in-law couldn't go. And we went. I thought he was extremely good and I thought he spoke the verse very well. I was surprised.

TA: It's very encouraging as well...

JG: Yes, yes...

TA: I'm always given a surprise when those kind of big-name actors on screen can actually do theatre very well as well.

JG: But you see, then you realise that he was at the RSC to begin with. I didn't see the David Tennant, but the same with David Tennant – they both had classical training. What I really want to go and see – I hope it's still happening – I read somewhere that Stephen Dillane is going to do Hamlet but I'm not sure who's going to direct him. But I saw about 20 years ago, Stephen Dillane's Hamlet – the whole four hours of it – in a production by Peter Hall. It's one of the best Hamlets I've ever seen. And if he's doing it again, I think it'll be really interesting to see how he approaches it.

TA: And it's not that production?

JG: No.

TA: It's a completely new one.

JG: If it happens. Because I did read it. Oh, Othello was Richard Burton here. Yes. Desdemona - Rosemary Harris. I can't remember what happened to Rosemary Harris.

Iago was John Neville. They were quite competitive so it's quite good having Neville as – well it reminded me of that famous production again that my parents used to talk about. Romeo and Juliet where Olivier played Mercutio and Gielgud played Romeo and they alternated in the thirties. Do you know about this?

TA: In the parts?

JG: Yes. Peggy Ashcroft was Juliet – and that was the production my mother talked about – but apparently – I don't know whether one did one and one did the other but it was an interesting idea. [looking through programmes] The Boy Friend, The Cherry Orchard. The Lyric, Hammersmith was very good, I think a lot of things were going on there. Gielgud I think directed quite a lot there.

TA: Wasn't it 'The Company of Four'?

JG: Is that what it was called?

TA: There was a link-up which I think was perhaps instigated by –

JG: It was Tennent...

TA: By Tennent, yes.

JG: Yes.

TA: And they hooked up with three other theatres and the idea was that they went from the Lyric to somewhere else and from somewhere else to somewhere else. I think the Hampstead was involved in that as well.

JG: Oh right. But this – look, Trevor Howard... Robert Eddison, know his name, yes? Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies is Madame Ranevsky. Esme Percy, now do you know Esme Percy?

TA: No.

JG: Well he was one of those old actors who was just brilliant at everything he did. He was just so good and he was in that. Patience Collier... I can remember Patience Collier in that as the Governess. It's just interesting.

TA: Yes.

JG: The New Lindsey Theatre Club, now what was this? [looking carefully at programme] I don't know why this was The New Lindsey Theatre Club. I remember nothing about it. It was Morland Productions Limited, Short Spring by Tony Block. Nobody in it I've ever heard of...

TA: Were you a collector of anything else apart from the programmes, or was it...?

JG: There are the programmes and my copies of Plays and Players. I think that was about it. Otherwise I was out seeing my friends and doing stuff.

TA: Yes, of course. Fantastic, very interesting.

JG: Yes.

TA: [seeing a programme] The Saville Theatre – which theatre is this now?

JG: This is going on a bit. I'm sure you don't want to go through absolutely everything – you'll be here all night!

TA: No.

JG: But this was The Wild Duck. This is '56 actually – The Wild Duck at the Saville Theatre. What was the Saville Theatre? That's the other thing – they change the names of theatres don't they? It was one of the Shaftesbury Avenue ones and it was licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, STP Theatres Limited, John Clements. That was... Dorothy Tutin – she was lovely in that. Angela Baddeley – she was Hedwig. George Relph... But, you know, we'll put this down... then you get to the Court. Family Reunion – where was that? Tennent Productions! They were pretty good actually, I shouldn't be so nasty about them!

TA: [laughs]

JG: They were pretty good. That was at the Phoenix, you see that's changed its name. Oh no it hasn't, it's become a cinema!

TA: Oh no, the Phoenix is still the Phoenix.

JG: Yes, they've got Blood Brothers on. [looking back at programme] Paul Scofield in The Family Reunion.

TA: It's interesting how the same actors' names pop up.

JG: Yes, but look at this. Sybil Thorndike, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Nora Nicholson – you may not have heard of – Patience Collier, Cyril Luckham, Paul Scofield, Harry H. Corbett, Lewis Casson. The Family Reunion. What a cast!

TA: I guess back then you could get those kind of names to do a run of a show?

JG: Oh yes, they did do runs. That's one thing, I gather that actors don't want to do long runs any more. And I can understand it. But I don't know how long something like – it was a Paul Scofield-Peter Brooks season. So I don't know how long it was on for. [looking at a programme] That was Paul Rogers again doing Macbeth. Hotel Paradiso... Alec Guinness was in that, Kenneth Williams, Billie Whitelaw...

TA: Wow! I would have loved to have seen some of these!

JG: And John Nevill's Richard II was just superb. It's a pity he went off to London, Ontario. And then here's, oh yes, Brendan Behan The Quare Fellow at Theatre Royal Stratford. Yes.

TA: What a fantastic collection!

JG: I know, I know! Look Back In Anger... The Devil's Disciple. Did you know Alan Badel or not?

TA: No.

JG: He was a very good actor. I think he died quite young. That's it, you see. [Hands over programme] The New Watergate.

TA: Thank you. [pause] Ah, there we go. [reading] Hugh Beaumont was one of the directors... Donald Albery...

JG: Yes, yes. Right. You see the Court were doing things like Brecht...

TA: And were productions transferring from the Court at that stage to larger theatres?

JG: No, I don't think there were in those days. I don't think so. I can't remember if The Entertainer did start at the Court and transferred, but generally speaking they weren't. You would go and see the play there.

TA: At the Royal Court.

JG: And actually the Royal Court is still very true to its beliefs to some extent. I'm going to see Enron on Thursday.

TA: Which is doing amazingly well.

JG: And I think that may transfer.

TA: Oh it announced its transfers before it even opened at the Royal Court.

JG: Right, well we managed to get tickets.

TA: It's got a West End transfer, a Broadway transfer and a film. Amazing.

JG: Yes, it is amazing. It does make you realise that it is still possible for theatre to work.

TA: In that kind of post-war period, what was the relationship between the theatre and television and film? Obviously there was crossover with actors – Olivier was in a lot of films as well as on stage...

JG: Well you can forget about television. Television didn't really exist. It was very, very limited. Not many people had – in the fifties – not a lot of people had television.

TA: It was with the coronation, wasn't it, when everyone went out and bought a TV?

JG: But even then, I remember us going next door to our neighbours to watch the coronation in '53. But we didn't get a television for some years. It was later in the fifties when we got one. And then, I don't think –

TA: It was predominantly film?

JG: Yes, it was more film than anything. Oh, I'll tell you another deeply memorable production was Saint Joan where Kenneth Williams played the Dauphin. And he was a very good straight actor.

TA: I guess you kind of remember him from the Carry Ons and –

JG: Yes, but actually he did have this other side to him. So, yes.

TA: Well, thank you very much for sharing those with us.

JG: Yes, I'm sorry I've gone on a bit about the programmes!

TA: No, no. It's interesting to hear those names because they've almost grown into legend. Well, they have. Gielgud, Kenneth Williams, Olivier... These were all people who –

JG: Edith Evans, Sybil Thorndike...

TA: Absolutely.

JG: Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies. These plays – she was The Mother in Long Day's Journey Into Night at the Palace Theatre. A searing performance.

TA: Fantastic. I think we're running over slightly but any final thoughts at all? It's all been fascinating actually.

JG: Let me think. Well I think that – I suppose all I'll say is that I'll take back what I said about Tennents actually. I think it was more what the Kenneth Tynans of this world wrote about Tennents.

TA: OK..

JG: But I do think it was a particularly rich time and I think it's a shame it's really so difficult now for people to get to the theatre. You know, it's a shame. [pause] What I might do one day – I'm really grateful to you because what I've done is I've opened the box [of programmes] and I've put all these in order now. I'm going to go through them properly sometime. I might even write something just – as you can imagine, going back this length of time, it's difficult to remember everything. But I had forgotten I'd seen Vivien Leigh at Stratford. Obviously it wasn't a deeply memorable performance! [laughs] But I'll never forget Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies doing The Mother in Long Day's Journey Into Night. I think that's about it.

TA: Fantastic. Well, thank you very much again.

JG: A great pleasure.