

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

Roland Metcalfe – interview transcript

Interviewer: Marta Musso

22 March 2010

Chief electrician; lighting designer. Amateur theatre; Arts Council Funding; audiences; backstage training; Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham; Company X; Edinburgh Fringe Festival; The Everyman Group; King's Lynn theatre-scene; King's Lynn Festival; Ian Mullins; repertory; technological developments; Theatre in Education; theatre lighting; touring theatre.

MM: This is Marta Musso from the University of Sheffield. I am interviewing Roland Metcalf. First I would like to know if you agree with this recording being used for the British Library Theatre Project.

RM: Certainly. No problem.

MM: OK then, just to begin, how did you become interested in theatre?

RM: I became interested partly, possibly, because I was taken to see some theatre as a child. My mother would take me to see mainly local amateur theatre, there were three companies - four companies - in King's Lynn: the King's Lynn Players, St. George's Players, the Operatic and Dramatic Society, and West Norfolk Gilbert and Sullivan, so we would go and see some of those things. But also occasionally at one or two of them there would be visiting companies, mainly Variety - not much in a way or to do straight theatre - but I was sort of sparked off I think by a puppet show. We used to go on holiday about eight miles up the coast - you didn't travel very far on holiday in those days, the late 1940s and 1950s - and I went to see a marionette show.

MM: That was where, sorry?

RM: It was in Heacham, which is a tiny little village on the Welsh coast. So I started making marionettes, very primitive marionettes, and writing for them and designing the scenery and turning a picture frame into a theatre. And I also went to... The local grammar school had a preparatory department, so from the age of seven I went there and I wrote and directed my fellow pupils at plays. That was sort of interrupted, as the family pressure was to go into science because the family business was a chemist shop.

MM: So your parents had a chemist shop.

RM: Yes. In fact the business collapsed... because of my father's condition really, he was an alcoholic. I am trying to write something about him at the moment, he had an interesting... he'd been in the Royal Flying Corps and crashed in the First World War and, you know... he was an interesting man, but... so you know, family pressure was going one way, so I went to Edinburgh University. But there had also been theatre at school - the school used to do Shakespeare plays, all-boy Shakespeare... I never acted in them. And then later on when I was in the sixth form we started to bring them out and we would do Gilbert and Sullivan with the local girls' high school.

MM: What year was that?

RM: That would be around 1956, and that sort of took me through to going to University in Edinburgh in 1958. So when I got there I joined the Drama Society and I was always involved backstage: I was the stage manager, I built scenery, I became the director of works on the committee, which meant I was responsible for all the technical stuff that we did and liaising with the university authorities. And we had our own theatre in Chambers Street, it is now used by one of the Fringe venues, "C venues" during the Fringe. And we used to do productions during the year but also for the Fringe Festival, which in those days - late 1950s early 1960s - was very small [laughs], unlike today when it's... enormous! [laughs] Again I designed scenery and stage managed the shows. So at that point I sort of decided 'this is really what I want to do'. So I dropped out of chemistry and zoology and there was a series of sort of strange coincidences, for I found myself teaching chemistry but also teaching drama.

MM: Where, in a High School in Edinburgh?

RM: That was back home in King's Lynn.

MM: OK.

RM: I went home and my old school had asked me back and then I met someone at the local Further Education College who said 'come along'. Meanwhile I kept looking for jobs. I got an interview at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham, and initially I didn't get the job; this was for chief electrician/lighting designer.

MM: This was in which year?

RM: This would be 1964. And chief electrician meant the electrician, because there were no assistants! [laughs] And... I went away and... I had previously done a production - in 1963 - with some students and staff colleagues at the college, of Five Finger Exercise by Peter Shaffer, and we had done that during the King's Lynn Festival - this is a mainly music festival - and I hoped it would be interesting in 1964 to do a revue, a late night

revue, because what tended to happen in King's Lynn is that everybody went to bed at half past nine or 10 o'clock and I thought 'Well, no, let's wake them up a bit', so I wrote and co-directed and co-produced the first ever late night revue for the King's Lynn Festival.

MM: What did you put on stage?

RM: We called it Innuendo.

MM: So you wrote it. It was an original piece.

RM: I wrote it along with a couple of colleagues you know, we hired a church hall and eventually it was quite successful, people came along. And while it was on I got a telegram from the Everyman in Cheltenham saying 'Please would you come along, would you phone us up?'. So I phoned them up and they said 'We would like to offer you the job now'; because the guy who had the job before me had a sort of nervous breakdown in the middle of Wuthering Heights apparently [laughs] and couldn't run the show. So I said 'Well OK, but I am actually doing something, you'll have to wait'. [laughs] And that's how I got to Cheltenham as Chief Electrician and Lighting Designer. I had done some lighting before, so I wasn't... but that was actually quite a shock because [pause] it was a very primitive set up. They got quite a modern electronic board, a bit like the one we had in Edinburgh, a bit more sophisticated, but the actual lighting rig was a mixture of some relatively new lanterns - the Strand Patt 23, which was pretty well ubiquitous at that stage, it was a small profile spot - and they got those in Front of House, and then on the Number One Bar a half dozen acting area lanterns which look a little bit like... I don't know, a mine, sort of conical shaped device and they didn't put a lot of light out. And then there were some old Furse Fresnels and some rather battered floods, and that was the basic lighting arrangement. And it was an interesting company because in that first season the director, Ian Mullins, who is unfortunately not available for an interview - he's retired to New Zealand [laughs] and he is living amongst the sheep - but Ian had decided to do Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, in a single part version which had been done at the Old Vic in 1947 with Donald Wolfit playing Tamburlaine... But you know, this was adventurous fare for a rep theatre - two weekly rep theatre - and at that time, in fact probably at any time, it was seen as an enormous shambling play... and that required some very tricky lighting, so I put a start to hire stuff in and gradually you know, we were able to get new equipment. Over that period it was always an interesting mixture of the usual rep fare, which would be something like a thriller - an Agatha Christie - there would always be a Shakespeare, there would be a pantomime, and you know, recent West End hits. And that was a sort of typical fare of a regional repertory theatre in the mid 1960s.

I am sort of lucky in that I made my mark and I became production manager and technical director and following on Jennie Lee's very generous doubling, sort of, Arts Council funding - in 1966 I think it would have been - my wage went... doubled almost overnight and we were able to actually employ more staff, so I had an assistant. And this was when Theatre in Education was beginning to take off in this country. Ian had decided - he always said that 'my problem was that I was an intellectual, would I mind coming and sorting out his wiring in his kitchen?', [laughs] but also because I had education experience he thought I would be the person to lead this, and so it then we

started to sort of dip into this. First thing we did was a children's play in the main house, one half term... no, not half term, but it was around sort of Easter period, and we brought schools in to see a play called Mango Leaf Magic, in which David Horovitch - who's an actor friend of mine, who has now become quite well-established - just come from RADA played an Indian God under my direction - and we still remember that one, we bumped into each other, in green make up, I seem to recall! And that was quite successful, so the following year... The intention had been to create a Theatre in Education Company. And what happened then, and I think this would have been 1967, a number of theatre boards decided to get rid of their artistic directors: John Neville at Nottingham Playhouse, Peter Cheeseman at Stoke-on-Trent and Ian Mullins at Cheltenham.

MM: Why was that?

RM: I think in Cheltenham they thought he had been there long enough... There are many stories about Nottingham and partly that they knew that John Neville was interested in the artistic directorship of the new National Theatre, or that's one of the stories... and Stoke-on-Trent I have no idea... but again I suspect both thinking 'he's been here long enough'. And there were various sort of protests, Cheltenham actors picketed the theatre saying and organising a meeting in the town hall, a very well-attended meeting, but the board said 'No, Ian Mullins must go', and he went. At Stoke-on-Trent the protests were so successful that Peter Cheeseman stayed and he's still there, retired, as a theatre director emeritus, I think they call him. And a new director came to Cheltenham, and Ian said 'You must stay', so I stayed, and we created a company of four actors.

MM: Which was...sorry, I can't remember the name of the company...

RM: Well it was a Theatre in Education Company.

MM: OK, sorry, I though you were referring to Company X.

RM: No, Company X was the one back in King's Lynn, the one that did the revue.

So I stayed on and we did a tour in Gloucestershire primary schools. That was interesting because... you know, at that point, 1968, we were still going into some schools which were very old, been built in Victorian time, so... we took our own technical gear with us, but you would find that all they had was a two amp plug which, you know, you can't run anything off [laughs] and we had in the show a robot that was electrically driven, that was basically it, and we just hoped that the wiring would stand! [laughs] And then we took out a piece which I had written about the early influences on William Shakespeare called The Upstart Crow and then we were planning the next stage when the new director said 'Do you mind not coming back next year?' which is a polite way of saying 'Bye bye.' [laughs]

MM: Why do you think he did not want you back?

RM: Because I was... One of the things that happens is... that tends to happen - or tended to happen then - above appointing a new Artistic Director who had probably been working somewhere else. In the case of Michael Ashton he had been working at Colchester Rep, so he came to Cheltenham and brought a number of people with him from Colchester, and I was left over from the old regime.

And so that sort of put a stop to the Theatre in Education Company at Cheltenham to a certain extent; they still did a little bit and I got a series of pieces in the local paper where I commented on... what I considered an unfortunate situation, they'd actually write something down... but because I'd got contacts in Education, people started to ask me to actually do some more teaching, and so I did that, but I also had a commission from the Everyman, we had done a production of Pinocchio the year before which I'd written and I hadn't set out to write it, I thought it would be interesting to play it as a children's piece-en-deux, a children's piece-en-deux. Obviously you know, I was aware of the Disney Film... and I started looking around for scripts and the only one I had come across was one by Brian Way, and Brian Way was the director of something called Theatre Centre in London - and I considered it a travesty, a nice set sort of - but he said 'Write it yourself', so I went away and did an adaptation of Pinocchio which we did in the Main House and then when I left, I said 'What do I do? A version of The Wizard of Oz' so I wrote a version of The Wizard of Oz for them. And then after that I eventually then came to what was then Salford College of Technology in 1971 with the brief to create - to set up drama - and I'm now part of the University of Salford, where we have a Drama Performance division of about 600 students so... we're fairly successful!
[laughs]

MM: So you still direct these days?]

RM: I still keep directing. After leaving I did a certain amount of freelance directing and design work. While I was at Cheltenham I had a commission to do the lighting for new operas by the Opera Company for the Cheltenham Festival... That was interesting, because one of them has stayed in the repertoire, it stayed as a practical version of W.B. Yeats' long poem Purgatory, and the designer for that who designed these [pause] projections... Quite intriguing! I mean, we're talking about 1968 here. He painted an abstract composition - which was about 30 feet long I think - which should've told the story of the House which is at the centre of the poem as it starts off as a country house in Ireland and then gradually decays and is finally burned down. He then filmed it in a very slow pan and the set was then... this was projected on the screen as the set, and there were only two singers... well, really only one singer: an old man who returns to the house and brings a boy with him, and that was quite interesting because at the technical rehearsals... There was a projector in the front of the Circle, with the film running onto the screens - and a technical rehearsal... well, you can never be sure what time it is because you have to keep stopping! So the first time we had it running completely was at the dress rehearsal. So everything is going smoothly. And then, within minutes of the dress rehearsal a conductor goes 'Tap Tap Tap' [taps a pen onto the desk to reproduce the noise] with his baton and the band stops playing and he turns to the director and says 'The band will have to go'. Well OK, there are 30 professional musicians, if they go over, even by matter of minutes, it's a full other session at whatever rate per hour they're getting, and so I stopped the projector at this stage, and the band go, where do they go? They go to the pub, because I follow shortly after, but... and then we resume the last few bars with a rehearsal piano... and we didn't ever

know for certain that a firm would run and finish at the right moment until the first performance. [laughs]

MM: So, in the period that we are analysing, you know, from the past war to 1968, it was a troubled political time pretty much everywhere. How do you think this influenced the theatre industry, especially regarding public funding.

RM: I think, in the period in which I was particularly involved in professional theatre...it's interesting to go back, I suppose, to even the beginning of that period, because one of the plays I have been involved with as a school boy had been Digging a Hole in St. George's in King's Lynn, and as its name suggests it is in fact a medieval guildhall, and it had been in disrepair, well, semi-disrepair, it had actually been the home of Bridges who were scenic artists, who painted scenery that would go out all over Britain... and in 1947 they decided to restore it as a theatre. It had actually been a theatre in the 18th century, it had actually had a Georgian theatre inside, but they basically restored it as a sort of theatre concert venue and... I mean I don't quite know where the funding came from, eventually the festival would get some council funding, but at Cheltenham that was a period when the Labour Government on Harold Wilson was in power, when he appointed Jennie Lee as the first Arts Minister and she was able to organize a quite considerable increase on the Arts Council grant, and that made a lot of more money available. That's certainly one of the facts which led to the take-off of Theatre in Education groups in repertory theatres in that period, and most regional theatres got into TIE. The main example I suppose, it's the Belgrade in Coventry; I knew people at Coventry, in fact I am still in contact with one of them, and we knew each other's work. My approach was, I mean, in terms of political... a lot of British TIE was socially or sociologically orientated. Directors - who I think had come from drama departments and college drama departments and universities like Manchester - sort of saw theatre as having a social function. They could use it as a teaching medium. I was more interested in using it to teach about theatre really, hence the piece about Shakespeare. And I think that if we'd continued that would have been the line that I'd followed. But I think that period was important in sort of kicking off a particular sort of brand of socially active theatre. And that then sort of spilled off into the development of Fringe Theatre and the post 1968 period, but I would argue I think, possibly - I would argue that in the book I'm working on at the moment - that increasing Arts Council funding in the mid-1960s was of paramount importance in the post 1968 development in British Theatre, but of course it's a rather different story now.

MM: But it's interesting to know. Why do you think it's that?

RM: Why do I think that's the case? Well, I think that what it did is that it made it possible in the first instance for a new group of theatre people, people who'd come out of primarily university departments like Manchester, and other places, although in its early days, Bretton Hall - which was a teacher training college in Yorkshire and it's now part of Leeds University - was also doing some interesting work under John Hodgson, who wrote a book on improvisation - the book on improvisation at the time - and I think it was that coincidence of more funding and a group of people who had different ideas about what theatre was about, sort of post Theatre Workshops, post Bertold Brecht and they learnt about political theatre and a sort of way of using it, and I suppose also that

you would get a new group of artistic directors also coming in who were a bit more open to a new sort of theatrical ideal.

MM: Also, at that time there was the explosion of cinema and television. How do you think this affected the theatre? Because it was really in the sixties that television started to take off.

RM: I think a lot it depended from where you worked. I don't think we were particularly adversely affected in that period when I was at Cheltenham between 1964 – 1969... audiences held up, there was a certain amount of sort of interaction I suppose between television and theatre there... Cheltenham was one of the groups of three theatres with a sort of informal liaison in that Ian Mullins, who had been my Artistic Director initially in Cheltenham, had also had been associated with... Derek Salberg at Salisbury Playhouse, and Derek's Brother Reggie had been the manager of the Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham, there are a couple of books that he's written about that period, and so actors tend to move between the three theatres and... One of the important things about repertory theatre in that period - in fact I would argue in a sense that they were sort of community theatres - is that audiences became associated with particular actors, so you would go to see a particular actor. Interestingly, many many years later in Canada my partner and I were in a place called Blyth which is near Stratford, Ontario, and they have a theatre festival and we were talking with one of the founders who said 'You know that, one of the things that happen is that they were able to persuade people to come to the theatre to see something which they might not necessarily see because such and such actors are in it'. And I think that was happening in regional repertory theatres, that people regarded the theatre as their community. But in the case of this particular group of actors, because of the Birmingham association, there was also a link with a TV in Birmingham, in particular with an absolutely dire soap opera called Crossroads. I don't think you've ever heard of it... they revived it but it was notorious for its flimsy sets and it's rather flimsy acting – although you know, there were quite good actors in it, there were some good people who played in it, but basically they had a morning to rehearse, set it up in the afternoon and record it to go out that evening, and the schedule just didn't allow - so to some extent people, actors who they could see at Cheltenham, or Salisbury, or Birmingham, they would also see on a television screen...

MM: But they would still go and see them in theatres...

RM: Yes! In a way, at that point I think there was a sort of positive relationship, in this particular case, between them, and you know... and hadn't got to the point in which you would cast because someone appeared on television. You know one of the things that are now happening is that theatres are always casting, you know, someone who... the fact that they're on television is the draw, whereas at that period the fact that they were as part of your community, and the fact that they were on television was sort of incidental to it. I think it's in the period after 1968 that the real sort of influence of television - as BBC 2 and other channels coming to existence - really starts, and the costs of the whole growth of the notion of celebrity culture then, more recently... but at that time - and cinema, I don't think cinema had much of an effect either, theatre was able to function quite well. I mean, as it happens the Everyman now does no longer any of its own productions, it's an entirely Receiving House... apart from the pantomime.

MM: OK... so can you describe me one day in your life as a light designer?

RM: Well, depends on what day you choose... it could vary, but if you took an average day, you don't have to be there all the time, you'd have to be there for the evening shows, so I would come in perhaps at 10 o'clock in the morning, check over the general electrics in the theatre, go up to the restaurant at the front to have a cup of coffee, where someone would probably say 'oh, we're having problems with the dishwasher' and you would go and solve the dishwasher. Then it would be preparing material for whatever is the show that was coming up, and that might be getting together, you know, particular props, electrical props, practicals. And also it would be a matter of sort of working on the lighting design. The process by which that would happen would have been... things would start off with a production meeting and at that you'd see that the set that the designer had come up with... and depending on what he or she had come up with you would then say 'OK, I can cope with that' or 'That's a bit of a problem, I'm gonna need some more... that's a big show I am going to need to bring lights, I've got to hire them in'. And after that you go away and you work on the plan and you watch rehearsals and see where people were, particularly once it got to the point where you could watch an act through, plot movements of the actor on stage, talk to the director about what sort of thing he - or she, occasionally - would feel they were looking for. And part of your day was going away and sort of thinking about it - I'm working out... OK, where do you want the lights on the stage and where you're going to place the lanterns on the rigs for a particular production. And so you know, a day for much of sort of two weeks would be a mixture of sort of basic maintenance, watching rehearsals, going away and thinking about it and then working out the lighting plot, and then of course you'd move into the technical rehearsals, the whole technical setting up of the show going through the technical rehearsal and doing the detail plot.

MM: Do you think there is a big difference now in the organisation?

RM: Oh, yes, an enormous difference, I mean, a thing that has made a huge difference is the advent of some very sophisticated equipment. Of course, the advent of computer as lighting - and that was only just on the horizon in late 1960s, it was just... I actually went down to look at the first computer board that Thorn EMI had produced, it was actually designed for television but...

MM: This was which year, sorry?

RM: This would be... I think this would have been something like 1967, 66/67, I can't remember the exact date, but Thorn had produced this computerized board, so you could put... basically you could plot everything into it in advance... and that eventually took off in the 1970s. But what it meant, what I would have to do would be to do the whole plot on paper, you know, to work out... OK, we had a... 48 weight lightning board - too small really for the size of theatre but that's how it was - and two of those were house lights, so we'd got 46 circuits to light with. So you had to work out, you know, cue by cue, what the levels were, and make it... guess what the lighting level would be, and yes, I could do a complete plot on paper and on one occasion we did

King Lear and I think we were about two levels out at the end after we plotted the lighting. Now you would do it on your laptop [laughs] and do it all in advance, where... you don't even have to be there, so there's... and also now theatres tend to use a great deal more... I would guess that a theatre that size would probably be using three times as much equipment, I would say, you know, when I first went you know, it was pretty dull... and I mean it in terms of actual light levels.

MM: Do you think there were advantages in the way it used to be in the sixties?

RM: I think in some things. One thing I've observed is that... I always felt, when I was on the board, when I was actually actively lighting - because initially as lighting designer I would actually run the show - that I was part of the performance, that I could... if I was fading a light down, manually or even a whole group, I could time it by watching what was going on stage and feeling it. Now there is a tendency to programme in a time fade and you simply press a button and the fade takes place, and... I don't think that you are quite... I was feeling in centre, I was a performer, even if I wasn't acting, you know, I was part of the performance. Now I think it's much more sort of instrumental and operational.

MM: Would you say, as Peter Hall, the Founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company, said, that the past 60 years have been the Golden Age of drama in Britain, do you agree with that?

RM: That's a really tough question to ask somebody who... [laughs] Ah...the Golden Age... wow! A Golden Age perhaps... when he's talking... when he talks of the past 60 years he's saying what, 19...

MM: He just said... yeah, the past 60 [they both laughs] the second decade of the 20th century...

RM: I think it has, I mean, I think in terms of... these years' outputs of particular writings and to certain extents theatrical inventions... ah, whether or not... you know... after all the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, what about the Restoration, you know... they're both... you know, vital periods of the 18th century, you know... I think there would be quite a number of Golden Ages of British Theatre, but... I'd certainly agree that there has been a tremendous happening in that sort of 60-year-period from the post war period yes... ah, lots and lots of changes... I think new writing is possibly one of the strongest things about it... and... perhaps... overall, a higher standard of acting... The lady I was talking to before I came in, but also - about weekly rep, about doing a show a week - quite clearly there are pressures on that don't enable you to develop a role in the same way you can if you got a full 6-six-week rehearsal period. I suppose, yes, I think... on balance... a Golden Age, yes...

MM: Can you tell us a bit more about Theatre in Education? Is it still running?

RM: Theatre in Education it's nowhere near as strong as it used to be. One of the... I mean we were talking in effect about post-Thatcher, so post-1968... Between 1967/68, when Theatre in Education really sort of developed, as I said, most regional theatres decided to do something along those lines and... there was a... the regional theatres at that periods were organized, they had an umbrella organization – the Council of Repertory Theatres, that now has been absorbed in TMA - Theatrical Management Association - and by 1968 it had a sub-division where people like myself, who were directors of TIE companies within the Council of Repertory Theatres, would have an annual meeting where we would meet and certainly through post 1968 and through the seventies TIE was a developing thing within established theatres, that's where it was largely based... ah, there were perhaps one or two independent companies, but mainly they were based within the... repertory industry as it was... and they were supported by Arts Council - largely by Arts Council Funding. There was always a bit of a problem about where it should be funded and... certainly I mean, I met problems with trying to get the local education authority funding for say, let's say, theatre business. Most of feelings sometimes I think, amongst the art council, or maybe the local authorities, because it was education, should also have some sort of financial interest in it, so it was a... tension between the two... but largely, between, you know, as I said, 66/67/68 TIE developed, and well into the seventies, what brought it to a halt was in fact that... changes in funding and... 1980s... when Art Council funding was reduced by the Conservative government and the first thing to go was Theatre in Education companies... and although most regional theatres as such now have outreach departments, there's nowhere near the same incidence of TIE in the sense that it was there in the 1960s, I suppose back to Peter Hall, that part of the Golden Age of it.

MM: Thanks. Maybe if you could tell us a little bit more about Company X.

RM: Oh. Company X was... One of the things when I was a student in Edinburgh we were doing shows during the Edinburgh Fringe... there were about 30 companies at that time doing shows, mainly theatres and one of the sort of privileged forms was the "revue format", and having experienced that I felt that this would be a sort of interesting addition to... what was happening in the King's Lynn Festival. The King's Lynn Festival was very much a music festival...ah, Ruth Fermoy, Lady Fermoy, who was the director of the Art Centre to St George's Guildhall, had been a professional musician, she was closely associated with the Barbirolli, Hallé, hence the Hallé Orchestra came and did an annual concert in St. Nicholas Chapel. So there was this very strong sort of music literacy thing, and I thought, well, things needed to waking up a bit [laughs] so I thought, 'Well, OK, I will create my own company', which was Company X, and this was with a couple of colleagues who taught at the college and some of my students who were doing drama and we set up and, say, wrote this revue...

MM: And you were... production manager and director there...

RM: I was everything for that! I sometimes tried to work out whether we actually made a profit, but... we all... chipped in and said, 'We don't need to lose money on it' but I was director, manager, marketing officer, the lot really, helped by friends and colleagues. I think if I stayed we would've carried that on, you know, the idea of doing something for the Festival that was non-musical in a sense, you know... so it was a very short-lived company I'm afraid, Company X.

MM: Would you say it was easier back then to fund a company and live out of the theatre business rather than today?

RM: I think it was, I think that, you know... I think partly you didn't worry so much, you wouldn't have worried so much about funding and... I think again, that might have been one of the factors that, you know, early in the development of Fringe Theatre that... OK it was mainly graduates of course, who had left university drama courses... but feeling OK, you could set up a company on your own... sometimes I feel, it tends to happen now, I think there are so many falling-out students, ah... you know, if you want to do something you have to do it yourself.

MM: One last thing. Again, in the sixties there was a big change in, you know, the moral, the perception of costumes and things like that. Did you have any problems with censorship? Did you see changes in this period?

RM: Well, of course, in fact this is when censorship came and... the one interesting occasion was a production of *Loot*, Joe Orton's play. One of the things I did as part of my education aim was going and talk to schools about the work that we were doing...

MM: Sorry, do you remember the year?

RM: Ah, this would be 19...68, 68/69. And we had done a production of the *Winter's Tale*, one of the few things I've ever acted in, but - I played Antigonus, who is the character who gets eaten by a bear, [laughs], we didn't have a bear! Ah, I had gone out to talk to a school in... Northampton I think it was, so I was actually away from the theatre on this particular night and... the British Medical Association would meet in Cheltenham, and so they had taken the theatre for the night for all of their delegates and their wives - or husbands I suppose in some cases - and they had chosen to see *Loot*. Now I was in Northampton talking about the *Winter's Tale* to school girls, and I came back to find a very upset company because it had gone down like a lead balloon apparently and... you know, it's meant to be a comedy and nobody had laughed, and you would have thought that a group of doctors might have found a black comedy about death rather funny, but they didn't... in fact it wasn't a case of censorship but certainly it was about reception of that sort of material... and Cheltenham would be one of those places, I mean... I don't know how much you know about Cheltenham, but it's a spa town and full of retired people, at that time full of people who had retired from, you know, the Indian Army, and - after the Empire, but - it was very sort of proper... the Ladies' College, who occasionally would visit the theatre, were always brought in a coach, even though the theatre was virtually walking distance but you know, they were not allowed to sort of walk out on their own... I think some would occasionally from the sixth form... You had to be careful about what you did... so, although there wasn't... I mean certainly after '68 a theatre found out that you could do more or less anything you wanted, but I can't imagine, although it's a bit later, that the theatre would have done *The Romans in Britain* for example, that would have been far too far out.

MM: Thank you very much. I don't know, if there is anything else you would like to talk about that we didn't cover, anything about your research that you would like to have in this interview, anything you want to say about managing theatres, anything really...

RM: Well, the research... what I am interested at the moment, what I am researching, is the way the structure of management of the British Theatre has changed. That was actually sparked off by a student in 1999/2000, sometimes around that, a first year student saying 'Please sir, what's Rep?'... unusual, but he was a fresher, so... and I was sort of teaching a module which was about sort of the whole production model, so basically as I've known it, you start with a production meeting, you decide things, you go through a rehearsal period, technical rehearsal, dress rehearsal etcetera... and then I had to stop and think 'Well, what is it?' because I had been back to Cheltenham fairly recently and discovered that, you know, whereas what the Everyman had done while I was there was a season of its own work from... roughly the end of August / beginning of September through to May and then there would be a break... and you know, the only thing we ever had in was local amateurs who would come twice a year with a musical... and we had Sooty & Sweep... you know Sooty & Sweep?

MM: No, I'm sorry, no.

RM: OK, Sooty & Sweep was a television puppet - and Harry Corbett who created Sooty - he was a sort of bear - teddy bear sort of thing, not quite a bear - also at a stage show, which he taught... you know, during the school term. And we also had a... usually one visit a year from what was then Ballet Rambert, a dance company, but the rest of time it was our own work. And when this young man said this - I thought that was no longer the case where I was, it's really not the case everywhere else, the Library Theatre in Manchester, which for long time had been a similar sort of producing theatre, although actually funded entirely by the local authority - if you worked at the Library Theatre you were actually an employee of the Council [laughs], even actors for that short period I think - and... so I suddenly think, OK, what the changes were, and initially I was particularly interested in, I suppose, the opportunity it gave, particularly to young actors; so for example I mentioned you I directed David Horovitch in Mango Leaf Magic, as an Indian God, so David I still know, he comes up to Manchester and plays at the Royal Exchange Theatre occasionally, but he comes from Drama School, from RADA, and he came as an acting ASM - Acting ASM - for production managers are always a problem because when you want them to ASM the director want them to act, and when he don't want to do ASM there's nothing more to do [laughs]. But he stayed with the company for two years,... the point was that... young actors used to get in rep in that period, particularly the 1960s... you know from, in the sixties and fifties - into the seventies - was a sort of post... post graduating apprenticeship. They had done the training at RADA or Central or wherever, and then they came and got the opportunity to play a variety of roles, sometimes they would just walk on as a small speaking part, the butler or whatever, but occasionally they would get the opportunity of playing something larger, and David played perhaps one of best Edgar in King Lear that I've ever seen, and they got an education, you know, post graduate education and also you could come as an Assistant Stage Manager almost from school, we had something called The Everyman Group, which I could tell you about later if you like, and you could end... learn on the job almost, as a sort of, you know, work experience... even not going to drama school and becoming an Assistant Stage Manager and then Stage Manager... but that sort of opportunity has now disappeared, because if you come out of drama school you can't

go into a company and stay with it... you get to do one show, and then there's going to be a touring company coming in, perhaps in the next show or next two, so companies are now employing young actors on a... one by one basis. Or a lot of young actors now of course go into television, if they are lucky, you know, quite a number of our students at Salford end up in Hollyoaks for a while. [laughs] Or now of course there's much, much more touring theatre. You know, there was no significant touring theatre in the 1960s, it had all disappeared, now, you know... it's stable, the Lowry Centre in Manchester doesn't have a resident company - all touring work - even the Library Theatre does, the Royal Exchange, OK, is a producing theatre but takes touring works into its studio, so...

MM: Can you tell me the specificity of this kind of theatre?

RM: You get something different with the touring theatre, you know... you're with a production perhaps for quite a long time, and you learn about working in different sort of theatres, but you don't get the opportunity to play different roles, of course, because you are stuck in that role, and we had one ex-student who went into The History Boys and OK, great experience, but... he's played the same role for six months, which is a very different sort of training. So that's where I sort of started to give... 'What are these sort of changes that are taking place'. So OK, it's become a much bigger story, and I had to talk about the whole notion of creative and cultural industry and that sort of framework.

MM: OK, thank you very much!

RM: Do you want me to talk about the Everyman group?

MM: Oh yes, right! Thanks

RM: This was something... we weren't the only theatre to have that sort of experience, but when we came to do... apparently when we had the odd show that came in and we needed extra stage crew for it, but also when we were doing our own strikes and set-ups... so Saturday night, end of a two week run, there's a strike and the set goes out, and then you are setting up the next production, usually on a Sunday; initially, when I started working, 1964, in rep, we used to get paid a pound an hour, eh, a pound every four hours... no, a pound for the Sundays, that was it, got an extra pound for working Sunday. It was a reasonable amount; we could pay for fish and chips at lunch time. Ah... and then it went to a pound every four hours, or a pound then when I became production manager and I had to work out, you know, could we have been a full extra session of that... but we also brought in these young people from local schools, mainly from local grammar schools, so... they'd be sort of... 15, 16, and they would come and help backstage, help on the fly floor, help on the set-up, help to take the set out, and we gave them a sort of pence for doing that... but it did actually provide some... you know, an introduction, some of them became ASM with us - two of them, a guy called Richard "Bing" Crosby went off, eventually, went to Central School of Speech and Drama, did stage management and of course became stage manager for a dance company for quite a long time until he decided, you know, had to leave his family too much, and...

Christopher Barron, who is currently the director of Birmingham Royal Ballet. And he started off as a school boy working back stage... and I'm sure there are similar stories elsewhere, but... and they were great help to us, but it was interesting the sort of stimulus it gave to those young people.

MM: OK, I think we covered pretty much a good number of things, so... I think we're done. Thank you very, very much.

RM: Pleasure. Thank you!