

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Alastair Davidson – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Hannah Laver**

2 February 2010

HL: OK to start off, what were your first experiences of the theatre?

AD: My first experience of the theatre was at school and I was a very active member of the dramatic society there. We used to do a lot of readings and quite a number of performances and I had always wanted to go into the theatre. The damage was done when I was first taken to a pantomime at the age of five and from then on it was the theatre. However, being the son of a farmer. I couldn't go into theatre. I mean, I was always told that I would die in poverty in a garret if I went into the theatre. So I had to choose something else, and I did science at Edinburgh University at a very young age. I spent most of my time with the dramatic society and with the annual charity revue. Then I was called up into the RAF when I failed all of my science exams in my second year. Having been in the RAF - I technically did war service although the war had just finished - I was due to receive a government grant and I took my government grant to go to drama school, much to the fury of my family. I wasn't quite good enough for RADA and they sent me to PARADA which at that time was a Preparatory Academy to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

HL: Because I was quite unsure about that because I couldn't find much information on it.

AD: Oh really?

HL: I could only find information on RADA.

AD: Right. Well, it only functioned after the war for a number of years because they had so many ex-service people applying and they instituted... well it was an ex-registrar of RADA who set it up... and the audition panel at RADA; if they didn't think you were quite good enough or there was some problem, they would recommend you went there and usually you were given a place there if they had recommended you. The reason I was sent there is because I was very, very Scottish and at that time if you were going into the theatre you had to speak proper received English. That was the principal training that you got at RADA. I did a year at PARADA and then I was accepted into RADA. I didn't audition until the end of my first year because they didn't think I was ready. When I did, I got in. I did my two years at RADA in a class with Sheila Hancock, Marcia Ashton - I have problems remembering names.

HL: That's fine.

AD: Rosemary Harris. Some of my contemporaries there were people like Joan Collins... I can't think of any more at the moment.

HL: That's fine.

AD: I graduated from RADA in 1952, and on our graduation you're always given a talk by one of the leading persons in the theatre, and it was Flora Robson who gave us our leaving talk and the gist of it was, 'Nobody wants you' [Both laugh] 'and you have to work very hard and you must send out a letter a day so that you've always got some hope in the post'. Most of the letters - I may say - remain unanswered.

HL: Uh huh.

AD: Just before I left RADA she said, 'If you're offered a job, take it. It'll probably be the only job you're offered'. And I was offered a job by the Fraser Neal Players up in Scotland because they were opening a season of rep in the Dunfermline Opera House. The only reason they were offering me a job as an ASM/small parts was because I was local interest. My home town was Kirkcaldy, which was a neighbouring – a large neighbouring – town to Dunfermline. They offered me £4 10 shillings per week and I refused that and said that if they didn't pay me the Equity minimum - which at that time was £5.00 a week – I wouldn't be taking the job. They gave me £5.00 a week and we opened a season. Fraser Neal – the Fraser Neal Players - Fraser Neal himself was head of a large costume and scenery hire company with a premises in Edinburgh and he'd always had an ambition to have a repertory company and this was it. Usually he hired out musical productions to amateur companies and he also produced quite a number of variety shows - something called Variety Revue which I will come to later - which was the sort of main, what you might call "ordinary entertainment" in Scotland at that time. I think they would be termed number three variety houses, and they had this peculiar form of entertainment, but I'll come onto that. The Fraser Neal Players were a weekly rep playing popular fare – mainly Fraser Neal's own favourites - things like *Geannie* and *Aloma of the South Seas*, [Laughs] *The Seventh Veil*, *Johnny Belinda*, *Pick Up Girl* – which we toured. We toured *Pick Up Girl* and another play of that time called *Cosh boy* which we played twice nightly round the variety theatres in Scotland, which was quite an experience because we were playing to - I would say - a working class audience who were usually the recipients of this resident revue and a play was very strange for them. *Pick Up Girl* was set in a court - it was a courtroom drama – and they would get very, very involved and vocal as well. I mean, you got comments and all sorts when you were playing it. It was a most extraordinary experience. Anyway, that was that. We completed our season and finished up that year – just before Christmas – in Inverness where the season finally died on - I think it was – a production of *Treasure Island* which was done in two acts. The first act was in the inn and the second act was on the island. So, the ship was missed out completely! And I played the character in that who came on every now and again – I was one of the sailors on the ship - and I came on to tell the audience what had happened in between times. It was a sort of made up character and it was terrible!

HL: So you acted as well as being Assistant Stage Manager?

AD: Yes I acted as well as Assistant Stage Managed in those days.

HL: Right! OK.

AD: That was one of the times when we acted from what was called a cue script. You weren't given the whole script of play, you were given your part with a few words of the cue line that you would given from the characters who speaks previously to you. So you had no idea what was going on! [Both laugh]. When you were learning your part... and it was very curious... but this is how plays were done at the beginning of the century; the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. I don't think I have any other comments to make about that. I then went on to stage manage for Fraser Neal. His company was called the House of Mutrie – M-U-T-R-I-E – and they were a well known company in the theatre in Scotland. He had two pantomimes that

year. I started off with *Dick Whittington* at Dundee. We put that on and then I went on to do the pantomime at Her Majesty's Theatre in Carlisle and it was *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*... we did actually have forty thieves! Although some of them were the juvenile troupe. They ranged in size from over six feet to about three feet. But the forty thieves did actually emerge from the cave in *Ali Baba*. I think that panto also had - I think - one of the best non sequiturs ever! There are always specialities in pantomimes, but my absolutely favourite one was in *Ali Baba*. We came into the desert scene with the entrance to the cave and to introduce the desert scene there was a skirl of bagpipes and on came 'Marigal of Joyce' on his unicycle playing the bagpipes in full highland rig! He came and did his act aided by the genie of the ring - who was his wife... [laughs] and I still find that one of the most curious things that ever happened. Right, at the end of the season in Carlisle I went on to do - again for Fraser Neal and the House of Mutrie - the spring show at the Glasgow Pavilion. Glasgow Pavilion was a well-known Number Two variety theatre at that time. The spring show lasted eight weeks and was this curious hybrid called resident revue - which is something that happened in Scotland and I think only in Scotland - where a variety company was set up, and this consisted of a comic and his feed, the second comic and the feed, there was always a soprano and a tenor, a musical act, a chorus line - who were supplied with their routines - and one or two other members who did - sort of - well just came on in the production numbers. There was also a speciality act that came in every week. Acrobats, jugglers...

HL: Wow!

AD: Something like that. There was a new Speciality Act every week, and every week the show had a different theme. The only things that were set was the opening chorus where everyone came on, and there was also a set finale which was not always used. Sometimes there was a production number instead of the set finale where they did a sort of number and a sort of pantomime walk down. In between... [pause] Every week had a different theme and we got a complete set of scenery and costumes for the particular theme. There was an army week, and a Scottish week - and I can't remember all the other ones - there was an animal week where I remember I had to find 12 dogs because we had a dog finale; "Your dog loves my dog, so if our doggies love each other why can't we?".

HL: Aww!

AD: That was quite a week! Because being stage manager you did everything, there was only one person. The resident theatre had a props man, an electrician, a stage manager in charge of all - this was the resident stage manager - they had the follow-spot operators and an electrician and assistant who worked the switchboard - which was a big manual switchboard. The shows went on with a minimum of rehearsal. They were twice nightly. The rehearsal happened on a Thursday and we had a rough set-out of what the show was to be. The various acts were given a timing to work to. The production numbers were sort of mapped out with a piano. On the Friday - which was also Treasury Day where those members of the company who didn't have an agent were actually paid by me in cash - that was also the day that we had a very rough run-through of what was going to happen. Not complete - nobody ever did anything complete, that didn't happen until the Monday morning. But for the Monday morning... the scenery came in on a Monday morning and I was given a list of the scenery at the end of the previous week for the numbers; the production numbers and the front cloths of the various things we were doing. I mean, we also had sets of drapes and curtains which were used. But I was given a list of the scenery and on Sundays I used to have to sit down and work out on paper where all the cloths and borders and anything that was hanging; where it was going to be hung and where the rest of the scenery - which was

normally bookwings, perhaps one or two other built bits which came on stage – I had to work out where they were going to go, how they were going to be, and how they were going to be stacked in the wings. On Monday morning at eight o'clock, the scenery came in from the stores in Edinburgh and I used to have to sort it out with the resident stage manager, hang the hanging pieces, drop cloths and borders and anything else that had to be hung, and then put the scenery in the proper order it was going to be used; stack it at the side of the stage, and at ten o'clock, we had a band call and during the band call I set up the stage and marked it all and there was a rehearsal with the band for all the band numbers. The comedy couples didn't do their routines; they said what their routines were going to be. They gave cues for the start – what they wanted at the beginning of their routines, if the band had to play a few bars, and at the end of their routine to play them off. And they gave the switchboard their lighting plot. The switchboard wasn't cued – the switchboard did its own cues – and they were given a plot of the cues and they took it from there. The follow spots were also given a list of cues. I had to work out on paper lists for all the show staff that came in - the stage staff - there were a couple of electricians because of course we had to have occasional lights in the wings, and rough cue for the follow spots, but the individual acts gave their own cues to the follow spots. This was twice nightly and - I've been trying to remember the times and I think it was six o'clock and eight o'clock - and the vital thing was that the first house had to be down at eight o'clock. The second house started – no it had to be down before eight o'clock - the second house started at 8.15, and the interval had to come at quarter to nine, because at that time with the licensing laws everything closed at nine o'clock and you had to get the second house interval.

HL: There was no room for mistakes then?

AD: No mistakes! If the first house was overrunning you cut out something in the second act for the first house. I mean arbitrarily - it was just taken out; people were told it wasn't happening and you just jumped forward. If you missed the second house bar you had the wrath of the theatre management on you. You simply could not miss it. If you went up late and you were running late you'd cut something out of the first half so that you didn't miss the interval. You just went on first house on the Monday and you did the show. If anyone was overrunning on the time... the most important thing in the prompt corner when I was running the shows was a stopwatch, and everything was done on the stopwatch. And if anyone overran the time, I signalled the orchestra pit and they played the...

HL: [Laughs] Oh?

AD: ... the music for the end of the act [laughs].

HL: So, was that type of job much more stressful then? Or was it even more exciting?

AD: Well, I mean, at that time you were young and it didn't matter.

HL: Right.

AD: You just went on and you did it, because that was your job. It was one of these things. It was eight weeks and you had some of the most extraordinary things I mean we had the week with the Highland glen! Now the Highland glen was the finale, and we had a pipe band for that – quite a small pipe band – but I mean we had the shepherd and his dog and then we had the pipes and the Highland glen was quite well built up, but it had a walkway down like that [makes a winding gesture] and came down and there was a waterfall [laughs].

HL: Wow! That's some set building!

AD: Which was a pump pumping up to the top and overflowing which had to have... you had to put some Jeyes fluid in it. This wasn't for... to keep it from going nasty; this is so that you would see the water from the front. You had to have some...

HL: Some colour in it?

AD: ...colouration in it, and that just provided cloudy enough so you could actually see it. The whole company, I may say, for that... I mean, they [pause] trooped down the Highland glen - I mean - went on forever for about three times because everyone went out one wing, round the back and came down the Highland glen again! So you've got a never-ending troupe of people - which did eventually end - they ended up on stage in a sort of pattern. I had to go out and get all the props and things for these. We had... there was the army week - we had the cookhouse sketch. And the cookhouse sketch was the one where we made a rabbit pie, so there had to be a rabbit which was put in this pie. This was also the one where they had the dough which got everywhere. The rabbit I had to find. I got a rabbit - it was a very nice little timid rabbit - but we also had custard pies! Custard pies are normally made with whipped up shaving cream - but I didn't like that because I'd used it in the pantomime previously and it's really quite hard work making the foam for the thing - and so I didn't do that and I went out and I got proper custard.

HL: Oh no!

AD: There was a bakery very near me and I used to get these huge jugs of custard! [Both laugh] Needless to say, the rabbit found out about the custard and the rabbit, during that week, was kept in my office in a big box and this little timid creature, during the week, blossomed out into quite a large, glossy creature with no timidity whatsoever! I had great problems keeping it in its box and keeping it... I had no problems keeping it fed. And it found the custard and I think the custard was the thing this great big glossy rabbit... By the end of the week it was absolutely extraordinary. Anyway, that was just one of the things. We also had papering the house during the course of it; it was on on one of the weeks. Papering the house; where you had to have the paste and that is shaving cream. It's very hard work because it's really a sort of foam and is very messy. You have to put a tarpaulin down on the stage because it becomes... it can become very dangerous if you'd got any dancing or acrobatics -

HL: Because it was slippery?

AD: [nods] - following one of these routines; the cookhouse and papering the room. Yes. I think that's about all. The chorus line - they used to bring their routines - they were rehearsed. They came from an agency which supplied chorus lines with a rehearsed routine. They came in with their band parts on the Monday because they always opened the second half. But that was it. It was a sort of introduction to the stage management in all its glory, a sort of baptism of fire for a stage manager because nothing was rehearsed properly, you just went on and did it. It was a fascinating experience. Not one I wish to repeat I may say! Although, I almost did. I went on to do the Cosy Corner Dunoon, which was the same sort of thing - this was a summer show - and that was twice nightly. The big difference was the change of programme came in the middle of the week on a Thursday. We changed the programme so that holiday makers who came in the week could see two different shows! That was twelve weeks. I don't know how we managed twelve weeks, but it was on a very small scale. I also went out front of house in my dinner suit in between shows. I also saw the audience in as well as stage managing and playing in sketches. After that I went on to the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, where I got a job as ASM props. I was asked if I made props and I said yes. Of course I made props - you'd never say 'no'. I'm quite useful with my hands and I'd done sort of, odd things but I'd never made props as a prop maker. I got there and the first thing that

happened is that the designer appeared in my room where I was going to make my props, with a huge sheath of sketches for the first show, which was an historical Scottish epic and I think the 11th or 12th century it was set. There was nothing you could borrow, it all had to be made, and I had to set-to making it...

HL: How?

AD: Including a banquet complete with goblets and plates. I raided the prop rooms... the prop stores at Glasgow Citizens. And I managed to get some of the things, but not all of them. And I had to make a complete set of goblets and all sorts of things, and what looked like, you know, a banquet of that time. And I had swords and shields and all sorts of things to produce. You just did it. I was there - Glasgow Citizens - I was there for the whole of that season.

HL: Sorry, this was all in 1953?

AD: This is in 1953.

HL: Right.

AD: Sorry, I haven't given the dates. Yes 1952, I started. 1953 I did the pantomime - Carlisle '52/ '53 - and this is 1953. That's right, Cosy Corner Dunoon was Fraser Neals' Coronation Revels; it was Coronation year. Glasgow Citizen season went through until - that's right - until the spring of 1954 when I decided it was time to move on and I got myself a job at the Pitlochry Festival Theatre as an ASM small parts. The Pitlochry Festival Theatre, the shows were done in repertoire there, so you started of doing one show which you put on, and you were also rehearsing another show and you put them on in sequence, and then once they were all on you were playing them two or three performances a week. So you had - during the week - I think we had seven shows so any visitors could see a different show every night.

HL: Wow!

AD: Well there's not a lot to do in Pitlochry except go and visit the Highlands and if the weather's bad then the theatre is the place to go. At the end of that season I went back to the Citizens Theatre. What happened was they had a touring company going to Ayr and one of the stage management fell ill and they needed someone in a hurry. I'd finished my season at Pitlochry and I was looking for work when they suddenly rang me and asked if I could go down to Ayr and take over the stage management on a play there. So I did. And I stayed at Citizens until we did the Christmas show; we did *Tobias and the Angel* for the Christmas show there. Following that, we were doing a New Year show which was a Robbie Burns; an adaptation of Robbie Burns' *Tam O' Shanter*...that's right, it was the *Tam O' Shanter* with music and it was one of these disaster-prone productions. It had a flying angel in it and a whole lot of other things, including a big transformation scene at the very end of the piece. And we never ever finished rehearsing it properly on stage. We never finished the technical rehearsal properly and the last dress rehearsal never got finished properly. And the first night was a sort of build-up to total disaster. We got through the first act more or less, except the flying angel didn't finish up on her plinth at the end of the first act; she finished up swinging to and fro.

HL: Oh no!

AD: Then we brought the curtain down. The second act just went from bad to worse because we'd never been right through it properly on stage doing all the things. The lighting went wrong, the lighting cues started going awry in the early part of the second act. We managed to get through to the penultimate scene which was an interior. Then we had a big transformation into the graveyard with all the ghosts and things, and the 'Cutty Sark' and the sort of orgy in the graveyard and we never got there. ['Cutty Sark' -

a short shirt in Burns' poetry. The reference to 'cutty sark' is an old Scottish name for short nightshirt as *Tam O' Shanter* ends with an orgy in a churchyard.] The penultimate scene started moving away but unfortunately the fine gauzes and things came down too soon and got caught at the top of the scene, of the bits of scenery that were moving off. The bits of scenery that were moving off had been designed by an artist and not by a scene designer -

HL: Ah right.

AD: - And they were top-heavy. They had very narrow bases and they were very - they were about twenty feet tall - so they were very, very unstable. The orchestra was playing *Over the Sea to Skye* to cover this big transformation and they carried on playing it, and they carried on playing it but we never got the transformation finished - nothing happened - by which time, you see, most of the audience had gone. We eventually dropped the house curtain. I wasn't the Stage Manager, I was ASMin'g.

HL: And the SM?

AD: It was the stage manager... had hysterics. She was having hysterics in the corner and she was running the show, and it was me who dropped the final curtain. [Laughs] We managed to get it sorted out the following morning, but it really was a total disaster. During that I got a telegram from the Dundee Rep asking me if I would go there as stage manager. The stage manager there had been stage manager at Pitlochry and he had gone to Dundee. He was taken ill and he told them to get in touch with me -

HL: How kind.

AD: - To take over from him, which was very good of him. And off I went to Dundee. Which was a fortnightly rep. So I went there and I was there from the spring of '55 for about three months. It was an absolutely excellent fortnightly rep. It had a good company, absolutely marvellous scene designers working in absolutely ghastly conditions. It had been one of these... I don't know, Masonic halls of some sort, you know, with a sort of long narrow hall with a stage at one end. The scenery and everything had to be done in a room underneath and brought up through a hole in the stage. It was very difficult conditions, but the two designers were absolutely marvellous. I left there in the early summer after a new director came in who had his own stage manager and well, literally - almost literally - got rid of me. It was fairly unpleasant but the management were very, very good. I left there with no work and prospect and I went home for a while to stay with my parents. I then went on down to London looking for work. It was then that the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet were looking for a new Stage Manager and I applied, and because I'm quite musical - I read music and I played the piano in my young days - and I was lucky enough to get a job with them. I think... let's have a little break?

HL: OK that's fine.

[Interview - Part 2]

HL: OK.

AD: Right. I joined the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet in summer of 1957. After a few weeks rehearsal we went out on tour. Now, the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet at that time was based in Sadler's Wells Theatre, and it was largely a touring company. It did short seasons in Sadler's Wells but it was out touring for between 32 and 35 weeks a year, and mostly weekly dates with a repertoire with three changes of programme per week. So we went out with a repertoire of hugely... well up to nine, ten ballets - some of them two acts some of them one acts - and the only full length one that we had when I was initially on tour was *Coppélia*, which was quite a lot of scenery. Both the scenery and the

company travelled by rail. With a company of our size - because there were I think about 60 or 70 of us including the orchestra and the company and the stage crew - we only had a small stage crew; a carpenter, props and an electrician, and two in the wardrobe, and two stage management; one the company manager stage manager and the deputy stage manager which was me. We toured number one provincial theatres round the country, and in some places we played cinemas instead of theatres because they were larger and had been built as theatres, although they were used as cinemas. It was a fairly hefty routine. 1956 was the first visit of the Bolshoi Ballet to this country, and we were playing in Leeds at the time. The director of the company, John Field, had two tickets had two tickets for the Bolshoi opening night, but unfortunately we had to put on... we were doing a new production of *Giselle* and his wife, Anne Heaton, was going on for her first *Giselle* and he therefore couldn't go to the first night of the Bolshoi. By a process of elimination the tickets came to me as being the only person who could get away [laughs] at that particular night. So I was very privileged to see the first performance of the Bolshoi at the Opera House Covent Garden, which was absolutely amazing - we had never seen anything like it. It was one of the most astonishing evenings of theatre ever. Anyhow, a year later, in 1957, the Royal Charter was granted to the Royal Ballet and we became the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet - the Royal Ballet, formerly Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet. Under that cumbersome title we continued our touring. During that time we toured the continent, we went to Spain - we toured festivals in Spain - we toured various festivals on the continent and in 1958 we went to Australia and New Zealand. The touring at that time, particularly overseas was very complex indeed. They had to have detailed inventories of absolutely everything that we took with us; every item of costume, every shoe, every bit of props.

HL: Uh huh.

AD: Absolutely everything had to be totally inventoried for Customs in the various countries that we went to, and there were also problems with visas and various other things. It was a very complicated business touring at that time, and going off to Australia was also very complicated as most of the stuff had to be shipped off by sea. We - myself and the company - flew out, which was a major operation in those days. We flew from Heathrow. I went ahead of the company by myself and Heathrow at that time was a series of Nissen huts with Lloyd Loom furniture in them and you were collected when you checked in to your particular Nissen hut. You sat and you waited and you were eventually called by the stewardesses and put on a bus by them and taken out to your plane and I flew out in a Constellation, I think it was. It was the most astonishing flight - it was three days and three nights - and we touched down in almost every city you can think of en route to refuel. We also occasionally were fed when we went down. We were fed in places like Cairo and Karachi, and it was always what they thought an English aircraft would want. We were given their version of roast beef and two veg, which was absolutely horrendous. The aircraft I went out in I was sitting in a single seat; there were two seats one side of the aisle, and one on the other. I can't remember how many the aircraft sat but I think it must have been about 50 or 60, I know that we had a whole aircraft to ourselves on the way back, and that would be about 60 as we weren't carrying an orchestra. The Australian tour with the ballet - by that time we had become the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet - this caused some confusion between ourselves and the large company but we somehow or another got over that. While we were in Australia we had various guests from the opera house including Margot Fonteyn and Michael Somes for the New Zealand leg of the tour. We were away for the best part of nine months. When we came back we had a week off and then we went back on our provincial tours with a repertoire of - not consisting of the ballets that had been to

Australia because we didn't come back until about 6 weeks later. At the end of that tour I left the ballet company.

AD: Interestingly enough, the reason I left... On a previous tour we had been... we played – I think two or three times – a theatre called the Essoldo which was used... it had been built in the 1930s as a very new theatre. It was a disaster and it was used as a cinema. With the last time we played there, the stage was in very poor condition and it had a counterweight flying system which was also in very poor condition and things were known to drop out of the skies onto the stage and the stage was rather like ploughed field. The equipment was very poor and it... we sent back a report to the opera house – myself and the company director – saying that this was one theatre we should not play ever again, that it was in a very dangerous condition and I added that if this ever came up on the tour list again I would leave. When we came back from Australia and went out on a summer tour, towards the end of the summer tour we were given a list of tours for the following autumn and - lo and behold! - the Essoldo Brighton was the first date on the tour. I handed in my notice and I went.

Following that I had a short season at the Ipswich Rep. By that time I had aspiration to direct in the theatre, and this was mainly what I was after. I didn't succeed. So I spent an autumn season at the Ipswich Rep. I left that to do a little musical at the Lyric Hammersmith called *The Demon Barber*. When *The Demon Barber* finished I was lucky enough to meet Peter Dalby who was the general manager for an Impresario – a Theatre Impresario whose name I can't recall just at this moment – who was acting as production manager for Orson Welles who was going to do a tour of *Chimes at Midnight* which was his version of *Henry IV* parts 1 and 2 and a little bit of *Henry V* which was sort of a life and death of Falstaff. That was one of the most incredible experiences I've ever undergone. He had employed Hilton Edwards whom he had worked with as a teenager in Dublin to direct the piece for him, but that's mainly because he was too lazy to direct it himself and appear in it. He was the most astonishing man. He knew absolutely everything there was to know about the theatre, he knew exactly what he wanted, but he was too lazy to do most of it himself. Hilton Edwards he knew very well indeed, and that was an arrangement that worked very well but he also tried to employ other people to do his set for him, and the costumes and he was always employing people. He would get... he would tell them what he wanted and they would come up with what their version of what he wanted and then he would sack them. It was always... everything was at the last moment. He would eventually get down and do it himself. And in the last week of rehearsals for his tour - we were opening in Belfast – he first of all came up one morning, with a complete sheaf of costume designs and then he also came up with the set design which was very simple. But I still had to get a series of rostrums and about 500 spears and a whole lot of flags and pennants and various things at the very last moment. I think I had about four days. I was sent off to Belfast to arrange all of this. Painters... a scene painter came up from Dublin to help. The spears and the banners and the flags were all put together and I managed to get a blacksmith somewhere who did the spearheads for me and we had to get hundreds of broom handles and stick them on. That was in the space of a few days. We put together the show, which opened in Belfast, after the longest dress rehearsal I had ever done. It started at 7 o'clock in the evening and went through until 7 o'clock the following morning and was... [laughs] We had some very curious things! Micheál Mac Liammóir - who was Hilton Edwards' partner, and they ran the Gate Theatre in Dublin where Orson Welles started off as a teenager. Micheál Mac Liammóir had always been in Orson Welles productions in the theatre – and in his films – and he hadn't been asked to take part in *Chimes at Midnight*. However, being the person that he was, he turned up for the dress rehearsal and sat in the circle – the front of the circle – and in the middle... in the small hours of the morning there erupted - between Orson Welles and Micheál Mac Liammóir – a row. Mainly

based on the fact that Micheál hadn't been invited to take part in the tour and I don't... I think he must have asked Micheál what he was doing there and Micheál told him and then they had a row with Orson Welles as Falstaff in the middle of the stage and Micheál Mac Liammóir sitting at the front of the dress circle. Life was full of diversions. I mean, he was always calling rehearsals then cancelling them. We were also meant to be doing *Twelfth Night* – not in Belfast – but that was in the contract to be done with *Chimes at Midnight* when we got to Dublin and we were hoping to go on a continental tour after that. However, by the time we got to Dublin it became quite clear *Twelfth Night* was never going to happen, although we had some rehearsals. Orson Welles was going to play Malvolio. We had some rehearsals and then he sacked the costume lady and sent her away and didn't do anything more about costumes. Then it suddenly became clear this was not going to happen at all! However, we still had to carry on with some rehearsals when we got to Dublin because we were contracted to play *Twelfth Night* there, and this had to be sorted out with the management in Dublin. Eventually it was sorted out. We the company – myself and the company, I was company manager as well – weren't told anything, we just saw it in the paper that instead of some of the performances of *Chimes at Midnight*, Orson Welles was going to do a one man show.

HL: Oh! [Both Laugh].

AD: So he did. I mean, at that time people like John Gielgud were doing his Shakespeare readings and various other people - Emyln Williams. Orson just thought, "Well, I can do it too" and he got a lot down from the things he was going to read from. I think he found it wasn't quite as easy as they thought. It requires a good deal of working out. Anyhow, he did it. I was put in the prompt looking after this. Nobody else was allowed backstage. And that was fine. He told me what he was going to do and how he was going to do it. At the end of the... when he had finished his reading he was going to step forward, take a bow, and then he was going to move back and I was to drop the house curtain, then we would take it up and he would take a further bow. However, on the first night he got such a good reception, he went forward, took his bow, started moving back, at which time I cued the curtain to come down, he stopped half way back! He took another bow, and the curtain just came down on top of him! He took some more bows and as he walked off stage past me the observation I got, "You fucking clunk". I think it's the only time I've been called that [laughs]. But, I did precisely what he asked, but he didn't! Anyway that all sorts... it was a sort of nightmare, but one that I wouldn't have missed for the world! The whole of that tour... the continental tour of course didn't happen. I mean the tour finished in Dublin, or sort of expired. He was very, very good when we opened in Belfast because he was relying on the company to carry him. He was unsure of his words but he gave a marvellous performance. As he became more sure of his words, he kept changing the script to make it better for him as Falstaff and eventually it finished up with a production where he dominated centre stage, upstage and the rest of the company were down either corner half turned up stage. And it really, it disintegrated. But it was an experience.

After that, yes I did the New Opera Company. I sort of started off doing little, sort of special seasons. In between times I got offered jobs for things like the New Opera Company to do a couple of weeks at Sadler's Wells doing operas that weren't often done. I did a couple for them. Then I got the job of deputy stage manager on the original production of *Oliver!* This was in the early summer late spring of 1960. That was - in its day - was a revolutionary production. It had a fully mechanised set. I mean, mechanisation in these days was fairly rudimentary. It had a revolving set with two side pieces that moved up and down stage and a number of large flying pieces. It was a marvellous piece of theatre, it was a magical production. It all worked brilliantly. Although we as the company - it was done as a small, cheap production - and we as a

company had no idea it was going to be the success it was when we opened that show at the - what was the New Theatre in London. It had been changed completely. We'd done some time down at Wimbledon Theatre. Nobody came to see it and the people who did come to see it said, 'It's going to be a disaster'. That was when we opened in London. The first night audience had come expecting a disaster and it was one of these extraordinary evenings when the curtain went up to - what I can only describe as - a sort of hostile audience who... it wasn't until the middle of the first act - they suddenly erupted when the big middle of the first act number "Consider Yourself" happened. The show literally stopped at the end of that number and we couldn't continue until the applause died down. It went on...well, it felt like forever but it must have been two or three minutes which is a very long time for something like that. Anyway, it was a huge success and we pioneered the no masking of the lights and general masking round about for the very simple reason we couldn't, and after sort of various efforts to try and mask the lights we decided it really wasn't worth the bother. And we were the - I think - the first production to show most of the workings of it. Anyway, it was and still is an enormous success. Although the current production bears little relation... the current production is a - what theatre is - it is a spectacle.

HL: Yes, spectacular.

AD: Whereas we, we were telling a tale. It was more story-led. Anyway, that was *Oliver!* I was with *Oliver!* for its first three years. One of the things about *Oliver!* is that it opened... when it opened, the West End theatre contracts were for 'run of the play' and that meant run of the play with no holidays. With the salary that you were getting on that contract and you were with it as long as it ran. You didn't have leading ladies that only did five performances out of seven, you had leading ladies who did - sorry, five performances out of eight - you had leading ladies who did eight performances out of eight. So it was very hard work.

HL: Very hard work!

AD: It wasn't until... it was during the run of *Oliver!* that they changed West End contracts, and the West End contracts became annual for twelve months at a time and they included holidays. The management - I may say - of *Oliver!* were very good indeed. After we'd been on for eighteen months they started giving people holidays and they did give us increases in salary, because the salaries were all absolutely basic it being a small cheap production. They did increase our salaries and they looked after us very well. It was only right, because it was making an immense amount of money. I eventually left *Oliver!* because I felt that I had got to progress. I'd never done a show in the West End before and I still had urgings to be a director and I thought I might - I thought when I was doing *Oliver!* that because I'd rehearsed all the understudies and all the new children and all the changes of cast - I thought I might have got some of the reproductions to put on, which would have set me off but I didn't. So, there we are. And I got a job, the next job was with the Edinburgh Festival, I was production co-ordinator. There were two opera companies and a fortnight before the festival they'd got the theatre to do their pre-production. We'd got an Italian company the first week for the setting up and rehearsing, then we got the English opera group for the second week setting up and rehearsing. And the English opera week then carried on and did the first week of the Festival. During the first week of the Festival the Italian opera company were coming in during the day doing their dress rehearsals. The initial object was to get the two companies to coordinate their lighting and the hanging of the scenery. It was absolutely impossible I may say. So we had one company rehearsing in the morning and with totally different lighting and totally different things to the company that was in the evening. Both companies - I may say - would not remove all of their things for the other company. And it was - I think - when the Italians company moved in and they were

doing very conventional productions. Whereas the English group were doing what you might call fairly new production, Very different in style. The English opera group had set up lighting booms in the wings which they refused to move. The first production that the Italians had to rehearse had rostra running off into the wings all the way up the stage and I thought, 'I don't know how this is going to work out' and it was absolutely unbelievable, because they moved in with their sets for their first rehearsal, and those rostra running off the stage ran exactly between the English opera groups lighting booms [laughs]. Needless to say, both companies thought I had arranged that [laughs] it was a small miracle but it did my reputation quite a deal of good. Particularly as I had to engineer other things like taking a big tuck in one of the English opera group's cycloramas because the Italians had left an absolutely immovable enormous bit of scenery in the middle of the flies And they couldn't get... The cyclorama had a painted bit at the bottom, so I had to get a huge tuck - took the whole thing to the sail makers and they put a tuck in the top of the cyclorama. Anyway, that was fairly hard work, but it was good.

I went on to the Wexford Festival in Ireland after that and at Wexford Festival they had one professional stage manager, one professional scenic artist and one professional lighting. And there was Reginald Wooley - who was a well known designer - he ran the Players Theatre for many years with his partner. Francis Read, the electrician, and he was one of the - I think - really one of the oldest lighting designers in this country and one of the best. We, sort of, worked together and the rest of our helpers were all amateur and the opera chorus was amateur and we had to run the shows by ourselves. It was marvellous and I thoroughly enjoyed that. I also went on after that to do a season for the Irish National Ballet which again, I enjoyed. After that I went back to rep at the Oxford Playhouse in the hopes of perhaps getting some directing work, but there was absolutely no joy there. Frank Houser had a team of directors there so there was no hope of getting in there.

HL: So it was really difficult to get into directing then?

AD: Yes! Yes, it can be. I mean, most of the best directors in this country have actually come from Oxford and Cambridge.

HL: OK.

AD: They're the places to go to if you want to be a theatre director. The Oxford Playhouse season ended. I had a little flirtation with the Opera House about the opera stage manager's job which I didn't get. In between times I was rung up - suddenly one day - and on June the 8th 1964 I find myself stage managing at a day's notice; the original happenings in this country. Now, do you know, have you heard about happenings?

HL: I haven't.

AD: Well I suppose this is the first of what you might call performance art. It was a collection of... There had been happenings in New York and on the continent and this was the first of them happening in London. It was a group of Theatre Impresario called Michael White who got together this group of artists and they were going to do these happenings in a hall in the basement of - I think it was - a Masonic building or something. In... or just from the New Victoria, well, Victoria station. He decided he'd better get someone to stage manage them because they needed all sorts of props including a bath and a loo and old shoes and all sorts of things. We had... There was sort of these nets that they hang down for training... you climb up, and all sorts of things. I got to help me a couple of my ASMs who had been at Oxford - as they had just finished as well - to put this thing together. I was given a duplicated sheet with just the names of the artists on, and I had a rough copy of sort of, what they might be

doing. I had a tape deck to play some music, because some of them wanted some music. I had no idea what this was going to be. But the great and the good in the theatre all turned up in this hall this evening in June 1964. The happenings were going to happen twice on successive evenings. However, on the evenings of the happenings they happened and – I can't... I have problems remembering names now – but there was an American lady artist who I read a big article about. She's still with us. She did something called *Meat Joy*. She had collected, sort of, about half a dozen persons - young persons off the street - who had to strip down to their underwear. I think if she'd had the opportunity she'd have made them strip off altogether. They rolled around on a huge sheet of polythene with bits of chicken and sausages [laughs]. It was absolutely awful. Though when the audience came in – or you might say participants came in – there were people sort of, clinging onto these nets which had been hung around this hall. They did all sorts of curious things. There was a couple who sat in a bath with masks of the Queen and Prince Philip on [laughs]. There was something called – now what was it – Gold... not Goldfinger, gold something. Where there was one of the men who had an electric drill with a brush on the end of it. Is that right? Which he stuck through his flies and, sort of, painted with this brush on the end of the drill whirring round. There was a lot of water involved as well. It was the most extraordinary evening. All the audience had to walk over a mirror and there were all these old shoes about. By the end of the evening there were some baths in this basement – there were cloakrooms with these baths – and some of the ones who had been in the *Meat Joy* thing went and had the baths but forgot to turn them off and they overflowed. At the end of all of this, we'd seen a sort of caretaker who looked at all of this and sort of [imitates a grumbling man] you know. Anyway, by the end of the evening the caretaker appeared in an absolute rage and threw us all out! The following day... threw us all out; I mean threw us all out completely. We were not allowed to go back the following evening, so the following evening didn't happen. I may say, this got a lot of newspaper coverage. This was a great artistic event, and all sorts of people were there. I mean, Peter Brook and all sorts of theatrical people, they came from far and wide and all the Impresarios. I still have somewhere, the original programme which is this duplicated piece of paper with the date on and happenings.

HL: Wow!

AD: I think that's worth recording. After that I... most of the things I did... I did a few weeks on a show at Piccadilly Theatre as a sort of stage management trouble shooter during their previews. It was a very complicated production with revolves going round one way and another. It had a, sort of, set of revolves, one inside the other and various bits of scenery that came off and on and did things. And during one of the previews the whole thing... the stage manager gave the wrong cue and the whole thing just came [makes cracking/crashing noise]. They had to unravel it and I was rung up in the middle of the night saying 'Would I go and take over this show' and I went with the object of doing that. It became quite clear though that I couldn't just take it over and that wasn't feasible. I helped them sort out the mess and helped them get the show running properly with the DSM that they had got. I spent a few weeks with them, and it wasn't doing very good business [laughs] and my services were dispensable. Then I went on to do a show at the Wyndhams Theatre, a straight play called *The Diplomatic Baggage*; very straightforward, conventional.

AD: Following that I went on to do a World Theatre Season at the Aldwych Theatre. These - at that time - were happening every year. They were managed by the RSC and it was mainly weekly dates of foreign theatre companies. Some of them played for more than a week, some of them played for a fortnight. It was a twelve week season. I was - I can't remember what I was called - a production co co-ordinator, it was something like

that. I had to get the companies in and out of the theatre and cope with any problems – technical problems – the things that they had during the season. This generally meant that on Saturday nights you were getting a company out of the theatre and once you got them out of the theatre the incoming company started coming in so that you worked right through. I mean, most of the staff – the backstage staff – worked right through from Saturday matinee until Monday evening after the show with usually, with any luck, a small short break in the small hours of the Saturday. With any luck some sleep on the Sunday night, but not always. That was a very interesting and exciting season. We had the Jean Louis Barrault Company from France. We had the Greek Arts Theatre. We had an Italian company. We had the Habima Theatre from Israel and we had the Actor's Studio from America, from the U.S.A. They actually had the last three weeks of the season. I thought, 'oh finally, that would be a rest' and they turned out to be – again – three weeks of nightmare.

They had two productions; they started off with *Blues for Mr. Charlie* by James Baldwin which was a marvellous play. It was directed by Burgess Meredith and it was super. The only problem we had is that they brought one of the... the lighting designer was a man called Abe Feder – I think – who was the top lighting man on Broadway and he took over! It didn't... you know, the actors and the rest of the show didn't mean a thing, all he was concerned about was getting his lighting right, and we had a bit of a tussle there because he wanted to work right through the night on the Sunday night and I stopped them at midnight after we got through the first act, which we started at 7 o'clock and we got to the first act by midnight. [laughs] He'd plotted all the lighting cues on paper, hadn't gone through them properly with the switchboard. The show never progressed; the actors said a few lines and then he reset all his lighting. At midnight I stopped this and said we're not going on and he said, [uses an American accent] 'Well if we don't go on, then we won't have a show!' and I said, 'If you do go on you won't have a show!' I said, 'because my staff have worked through Saturday night, they're not going to work right through tonight.' I said, 'Everyone is going to go home and come in tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock, we're going to go right through the lighting plot and get it sorted out and in the middle of the day, or early afternoon, we will do a run through of the whole show without stopping and with any luck you will have a show in the evening'. They were furious! They argued and they rowed, but that's actually what we did and it worked. But they were changing – again, they were doing ten days of this – and they were changing on the midweek change. They were doing *Three Sisters* with three cumbersome sets and the *Blues for Mr. Charlie* had been done – more or less - on a bare stage with blacks and lighting and not much else. They refused to coordinate their lighting. They got a different lighting designer for the *Three Sisters*. Which meant - overnight on the Wednesday - we had to take out the entire lighting rig for *Blues for Mr. Charlie* and put in the new lighting rig for the *Three Sisters*. The *Three Sisters* was opening the following night. Now, they'd had a rehearsal on stage on the previous Sunday with the *Three Sisters* sets but none of the lighting and none of the technical stuff had been done and we weren't able to do any of that until the Wednesday - no, the Thursday morning - when the sets had to be put up, the lighting had to be done and we were meant to have a show in the evening. It was a disaster, unsurprisingly. It was the head of the Actors Studio - whose name I can't remember - a very well-known gentleman who was directing *Three Sisters* and he had a very starry cast. Anyway, the *Three Sisters* – I think – eventually ended that evening at about 11 o'clock or a quarter past 11; it's the slowest thing ever! It really was dreadful, and his cast – I may say – also behaved dreadfully. The leading lady wouldn't come out of her dressing room unless the stage manager went and collected her personally! We had various other upsets; I had nothing to do with that, that was up to them. We had various other things including a special luncheon hosted by Robert Helpmann for them, to which nobody went [laughs]

or only a few of the small... none of the stars went [laughs] which upset quite a few people. Now, I was rung up on the day of this lunch by the lady who was organising it saying, 'What are you going to do about it?' and I knew the lady and I said, 'I'm not going to do anything about it, it's not my job, get onto their company manager if you really must, but I don't think it'll make any difference'. [laughs] So that was that. Then I went on to work on the Commonwealth Festival where I was production manager for... they had a poetry festival at the Royal Theatre where I had to produce and provide a set for that. I had nothing to do with the actual poetry but I had to do the Great Dance Gala. And the Great Dance Gala was taking place in the Albert Hall and it had consisted of about seven or eight dance companies from commonwealth countries that had to be melded into one show. Plus, a couple of hundred English Country Dance people. The companies varied from, sort of about a dozen to fifty or sixty. We had in fact – at the Albert Hall - I think between 600 and 700 performers and these had to be... we had to make out of what they'd brought with them. The director was a very well known opera director, he is called John Cox and I was production manager. It was my job to look after these people, feed them and house them – because we weren't playing in just the Albert Hall - we were going to Cardiff, Liverpool and Glasgow. So, the logistics were quite formidable and I simply said to John Cox, 'You've got to make a manageable show out of this' and I said, 'It must not run more than a two and a quarter hours at an absolute maximum, because you can get something like this that can go on for three to three and a half hours and your audience are just gone'. I said, 'It's up to you to get them to time their pieces and get them to cut it to a manageable size', which was very difficult. They all wanted to do their full thing and I said, 'You cut them to size and organise them into a programme that works and I will get a team of stage management who will get them on and off the stage – one lot going off as the other came off – so that we have no hiatus in between'. So I had a team – I think it was 12 ASMs - and at that time radio control was just coming in and we radio controlled them because they were all... There were a series of huge rooms in the basement of the Albert Hall and we had all of these groups, there must have been six because we had two ASMs for each group. One ASM at the entrance of the stage because they had vomitories coming up into the central area at the Albert Hall. We had one ASM there and one at the dressing room so that the dressing room one was called and brought them to the vomitory and the other ASM got them onto the stage as the others were disappearing off stage and taken back to their room. It was one of the most – I think probably the only – successful event of the Commonwealth Festival, which was one of these well thought up things which - when it came to it - really was a fair bit of a washout apart from the great dance gala. We did... we managed to make it into a compact programme and then we toured it. We had to take all of the participants, some of whom had never been out of their villages in Africa and various other countries. Who'd never been to a country where there were cities and built up places. Stairs were new to them; they'd never seen stairs before and most of them... Littlewoods were marvellous and gave us duffle coats for them all and also fed them on their first arrival; fish and chips! Which they took to – I may say – all of them without hesitation. Fish and chips; because we had to be careful about... because some of them were vegetarian and quite a few of them didn't eat pork and things like that so we had to arrange our meals very carefully. I travelled them around the country in a fleet of coaches with all these ASMs looking after them and their coaches. That was a thing. I mean, some of the local places, like in Glasgow, we had some highland dances, pipes and drums with them. I think we had a bit of a choir in Cardiff taking part. We didn't have... I don't think Liverpool provided any additional British content, but that was quite an experience. So then I went back to the Wexford Festival, the Wexford Opera Festival, after that and did another season there. Then in '65, oh yes, the end of '65 the British Council... The

man who got me to do the Orson Welles, by that time, was working at the British Council in the drama department there. He, it was, who engaged me to take out the British Council tour of what was going to be West Africa doing a couple of set books and a recital programme on contemporary plays. The actual content was being provided by the Nottingham Playhouse and I was engaged as the company manager by the British Council to look after this company. Immediately before we went we were going to do a fortnight in... we opened in Nottingham, that's right, we did the shows in Nottingham before we were due to leave. The week we were due to leave – which was immediately after the shows in Nottingham – the Biafra war broke out...

HL: Ah!

AD: AD: ... and our West African tour was cancelled. In the interim, we were sent up to Newcastle to play a couple of weeks at the Flora Robson Theatre in Newcastle to fill in. In the meantime, the British Council arranged for us to go to South East Asia, sort of, Malaysia and Brunei and Borneo ending up in the Philippines which was the most wonderful tour. Sets were very simple and were usually constructed in the various places. Peter Dalby – who was the Gentleman from the British Council and the man I worked for with Orson Welles – he went on ahead with them and arranged the sets and then we went on behind. That was a marvellous tour, I must say - I enjoyed that enormously. Then when I came back, the Sierra Leone national dance troupe - who had been part of the Great Dance Gala at the Commonwealth Festival – came back to this country to do a provincial tour by themselves. They had a full show they could do and I did part of that. Then I went on to do the City of London Festival; I was house manager. At that time the City of London had a Festival... *The Yeomen of the Guard* in the moat of the Tower of London. I was house manager for that – not a taxing job. I was also rehearsing another play that was going into the Arts Theatre; I did that... Her Majesty's Theatre; *Say Who You Are* which was a long running play and I took over as...

HL: I've heard of that one, is that one with just the four actors?

AD: Yes.

HL: And the one set?

AD: That's right.

HL: Right.

AD: Yes. Yes, ah. Then, having done that two weeks up in Newcastle with a company from the Nottingham Playhouse, I was asked to go up to Newcastle. The Nottingham Playhouse had been asked to take over the Flora Robson Theatre in Newcastle and run it as a rep theatre. They asked me to go up as general manager, which I did. And we got the theatre open and then I had some trouble and strife with the Nottingham Company. The Nottingham Company was at that time run by John Neville and his sidekick whose name I can't remember. They had all the financial... finances were done in Nottingham but I was supposed to work to budgets in Newcastle, and it really didn't work. And the arrangements they made... I wasn't meant to keep accounts. It was impossible and I tried to get them to change some of this and they took great umbrage at that and they sacked me. Well, actually, I'd offered to leave. I won't go into it. It was one of the most unpleasant things I've ever encountered in my time anywhere but I'd learnt enough – by that time – to keep my nerve and not lose it and I actually came out of it very well although very, very badly shaken. I also managed to make them – John Neville and his sidekicks and various other people – I managed to make them look absolute idiots. But they did that by themselves, I didn't have to do anything, all I had to do was keep my nerve and they did the rest. They lost their tempers and their nerve. But it was a really awful experience. I was very fortunate to get a job as assistant house manager at the

Festival Hall at that time; mainly because the house manager had been the general manager at Sadler's Wells when I'd been working at the ballet and I sort of kept up with him and he was the house manager there. It was a sort of period of recuperation, I think this is the only way to describe it. I loved working there; the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room had just opened and were very, very difficult venues to house manage; they were not audience friendly, unlike the Festival Hall. You couldn't alter them at that time because they were the pride and joy of the GLC's architectural department; and they had total control. So, making them audience-friendly was not their priority, their priority was architectural purity. [laughs] We won't go into that! I think that more or less completes what I have to say. I was very fortunate to get a job with the British Council in their drama department looking after theatre companies and taking them out on tour on the continent and, oh well, various places But my territory was more or less East Europe at that time and I did used to take drama and dance companies, programme them and take them out

HL: Right, I've just got a couple of questions.

AD: Yes?

HL: Because you seem to have travelled all over Britain, I was just wondering if you noticed a difference in audience? You know, anything different? Perhaps even between Scotland and England and Ireland, and did you go to Wales? Yes you did.

AD: No. When I was touring with the ballet company... I mean, when I was working in Scotland before that then... when I was doing the weekly rep – my first job with Fraser Neal and the House of Mutrie – that was a very different audience to the audience I played with later. The audiences we had with them were what I would call working class audiences and where we got good audiences, they were marvellous to play for. In the variety that I worked with, the audiences were wonderful! When I was on tour... With Rep we had very loyal audiences with the weekly reps that I worked with after that. I mean, up in Pitlochry our audiences, they were mainly tourists. With the ballet, well you see the dance audiences – there wasn't a lot of dance on tour at that time – so we played to good houses everywhere. We seldom played to what you might term poor houses. It did happen occasionally when we got a very large theatre – I mean as there were - some very large theatres and some not so big catchment areas. But for the most part the audiences were... there was not a lot of difference between them. Going out overseas was a different matter altogether. When I took companies out for the British Council when we went on tour with the ballet, I mean, our audiences... we got huge audiences as visiting companies, mostly very responsive. The only audience we had that wasn't terribly responsive was with the ballet company. One of the first overseas European tours that I did with them we played in the Opera House in Cologne. It was brand new, it had only just opened after the war - the centre of Cologne had been devastated and we were staying in a half built hotel. We were the first visiting company at the Cologne Opera House and they did not like us! Neither the staff at the Opera House nor the audience. We got a very chilly reception there. I mean, the audience came, but that was I think one of the most uncomfortable places I've ever played. Out of the Opera House, if they knew you were English you were not popular. This is what, '57? No, it would be '56. No, it was '57, early '57.

HL: OK and...

AD: And the German audience was... they didn't like the English.

HL: OK and then, just finally; did you go to the theatre much yourself?

AD: Oh yes, yes.

HL: And what were your favourite types of things to watch?

AD: I'm fairly eclectic in the things that I go and see. Ballet has always been one of my things. I loved going to ballet. But no, I go to theatre. I love the theatre and I go... Musical theatre in particular. Opera [pause] sometimes. But musical theatre is my thing. I go and see all sorts of things and I also keep in touch with RADA; I go and see shows there and I go and see shows of some of the other drama schools. I catch up usually with plays that I haven't seen when they've been on commercially and I didn't feel I could spend the money seeing them when they were on, but I don't mind seeing some of them now.

HL: OK, well I think that's everything!