

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Jan Carey – interview transcript

Interviewer: Charlotte D'Arcy

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Actress. Assistant Stage Manager; auditions; critics; female roles; The Guildhall School of Music and Drama; Arthur Gurney; Mermaid Theatre; Arthur Miller; musicals; Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond; repertory; Paul Scofield; Spring and Port Wine; theatre-going; television; theatre in the round.

CD: Hi Jan. Thank you very much for joining us at the British Library today to talk about your theatre history. Can I just ask – as a first question – how did you get into the theatre? Did you go when you were a youngster or...

JC: I was always very lucky because my mother used to take us a lot to the theatre. We lived near Portsmouth – Southsea - and there was the King's Theatre Southsea, which had all the post- and prior-West End plays and operas, ballets, you name it. We used to go once a week when I was... I suppose from the age of about ten or eleven, and sit in the pit, which was wonderful, which you had in those days. So I saw a great deal and I was very lucky and I always loved going and was never prevented from going, so it was never really an issue. It was great, I saw an awful lot.

CD: What kind of things were your favourite? You said you had ballets and plays and...

JC: Yes, well I saw the tour after the original West End Look Back in Anger. The London cast – that was Alan Bates and Kenneth Haig and Mary Ure, and I can't remember who played Helena. But we were very lucky and all the West End plays with Paul Scofield and Tony Britten and oh! It was a great galaxy – it was very exciting. And then ballet; I can't remember what ballet companies there were. Sadler's Wells Opera used to come, and then on Sundays at the King's, Southsea the great tradition of very, very good Sunday concerts. So there were soloists and orchestras and it was good. I was very, very lucky, and very lucky that my mother loved it because she wanted to go into the theatre. That was the end of the First World War.

She came down to London and met Elsie Fogerty who was the founder of Central School. It was then running in the Albert Hall and Elsie Fogerty said, 'I'd like to take you on', and when my mother got back to Edinburgh (where she lived) there was a bit of a rumpus because she never told them she was coming to do that. They said, 'No, you can't. You've got to do something proper'. I don't think theatre was greatly thought of then in those days.

CD: So, she took your mum on... [coughs]

JC: Yes. But my mother was not allowed to go, not allowed to train.

CD: Awww.

JC: And I think that's why my mother loved it so much and used to take me so often, you know. I was very lucky, very lucky. Lots of theatre. Then at half term, at my local school, my mother and my younger sister and myself used to go up to London for a matinée and do a day return on the train from Portsmouth to Waterloo. So I did, I saw an awful lot.

CD: I'm impressed! [laughs]

JC: [laughs]

CD: You used to go every week!? Wow!

JC: Nearly every week, nearly. Not quite every week but a great deal.

CD: Then you start going off your own bat after your mum introduced you to it?

JC: Yes. And how old was I...? I was about 17 when I got into Guildhall - Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I got in as a pianist - I loved the piano and I had a wonderful, wonderful teacher at school who was a music professor at Southampton University and he taught about five of us and I got into Guildhall on that. Then you had to have a second subject, so I sang something... I can't remember what, [chuckles] - it was a long time ago - and they said, 'We'll give you a small scholarship for singing'. So I said, 'OK, and I want to act as well'. So they said, 'Enough's enough', so I thought, 'Don't say any more! Get in and try and change over', which is what I did - I ended up doing mostly drama.

CD: Why did you decide to change from music to drama? Was it because of the theatre background?

JC: Yes. I always wanted to act because I always knew I wasn't a good enough pianist to be a soloist.

CD: But you have it on your CV still, so you're obviously pretty good.

JC: Yes. [laughs] I'm trying to do more practice. I enjoy practice much more now than I did when I was a student and at school. I try to keep it up. I did about three and a half years at Guildhall and in the end I was almost completely in the drama department.

CD: Nice.

JC: It was very lucky, the Guildhall. I don't know if it's still the same, but the only music/drama school in London that would let you do a combination of music and drama.

CD: Really?

JC: If you went to the Royal Academy I think it was music... yeah, I'm pretty sure it was. And if you did singing as a student at Guildhall you had to do opera classes, which was about 12 people sitting in a room having to sing arias from opera, which I absolutely dreaded. But a lot of the opera classes were taken by some of the drama professors, and that's how I got to know them. Then in my first year, I think, or second year – at the end of every summer term there was a student production, a drama production that an outside director was brought in to direct, and it was an open audition so a lot of music students thought they would audition as well and I did. It was a lovely, lovely thought – and wow! – and was a play called *Our Town* and is an absolute classic, so then I was hooked really.

CD: You couldn't go back after that?

JC: No. So that was that.

CD: So how did you find your years at Guildhall, then? How did they teach you and...

JC: It was very interesting. For drama you had individual tuition, which I don't think you do at other drama schools and I was trained by a wonderful man called Ambrose Marriott, who was so great to learn with. And then you had all the aspects of drama teaching; you had movement, you had voice production, everything like that. It was quite a good course.

CD: Sounds like a great course!

JC: Yeah, it was good. In those days it was in John Carpenter Street, which is just off Fleet Street and when I was there they were saying, 'Oh, in a few years we'll be moving to the Barbican.'. Well, I think it probably took about 15 years after I left for them to move. [laughs] It was a lovely, wonderful old-fashioned building and you had to book your rooms if you wanted to practice piano or anything – but I suppose that's the same in a lot of music and drama colleges now. There was never enough individual space to

go and practice. But I remember it. I was scared stiff, absolutely scared stiff when I went. There was a central waiting room – it was where you sat and waited before you went to your classes and I remember being absolutely terrified of going in there because I didn't know anybody. St Paul's Cathedral was up the road, so I used to go up and sit there, which was much less intimidating. [laughs]

CD: [laughs] Less intimidating – St Paul's less intimidating? Wow!

JC: Yes. So, that was that then.

CD: I bet drama was a good subject to get to know people – I imagine you got to know loads of people through that.

JC: Yes... Yes I did. One or two in my year, I don't think we were a wildly successful year as regards to those who are very well known now, but some very good friends... Very good friends, yes.

CD: Do you think, with your history in music, that that helped you out in the drama sector a bit because you were multi-talented?

JC: [laughs] Multi-talented.

CD: [laughs] Well, yes.

JC: Yes, I did use my singing a bit when I was much younger. Yes, it did help. But I don't use it now.

CD: That's a shame.

JC: Well, I think I haven't got the voice that's needed for musicals now and anyway they're much too frightening to audition for – they're absolutely terrifying to audition for, musicals.

CD: How was auditioning when you used to audition for them?

JC: Sorry, how...

CD: How was auditioning when you used to do it, because I noticed on your CV that there was mountains of theatre work.

JC: Well, singing auditions... I remember the Royal Shakespeare Company were doing *The Beggar's Opera* and I had an audition for that and it was at the Aldwych in the West End – it was when the RSC used to use the Aldwych as their London base. And – I remember arriving at the stage door and the auditions were being relayed up to the stage door, so there was some actress or singer singing – I think it was the Jewel Song from *Faust*, which is a very operatic aria. I thought, 'Heavens! What do I do? I've just got a folk song that I do unaccompanied.' The audition was held on the stage and it was the set of *The Representative*, which is *Hochhuth* – it was done recently in London, somewhere I can't remember, but is an extraordinary play about the... I think it's about the Holocaust. But anyway, it was a very bleak, black play, and the set was entirely black and I remember going on to it and thinking, 'This isn't exactly cheery'. And, you know, the pianist always comes forward and says, 'Can I have your music?', and I said, 'I haven't got any!' [laughs] and he looked a bit astonished. And I think I was so nervous I said, 'Can I sit down and sing?'. So I sat down [laughs] and I didn't get the job, needless to say.

CD: Oh no.

JC: But that rather put me off doing singing auditions. So I don't think I did them any more.

CD: You were quite brave to do it unaccompanied, I'll give you that.

JC: Yes. Anyway, there we go.

CD: Was that the only audition you did for the RSC? Are you not really into acting out Shakespeare?

JC: I did an ordinary acting one and it got nowhere and then about fifteen years ago I did another one and it got nowhere. So I never tried again.

CD: Not a Shakespeare fan?

JC: Oh, absolutely! But nowadays you seem to have to commit yourself for a long time to Stratford and there's not much for women of my age in Shakespeare and there's a lot of people wanting to go. No, I think that's past. No, I think Shakespeare's wonderful, but not enormously for me really.

CD: Not in the acting way.

JC: I'd like it to have been but that's the way it goes.

CD: But you've done a lot of other theatre as well. How did you get started doing that? What was your first one and how did it snowball from there?

JC: Well then, 1961 it must have been, there were so many repertory companies in Great Britain...

CD: You did lots of repertory...?

JC: Absolutely wonderful. Yeah, that's where you learnt... that's where you learnt acting. I mean, there was hardly any television and you went off to rep and you became part of a company and you usually stayed six months [or] a year or something and you did an extraordinary range of parts. I started off as an ASM – assistant stage manager – and my first job when I left Guildhall was a summer season in Colwyn Bay in the North of Wales (but that theatre doesn't exist any more) and I stayed there for the whole summer season. That was weekly and it was a mid-week changeover, so you finished a play on Wednesday night and opened a play on Thursday. [laughs]

CD: Oh my God!

JC: A weekly rep was the norm then. And where did I go next? I think I went to Canterbury and there, again, I was an ASM playing small parts and juve leads as well but you really learnt your craft – possibly you learnt some bad habits too, because of having to learn a part in a week, but it was good discipline. You had to learn and act in a night otherwise you weren't there for the dress rehearsal and the technicals and if you were ASM-ing you got back about 10.30/11 to your digs and you had to sit up and learn act one before you went... [laughs] And initially, in my first job, all for £7 a week.

CD: A week?

JC: Mmm...

CD: Oh my...

JC: [laughs] It makes you think, doesn't it?

CD: Yes.

JC: And out of that I paid my agent – I had an agent then – 10% and then you had to pay for your digs and your food out of that. But you did. I mean the cost of living wasn't so dreadful then.

CD: That's out of £7....?

JC: [laughs]

CD: I can't believe it. [laughs]

JC: Yes, and my next job was £7 as well, in Canterbury, I think. Then it went up a little bit. It was a good time. We made great friends and you learned and nowadays there isn't that for people coming out of drama school. You knew pretty well, on the whole, that when you finished one job in rep you would write a great deal of letters and hassle, but you knew you'd get another job. Not so now. Much more difficult

CD: It's great experience. It must look great on your CV to do repertory theatre because you've got all these different kinds of plays to show... That you're quite an adaptable actor.

JC: But all my generation did that. I'm not remotely unique. Everybody's done it and I think it's such a shame and such bad luck that it doesn't exist any more. Of course, when you come out of drama school... there's nothing obvious to do. I suppose you hang around for the television, of which there's less and less and less or you get into the RSC or the National. But when you think about the number of people coming out of drama school – they must be desperate. No, rep was good.

CD: You said you were an ASM. What did that entail?

JC: That entailed usually being on the book and getting together all the props for the performance. There was a designer, always, and you had to go round, you know, and shops would lend you things – you didn't usually have to buy – and you made tea and coffee for everyone. You were just, I suppose, a bit like a runner on the television, you were there for everybody. But there was a stage manager, an assistant stage manager, maybe two. My first job was a lovely elderly actor whose name was Morris... (I can't remember his surname) and he was the manager of the company. So it was quite busy. You learnt... Did you have to do lighting as well? I don't think so, I think there was... Do you know, I really can't remember. I think of all the palaver there is now and you look at the back of the programmes and you see the number of people running a theatre you think 'woah'. Back then...

CD: There weren't so many of you. What kind of – you said there weren't so many of you – what kind of team did you have to create? You know, you said you've got the manager and then you've got the designer and you're talking about the lighting but how many people would make your set and everything and run it?

JC: There was the designer... Summer season was sort of different from the bigger reps because it was done for people going on summer holidays, therefore the play were quite

light. They were interesting but nothing very heavy because they were on their holidays and it normally ran, I think, for about three months probably. And yes, there was a person who employed you [who ran the company], there would be a set designer, there must have been a carpenter, a stage manager, an assistant stage manager and maybe lighting but that's it. Then the company of actors would consist of your leading man, your leading lady – they were actors probably in their late thirties, early forties – there would be the juvenile male and female and there'd probably be a character male and female actor and the plays would be built round them. Sometimes not everybody, of course, was in every play because it depended on the cast. No, you did learn.

CD: You seem to have learnt a lot!

JC: As I said, anyone else in my generation has done exactly the same.

CD: It's true, because I know so many people who've gone to drama school and it's really difficult from them to get jobs because they just haven't got the kind of experience your generation has.

JC: No, and also coming out of drama school there's a lot of people just a step ahead of them who maybe have done a little bit of work and, because there is so little around – so little television drama around – and everybody's cutting back, cutting back, cutting back, your obviously going to employ somebody who's probably got a little bit of experience rather than someone who's got none at all and that's very hard, very hard indeed I think. But that's the way it is. It's not very good at the moment.

CD: Do you think theatre's better back then?

JC: It was different. Oh, I mean vast improvements. Television has grown hugely but the powers that be – ITV is cutting back on drama programmes.

CD: Oh, really?

JC: Mmm... and the BBC is not very helpful either. So hopefully it might change. I think whether they're waiting for the general election next year I don't know but there was a lot of publicity against the BBC this morning about all the huge salaries and expenses and it's the licence fees. Well the general public pays, and there was a lot of disquiet about that.

CD: How do you imagine TV's changed theatre, if you think it's changed it at all?

JC: If it's changed theatre?

CD: Yes.

JC: You can't really compare the two of them...

CD: Like, in the past there was a lot more plays because there wasn't TV. Maybe now, I imagine that TV's kind of changed theatre, kind of for the worse?

JC: No. I think theatre will go on, but I think television drama has changed because in the sixties there were wonderful writers like John Hopkins, and then you come to Dennis Potter who died – he must have died about ten years ago or more – but they were writers who wrote for television and in the BBC you had Play of the Week... You had one new drama every week, you had so much drama and there was such a lot of really, really good writers – was it Alan Bleasdale who wrote Boys from the Black Stuff? It wasn't only the BBC, because Granada used to do a wonderful drama called The Jewel in the Crown, which was a wonderful series about India and that was drama of the highest quality. I don't think Granada do any drama now. It doesn't pay; it doesn't get the ratings.

CD: Yes, I know.

JC: People like all these celebrity shows and all the reality shows and that's what brings in the audiences.

CD: Yes.

JC: And the minority things like drama rather get pushed aside

CD:; It's a shame really, isn't it? You've gone some TV and a bit of film work as well...

JC: Not much though

CD: You've done The Whistle Blower, haven't you? I've heard of that one.

JC: I never saw that. And A Man for All Seasons, which was quite exciting – sitting at Paul Scofield's feet for two days, I remember that! I think I was a member of the household and it was quite exciting to have Paul Scofield sitting there in a row for two days. Wonderful actor, wonderful actor. I haven't done any film for a long time.

CD: How do you imagine that doing TV and film compares to being in the theatre? What do you prefer?

JC: Well I can't really talk about film because I've not done enough, but I enjoyed both but they're both completely different. With the theatre you've got a chance of doing things to your performance and you're working with a company in the theatre and that's what I've been brought up with and I love the camaraderie of a company and if you play in rep for four weeks or you're in the West End or whatever, there's a chance to develop because you don't stop after one performance, whereas with television you've got one chance, not necessarily in the right order. [laughs] I did a television play about Lord Reith for the BBC and a wonderful actor called Tom Fleming played Reith and that was, I should think, probably one of the last company television experiences I had where you actually met as a company and you rehearsed for maybe two weeks or three weeks, I can't remember. Then you went into a studio and you filmed it in about five days, and now you go to a read through, if you can, and a lot of the cast probably won't be there or some of them won't be there because they're doing something else, and that's the last you see of everybody. Of course if you only have two or three scenes that'll be grouped together possibly in one day if they can manage it because it saves having to pay you for more than one day of filming. [laughs] You just meet the person you're doing a scene with and that's it. But I still enjoy it enormously; I like television but it's a completely different medium. It's like radio; I mean, you've got your audience here with radio. That's quite exciting.

CD: You've done a bit of radio.

JC: Not for a long time. There used to be a radio drama repertory company, which was a great learning ground and it was quite a big company, which has been cut back and cut back and I don't think it's a very big company now. And, of course what's changed with the BBC – television and radio – quite a lot of the stuff isn't in house any more and independent companies make a programme and are commissioned by the BBC I suppose or they try to get the BBC to use it. So it's not just radio happening in a broadcasting house

CD: Do you prefer having the audience, because you were saying that the audience was 'here' on the radio – do you like playing to an audience? Do they feed you when you're acting? Do you know what I mean, like...

JC: Yes.

CD: their responses. How were the audience in the theatre?

JC: It depends on the theatre. I mean, with an ordinary proscenium arch theatre you've got a whole bank of lights at you before the audience, and of course you know you're they because you're giving your performance for them. But it's very different from playing in the round – which I have quite a bit – when you've got people on four sides very, very close to you. And you're absolutely conscious of who's there and who's gone to sleep [laughs] – and the concentration... You really have to concentrate. Really, really, really. The first time I did in the round was the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond and it was when they were in a room just over the pub and I don't think I've ever been so frightened before doing the first play I did there. I thought, 'What on earth are you

doing to yourself?' People would sit in the front row with their legs sprawled out, so you had to kick them out of the way if you had to get there or – you could take your drinks in – if there was a table on the set you'd suddenly find a glass of beer on the table [laughs] and somebody in the audience had put it there. But it's exhilarating at the same time; very frightening, very exciting. You get used to it a bit but it is hard work because of the concentration. I've done that at the old Stephen Joseph Theatre in the round in Scarborough Alan Ayckbourn's Theatre and the Orange Tree – I've done quite a bit there.

CD: I noticed that you've done a bit at the Orange Tree and that's a round theatre?

JC: Yes. Well, sort of square/round – it's four sided. It's a very good little theatre. It seats something like 130/140.

CD: Tiny little theatre, is it?

JC: Yes. But they do amazingly interesting things like big cast plays. I remember they did in the room – I think it was something like *The Way and The World* they did in the pub. But a lot of fringe theatre/pub theatres are so adventurous now and it's great and you think, 'that's where all the interesting work's going', but then you don't get paid much. It's not subsidised.

CD: That's the only problem.

JC: But that's pub theatres. The Orange Tree gets Arts Council money but the smaller pub theatres [are where] you don't get paid much, if at all.

CD: Did you do many big theatres as well? Because I noticed that a lot of your theatre work was at the Orange Tree.

JC: The last West End thing I did was *Pygmalion* in the Albery. Is that the Albery, yes. Up from the Duke of York's opposite the Coliseum. Yes, that's a huge theatre. Then very early on I did a play called *Spring and Port Wine* by Bill Naughton who wrote *Alfie* and I did that originally at the Birmingham Alexandria Theatre. A year later it was brought into the West End by some of use who had done it at Birmingham and we went to the Mermaid first. The Mermaid was a very interesting theatre and when I first went there with *Spring and Port Wine* it was just a long warehouse and you looked out of your dressing room windows at the end down into the river and there was nothing round it. It was an amazing place. Now, I think, it's got a four-lane motorway between it and the Thames. It's surrounded by buildings (even buildings on top of it) and it hasn't really existed as a theatre for a long time. Very sad. A lot of interesting stuff happened there

CD: Like what?

JC: Like what?

CD: Yes. You don't have to tell me but...

JC: [laughs] It was started by a wonderful man called Bernard Miles – he was an actor/manager – and it was his theatre. Lovely actor, quite an eccentric man, a great man. I think he was quite famous for doing a Christmas Treasure Island – Long John Silver – and he always had a live parrot, which was quite famous. Hadrian VII I remember there, with Alec [McCowen]. Oh, lots of really, really, really good things, but I think that sort of finished its life about ten years ago. They keep trying to resurrect it, but it's changed so much from what Bernard Miles conceived – being overwhelmingly swamped by buildings and offices. It's very sad.

CD: Did you prefer doing the big theatres? Or was it at the small ones where the atmosphere was better?

JC: No, big theatres are great... If you're doing good work with good people it doesn't matter where it is; if you've got a good script I don't care – it's just the quality of work you're looking for.

CD: What are some of the best scripts you've ever done that really stand out to you?

JC: Well, I suppose most recently – at the Orange Tree – was a play by Granville-Barker called The Madras House. I just think he's just a wonderful, wonderful writer. He was a great friend of Bernard Shaw but younger and he wrote the Voyage Inheritance, which the National did a few years ago. A great writer – I absolutely loved doing that.

Always a wonderful play I remember, by Somerset Maugham, For Services Rendered, which takes place between the two world wars – I did that at the Stephen Joseph in Scarborough. I really loved that. But you know when you do things there are bits in some where you've enjoyed the experience or maybe it's been tempered by something, but on the whole you rather forget if there's been anything bad and you remember the good, yeah.

CD: Is it dramas that you like to do or...

JC: Not necessarily. I love doing comedy but comedy's much more difficult, much more difficult than doing drama. I like to do something funny.

CD: What funny ones have you done?

JC: Well, Spring and Port Wine was quite funny.

CD: Yes. What was that about?

JC: It was about a family... Well, Bill Naughton came from Bolton, and it was about this Bolton family and it was the mother and the father and four children, two sons and two daughters. Hilda was the youngest daughter - that was me - and I think the premise of the play was that they had the evening meal and it was herrings and Hilda refused to eat it, so that caused absolute ructions and mayhem in the family and she stood out because she wasn't going to eat it. That was probably the main strand that went through, and then there was the older sister who had the boyfriend who lived next door and then the lovely older brother character; John Alderton, John played that. It was really good Bill Naughton family. I think it was made into a film with James Mason a few years later. I did that for over a year.

CD: Wow! That was a long, long time.

JC: It is, yes, yes.

CD: What did the critics think of it?

JC: I think they liked it, because I think quite recently – well not very long before there'd been Alfie, which John Neville had done... Bill Naughton was a popular writer then. I don't know what plays he wrote after but Alfie and Spring and Port Wine I think were two of them. I remember actually, some years ago I did an interview for the BBC radio and I think Spring and Port Wine was then on the GCSE syllabus list, or somewhere, and I went and talked to them about it and I think one or two of the others did. So that summer in the BBC... it's a good play.

CD: I might go and see them if it comes round again, it sounds quite interesting

JC: It was done last year somewhere like Stoke-on-Trent near Bolton in the Midlands. I think it was.

CD: What were the – sorry, going back to the critics – what were they generally... we they quite harsh towards plays – sorry, I'm still thinking of post-war here – did they change at all or...

JC: What do you mean? In the way they wrote?

CD: Yes.

JC: [laughs]

CD: I didn't think about that one, did I? [laughs] No, I was just thinking... Most of the plays you did, we they quite well received or...? I'm just interested.

JC: I think... I seem to remember on the whole... I sure some plays had bad notes when you were in rep but you sort of forget, really. Oh, I'm sure there were.

CD: I don't want to conjure up any bad memories!

JC: I did a play in Salisbury not very long ago and we liked it hugely; it was a play by J.B. Priestley called *The People at Sea* and there hadn't been a performance for a very, very long time – I think it was one of his earliest plays – and we all enjoyed it enormously and the audience loved it but the critics were a bit iffy about it and perhaps there was a reason why it hadn't been done for a very long time. [laughs] But I find J.B. Priestley very intriguing; I like his plays. But we all enjoyed it and the audience did. I mean, the problem with critics is that it's one person's opinion and it can make or break a play. I don't know who the really great critics are now; when I was starting off there was Kenneth Tynan, who was probably the most famous critic there has ever been because he was a brilliant writer, a brilliant writer. But nowadays you get it in the paper when something's got one, two three, four stars, five stars. You read it and see and bad crit about something but you go along and see it and enjoy it enormously because a critic can't but be subjective I don't think. They may not like that type of play, they may not like that particular actor, they may love something that nobody... Anyway. I don't think you can particularly rely...

CD: Yeah, it's a personal thing

JC: You shouldn't rely on a critic's judgement if you're looking for a play to go and see. Some actors say they never read the critics – I'm not sure that's true. [laughs]

CD: I think they'd read it if it was good! Did Tynan ever go to see any of your plays? Did he say anything about them, or...

JC: I don't think so. He might have done but I don't remember. No, because I was never part of the Royal Court, which was the great breeding ground for new writers when I was starting out. George Devine ran the Royal Court and that's where new writers congregated, still is really! Good plays from new writers.

CD: Where did these good writers come from? Were they trained at a special, like... You know, RADA's really good now, well it always was for drama and things, but did the writers come from anywhere like that or were they just 'people'?

JC: I don't know. I don't think Alan Bennett got train to write plays. I think, nowadays, there are certainly workshops and things for writers – I think the Royal Court had workshops if you want to go and do a workshop on how to write a radio play. Then

there's the National Theatre Studio, which will take a play if they're interested and let you work there and maybe stage it and see it as a play – it doesn't mean that they're going to take it and produce it, but I think I'm right in saying that. I wrote a piece – it must have been about ten years ago – about a First World War poet and composer called Ivor Gurney who was born in Gloucester in about 1896/4, and he went to the Royal College of Music and then went as a private soldier in the Gloucester Regiment to the trenches. He absolutely fascinated me because a book came out of all his letters, which was edited by somebody called Kelsey Thornton (who is Head of English, or very big in English at Birmingham University), and they were so exciting to read because he wrote as he thought and he had a mind that went in every direction – a very sharp mind – and he wrote the most wonderful poetry and I thought, 'well here you've got a guy that writes poetry, is a composer, writes wonderful, wonderful songs.'

He had a mentor, a woman called Marion Scott fifteen years older than him who was also at the Royal College in her time and who started the student's union there, who saw the genius in him and supported him. In the end he landed up in a mental asylum; he was always a bit unstable. He was gassed at Passchendaele but that was not the reason he became schizophrenic, as some people think. And she supported him loyally 'til he died. He was fifteen years in a mental asylum in Dartford, still writing. But I thought this was so interesting and I put together a celebration of this man and I played Marion Scott and John Malcolm Sinclair played Gurney and a wonderful, wonderful singer, Ian Partridge, sang the songs and Jennifer, his sister, was a great accompanist. I really, really, really loved doing that but it was a bit expensive to put on because it was very necessary to have a good piano and if you went to a music festival there was a piano, but if you went not to a music festival you had to hire a really good grand piano and that cost a fortune and it just got too expensive. We did it on the South Bank at the Purcell Room – I don't think two years running but with a year in between to coincide with Armistice Day.

Well I enjoyed doing that enormously. I could never write a play, but it's quite interesting, very interesting researching, putting all the things together and using other peoples' words and turning it into something.

CD: Are you still not interesting in writing a play because it sounds like you've got a good idea of how to do it.

JC: I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know how to write a character.

CD: Really, after playing all those characters?

JC: And I wouldn't know how to write a novel. No, I don't think I'd know where to start

CD: Well you're suited to acting then.

JC: Directing?

CD: You're suited to acting... Have you ever thought about directing?

JC: I couldn't do that. I don't think I'd have the patience to direct. I don't think I'd have the patience to teach. I'd be so cross if people couldn't do exactly what I wanted them to do after about ten years – I think I'd be absolutely useless.

CD: A bit of a perfectionist?

JC: No, I just wouldn't be good. I know my limitations. [laughs] What else?

CD: Goodness me. Well I was wonder what your inspirations were – you were talking about Ivor Gurney a lot and how he inspired you to do that thing on the Southbank. What other inspirations have you had? Like, though your acting career? Maybe an actor or...

JC: Well I think you always have your person you look up to. Peggy Ashcroft was a wonderful, wonderful actress and someone I grew up seeing as an actress and I thought she was incredible. I suppose she was my acting heroine. She did such an enormous cross-section of things too – all the classics like Chekhov.

CD: Interesting that you picked a lady as well. Were there many female actresses then, or was it easier for men to get parts?

JC: I think it always had been.

CD: Yeah.

JC: Well, when you look down the cast of a Shakespeare play, and if you look at most plays or on television now, there are very few women. I watched last night, because I'd not seen it, the play about Mrs Thatcher; there was Mrs Thatcher, there was her companion and I think that was it [laughs] - Lindsey Duncan. Yes, that was it I think – there might have been somebody opening the door or a secretary or something (I don't remember that) but it was a play about politics and she had no women in her Cabinet.

CD: Really?

JC: So there you are, two actresses employed in that show. And very rarely do you get a play with all women, very rarely; you get plays with all men. No, but I think it is easier for men because there's much more work for them and I think as a woman, the older you get the less work there is.

CD: Did you find that there was a lot of competition for parts because there wasn't many of them?

JC: Absolutely, there always has been and it gets more and more difficult as you get older.

CD: You dealt well with that, obviously you get loads of parts but then again you don't get loads of parts. You must have been quite strong to have taken it and just moved on.

JC: Oh, you live a life of rejection if you're in the theatre. Oh yes, rejection is sort of automatic. You can't take it personally and you know that's how it's going to be when you start out and if you don't want to be rejected, don't go into it because there's too many of us right across the board for what there is available.

CD: So you've found it more difficult as you've grown older to get the parts.

JC: Yes. Yes. Bigger gaps.

CD: That's a real shame.

JC: That's life and I don't think it's going to get any easier or better looking at the situation now.

CD: But you plan to continue?

JC: Yes, until I can't remember my lines or can't walk or have to go about in a Zimmer frame. Yes.

CD: There might be parts for that though.

JC: [laughs] Yes, well, as you get older you get more nervous too because you experience all the things that could possibly go wrong

CD: Yes, but then again you've experienced them, so...

JC: But you do learn how to cope with them. You do sometimes stand in the wings and think, 'what on earth am I doing putting myself through this!?' But you do it because there's something about it that you can't really let go. I think I actually envy people who say they don't want to do it any more.

CD: Yes?

JC: It would make life much simpler if you still didn't have that 'bug' of wanting to go on acting.

CD: It must be so much fun though; you must have travelled to loads of places.

JC: Not too much, I haven't done a lot of touring

CD: Really?

JC: No, no I haven't

CD: Not been abroad with it or anything?

JC: No, no I haven't. I haven't even been abroad doing commercials on television, which is one of the ways of getting abroad. No, no I haven't.

CD: Would that have been something you would have liked to have done if you'd have had the chance?

JC: Touring abroad? Yes, I think that would have been fun with a company like Cheek by Jowl. All the big touring companies used to go abroad and those were the days when the British Council sent tours all over the world. It doesn't happen now, not much anyway.

CD: It would have been fun to go abroad. Were you watching any of the plays from America or anything? Back in the sixties like West Side Story or Oklahoma! or Rodgers and Hammerstein stuff?

JC: Oh yes, that was so exciting.

CD: It's really good, isn't it?

JC: That was really exciting because there'd never been a musical like it.

CD: Which one?

JC: West Side Story. It was really.... You thought 'this is not just a jolly musical with jolly tunes, it's really, really serious'. Wonderful music.

CD: Did you see it?

JC: Yes, I saw it. Before that there had been things like Oscar Hammerstein like South Pacific and Oklahoma! and The King and I, which were all lovely with lots of tunes and costumes. And then you came to West Side Story and you found this horrendous conflict, and he's just brilliant, Bernstein, for the music. That probably turned musicals.

CD: Stephen Sondheim and his lyrics are really good as well, aren't they? I'm a fan of Stephen Sondheim...

JC: Yes. They're more like spoken plays, Stephen Sondheim, they were wonderful. You have Andrew Lloyd Webber. I did see at the Majesty's... what's the one that's gone on forever? Phantom of the Opera. I saw that in the very early days, but I haven't seen any others of his. I liked Joseph and the Amazing Coloured Dream Coat - that was great because Tim Rice's lyrics were good and it just was what it set out to be and I saw it originally when it was done at the Young Vic, partly because a friend of mine was in it. I enjoyed that; and then, of course, when I was growing up there was the two famous English musicals/British musicals, Salad Days (Julien Slade) and The Boy Friend, which extraordinarily came along almost at the same time. Two very, very, very different musicals but they were such a hit, such hits they were. And yes, so West Side Story really changed things enormously.

CD: Yeah, I mean I'm not too familiar... I'm familiar more with the American musicals than the British ones, but you seem to be familiar with both of them. How did they compare? Was the American one a bit more grand or... because I'm not too sure.

JC: American ones on the whole were much bigger and the dancing was extraordinary in American musicals. You think of West Side Story and it's probably only in the last ten or so years that the dancing in musicals in this country has been absolutely phenomenal and in Dirty Dancing the dancing is great. The dancing in... oh, my brain has gone... what's the musical? Roger [Allam]'s just going back into it down at the Playhouse Theatre... anyway that dancing is absolutely amazing and I think now at drama schools you get such an overall training, which you didn't do when I was at drama school. I think young actors can dance and sing in a way that we didn't back in the sixties and you think, 'would one have got into drama school now, because the range is so enormous and the dancing is absolutely spectacular?'. So American musicals I think did that for musicals over here, and I'm sure - I've haven't been to Oliver! - but I bet if you went to Oliver! you'd find the choreography and the dancing there pretty good.

CD: So you were quite lucky, as I said before, in the fact that you were musical and a drama student as well, and they didn't teach you dance or anything when you were...

JC: Not as such, no. Movement. But not dance; it was much more separate. I did do The Boy Friend.

CD: Oh you played in that as well?

JC: Yes, I did that in Sheffield.

CD: Did you?

JC: Yes, in the old theatre.

CD: Which theatre?

JC: It was called the Sheffield Playhouse then, and I played Polly Brown in that.

CD: How long did that run for?

JC: Oh, it was just in rep.

CD: Oh, it was?

JC: Yes. Three weeks I think, but I haven't been to Sheffield for about twenty years. I did a play by Racine, Britannicus, in the New Theatre. What's happening to it, by the way? There's a new artistic director, isn't there, taking over?

CD: Oh gosh, I'm not sure. I just know that there's a lot of work going on at the Crucible at the minute

JC: A lot of work?

CD: Yes.

JC: Yes, because it's been closed, hasn't it?

CD: Yes, it has. So... you didn't know much about dance then, huh?

JC: No, no.

CD: So it took a long time for dance to be introduced to the British musical?

JC: No, it was there, but was not the same calibre of dance that you got in American musicals, which was brasher and up front. No, that's not the word. I suppose American musicals were probably a bit more spectacular, probably because more money went into them because *Salad Days* and *The Boy Friend* were not great, spectacular musicals at all. Then, as you say, *West Side Story* came along and you could use serious subjects for musicals

CD: Did you see any change in the British theatre after that came out when they thought, 'well we can do more serious things in this'...

JC: In musicals, are you still talking about or in general?

CD: Musical or in theatre because it came and it changed, so...

JC: Well everybody says *Look Back in Anger* changed it, but people also say no, that it was changing already. There was a lot of theatre around, a lot of plays around then. Of course, there wasn't the television. I think plays in this country have always been a very interesting cross-section, a very varied new plays, and it's gone on being so. There are amazing playwrights.

CD: Which playwrights did you really like in the sixties? Harold Pinter was one of the big ones, wasn't he?

JC: Yes. I've never done Pinter. The American Arthur Miller I think was a fantastic writer; I've done one of his plays.

CD: Which one?

JC: Oh Lord...! Oh heavens above... I did it in Plymouth... about two brothers...

CD: It wasn't *Blood Brothers*, was it?

JC: No, no. The 'Something'... my brain is seriously going. It's about two brothers, one is a surgeon, a doctor, and the other is a policeman, who're selling off the contents of – I guess their parents have died. And then there's the old antique dealer. I'll probably remember when you switch that thing off.

CD: Probably.

JC: No, *The Crucible* I think is one of the most wonderful plays and I've never done it. I think it's an amazing play

CD: Why's it so amazing in your opinion?

JC: The subject and the way Arthur Miller writes, but I think Arthur Miller is a very, very great writer and I'd like to have done more of his plays. I haven't done a great many new plays; I mean, you go back to Chekhov, which I love doing... Never having played at the Royal Court, I've never had opportunity of doing new plays at the Royal Court, where a lot of new plays go to. The National do masses of new plays – have you seen *Enron* yet? That sounds absolutely fascinating.

CD: I've never heard of that.

JC: The David Hare play at the National sounds very good; those are the two plays that were written about the financial situation in the world and in the country and it's completely different and very, very interesting.

CD: Are we good?

JC: OK.

CD: Yes. Well, that's an hour, so...

JC: Was it?

CD: I told you it would go quickly. But is there anything else you want to add before we end? Anything at all? Preferably about theatre.

JC: I don't think so. I hope I haven't repeated myself.

CD: Nope. Well, then thank you very much.