

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Gillian Lynne – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Sue Barbour**

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Dancer and Choreographer. Acting; David Albery; A Midsummer Night's Dream; BBC; Broadway; Rudolph Cartier; Cats; choreography; Cone Ripman School; Bernard Delfont; digs; Five Past Eight; Errol Flynn; Margot Fonteyn; John Gilpin; Pauline Grant; Robert Helpmann; jazz ballet; Molly Lake; Jacques Lecoq; Andrew Lloyd Webber; London Palladium; Leonide Massine; David Merrick; modern dance; Dudley Moore; musicals; opera; Peter and the Wolf; repertory; revue; Sadler's Wells Ballet; Symphonic Variations; The Three-cornered Hat; Dame Ninette de Valois; variety.

SB: This is Sue Barbour with the University of Sheffield. I'm interviewing Gillian Lynne, and first of all Gillian I'd like to ask you if you are in agreement with this interview being used for the British Library Theatre Project and for future generations to learn about Variety Theatre?

GL: Yes, I'm very, very proud. Very proud.

SB: First of all I'd like to ask you where you were born and brought up?

GL: I was born in Bromley, Kent and my ancestors had all been living in Kent and I was brought up all over the place because when we got to 1939, when I was, I think, twelve, and my mother was killed in a terrible car crash, so that I had... Very quickly the war came and my Dad – I was an only child – and suddenly I had nothing because my Dad, like everybody who had been in the First World War, was immediately sucked up into the army and he had been a Captain in the First World War, caught, kept prisoner and all that sort of thing.

SB: Oh gosh!

GL: Yes, he had a fantastic time, my Dad, and Mummy had gone, so... and then, like half of England's school kids, I was packed off to the country, where there was no dancing...

SB: Oh, were you? Where were you?

GL: To Somerset. I cannot remember the village or anything – I can see the place – and the reason I was packed off there was because my poor, desperate Dad, was... with Mummy killed, the War happening, him in the army and this disaster that was happening to England, he thought, 'What am I going to do with my child?'

SB: Mmm.

GL: And there were some very sweet people who'd had two kids at the same dancing school as me and Beryl Grey. We had the same wonderful teacher.

SB: Oh, really?

GL: Or Beryl Groom, as she was then.

SB: Was she!

GL: Mmm. And I was Gill Pyrke then, I wasn't Gillian Lynne. And she said, 'We'll look after her'. So, they took me in and so I was with this family. They were very sweet but I had a totally broken heart...

SB: Mmm.

GL: ... and we were all a bit scared of the war. Nobody knew what on earth... In fact, at the beginning everybody thought that Hitler would just get over the channel and take us. And if he had then, as we all know now, he could have... and so, it was because of their school that was evacuated, that I went with them.

SB: Oh, I see. So, how long... when did you start dancing?

GL: Oh, I started dancing... I think I was five... It could have been eight... but I think it was five.

SB: Mmm.

GL: Five or six.

SB: So, when you went down to Somerset there were no classes?

GL: Nothing.

SB: Nothing at all?

GL: It was just an ordinary school.

SB: So, you just didn't do any more?

GL: I ran away.

SB: Did you?

GL: Mmm. I ran away. I stuck it out for a while... while I was there, France fell and all I could see were teachers in corners, hugging each other or crying. We didn't understand. The kids didn't really understand the significance of that, I suppose, but... So, I'd lost my Mum, my Dad was in the Army, France had fallen, everyone where I was, was permanently in tears and no dancing... so, I thought, 'I can't do this'. I think I was there for about a week and then I just upped and went one day.

SB: Where did you go?

GL: I went for miles and miles and miles and at about seven o'clock at night I saw a very nice looking farm house - sort of, friendly - and I turned up there and I'll never be able to thank these people enough and I don't know their names or anything - I can't remember it - but they, instead of taking me in and ringing the police, which nearly everybody would have done, they took me in, they gave me some soup, they put me to bed on a settee in their living room with - I always remember they had a great big quilt which they put over me.

SB: Oh yes.

GL: And I was there about four or five days 'til they gradually - because I must have been in a terrible state. A) I was hungry. B) I was heartbroken. C) I'd lost everything and so I, obviously, was in a very bad way and they - instead of trying to get it out of me - they just let me live there for about three to four days, gradually getting it out of me. Who I was, where I was... and the minute I said about my Dad - his name and where he was - you know, the Regiment he was with - they were on [the phone] and he sent an Aunt to collect me. So... I went back to Bromley and lived with an Aunt, just in time to see all the troops coming back from Dunkirk. She had one of those typically English houses, with this red brick, terraced...

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: With a gable, and she had this garden - long garden - that went down to a great big bush but... there was an archway in the bush which came onto the railway embankment and I sat on there, on that bank and I watched train after train come back with men hanging out like that. [Gillian slumps and hangs over in chair]

SB: Oh no!

GL: Yes. I'll never forget it. I'll also never forget the food I had. I was always having lamb chops, mashed potatoes and tomatoes. And when I think that - we didn't have any food, there was the rationing - and I think she must have given me her rations!

SB: Oh, gosh!

GL: Anyway, my Dad - there was a big article in the Picture Post about the Arts Educational - it wasn't the Arts Educational then, it was the Cone Ripman School.

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: And my Dad thought, 'Oh, the answer! If I could just get her there!' So, he rang them up and they said, 'Well, she'll have to audition, you know', and my Dad, equally proud, said, 'Well, she had a scholarship for The Royal Academy of Dance', which I did before all this happened. So, anyway, he took me and Mrs. Ripman - Olive Ripman - I remember, gave me a class, solo class and I got in.

SB: Oh, gosh.

GL: And that was that. I used to go to Baker Street to class and Oxford Street because it was two schools, Olive Ripman's school and the Cone sisters' school. And the Cone sisters produced some incredible people - incredible - and, anyway, I was going to both and then the bombing started and the war got worse and they thought they would have to evacuate their school. And they had terrible trouble finding a place and eventually found a place called 'The Hallams' in Surrey [in Shamley Green, Guildford]. It was a place... I don't remember a lot about it, except it had a wonderful central hall with a minstrel's gallery.

SB: Oh, did it?

GL: Mmm. And it had dancing. It didn't have much schooling. [Both laugh]. But, it had wonderful teachers so, of course, for me it was seventh heaven.

SB: And did you board there, when it moved?

GL: Yes. I did. I did. It was all a bit poly-cotton because, of course, in those days they weren't used to a boarding school. They were two London schools, they didn't have... and we'd been there a month and the Army chose to send about three companies of men to the same building. It's like that film – Do you remember that film? There was a marvellous film with that wonderful Scotsman who was so funny and the women with the great big jaw... Margaret...

SB: What, Rutherford?

GL: Rutherford and Alistair...

SB: Simms

GL: Simms and I think it was called The Best Years of Your Life.

SB: That's right. Yes, I think so.

GL: Well, that was exactly the same. That was the story, wasn't it? There were two schools... only we were not two schools... we were a school, a Theatre school and the Army.

SB: Oh, gosh.

GL: So, this poor, wretched Principal had to go off, all over England, shooting around from place to place, desperately trying to find another house. So, the school had to be disbanded because it wasn't healthy for the older girls [both laugh], to have the Army in the same corridor and all of that... and I'm sure that naughty things happened... I'm sure they did.

SB: Yes.

GL: So, we were sent back home. So, I was sent back to my Aunt who lived in East Croydon, just as the bombing started. It was so ridiculous... So, we'd all been evacuated to avoid it and then this happened and we were all returned to our homes and as we returned...

SB: Oh, no.

GL: Well, it started and they went around – I can't remember how long – but I was there for quite a bit of time. Daddy was in command of Croydon aerodrome...

SB: Oh!

GL: The defence of it, so I saw him, just occasionally, which was lovely. And, my Aunt was a dear woman and she and Uncle were members of the Concert Artistes Association...

SB: Oh, were they?

GL: ... and they used to book acts all over England. So, I saw a lot of that and there was a wonderful pianist they worked with a lot and it was the first crush I had, on this man. He had red hair, very pale skin – as they often seem to – he was very, very thin but his hands were strong! And he used to play Jazz and it was my first real connection with Jazz and it was absolutely wonderful. It was – not only Jazz, he played other stuff as well, but the Jazz was superb and that was very important to me, that connection because later on when I started to choreograph, I met Dudley Moore and I remembered that connection, you know. It was extraordinary.

And, anyway, eventually, we got a phone call and they'd found somewhere in Leicestershire, called Loddington Hall.

SB: Oh.

GL: And we were gradually called back and we all, gradually – I think it took about two weeks for the whole school to assemble – and there was a new boy. There was a boy amongst eighty-five girls.

SB: Just one?

GL: One. And that boy was John Gilpin.

SB: Oh, my God!

GL: Who was bi-sexual, so I always thought, 'No wonder...!' I think he was about eight or nine. He was tiny and he wore this little bright red cane stitched jumper, black tights, white socks, and shiny black shoes. I've always remembered it. And he and I just clicked. We were... By then.... Oh, I forgot to tell you. An incredible thing happened in the first place I was sent – The Hallams, it was called.

SB: Mmm?

GL: Because, my first night there, everybody had supper and then I noticed everybody went into this beautiful main hall. And they played lovely music and, not everybody but

half the school, at least, got up and danced – all ages – dancing together. Not together... but... I'm dancing, you're dancing, you know...

SB: Mmm.

GL: I thought, 'This is wonderful!' - well, I'd been bereft of dancing, you know.

SB: Yes.

GL: I was sitting there looking very... I was very thin and very wan, you know, a bit like today because I've had a cataract operation last week so I'm a bit under par, and this darling, sweet girl, who's a friend to this day, came up and said, 'Why don't you go and dance?' and I said, 'Oh, no. I'm much too frightened. No, no, I can't get up and dance. I'm just happy sitting watching'. And she said, 'But you can, you know, because nobody'll look at you because everybody is busy dancing for themselves. Nobody's watching, we're just all doing it for ourselves'. So, I watched for about fifteen more minutes and then I got the itch... and so I, very tentatively, got up and started to dance. And, it's an extraordinary thing... I've had two spiritual experiences in my life and I think this was the first one... I'd been pretty good, up 'til then, because I'd got a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Dancing and all that but I wasn't what I think was really good... You would say, 'Oh, look at that child!', you know, but when I got up and danced that night I knew something had happened... something had changed...

SB: Really?

GL: ... And I knew I was very good... [Pause]... and it was my mother. It was my mother's death. Because in the interim, you see, she'd been killed in this terrible car crash.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And I think she'd just passed her whole spirit and her will for me to be good. She wanted me to be a dancer and she taught me discipline when I was very young... and she was like a best friend.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And I think it was just all of her spirit and her longing had got into me.

SB: Gosh. Did she dance?

GL: You see, I hadn't been dancing in the interim, because I was dancing and then she got killed and then... all four women were killed in a tiny baby Fiat... and so the press got hold of it and so the children were kept away – we were shut away and then Munich happened and that whole time was so terrible so, not only did I not get any dancing, I didn't get any ordinary schooling either. I mean, for six months, literally, I think it was six months...

SB: Really? Nothing at all?

GL: Nothing.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And then the War... and then we went on.

SB: So, did your Mother ever dance?

GL: No, but she had the most brilliant singing voice.

SB: Did she?

GL: Mmm. And she had danced and she'd been seen by Cochran.

SB: Oh, really?

GL: And my Grandfather – the old classic story – Cochran made her an offer and said, 'I want her to come and work with me. She's got everything'. And my Grandfather said, 'My child on the stage? Never!' So, that was all in her, so when she got a little girl, you know, and this little girl wanted to dance... And then we talked, like you and I are, and then she'd say, 'Right, Darling, practice!'

SB: Oh, really!

GL: And I ran and put my little pants and top on and a pair of ballet shoes. She would clear the tea things and I would hang onto the dining table as my barre.

SB: Really!

GL: And that was winter, summer, spring and fall.

SB: Oh, my gosh!

GL: Yes. So, she taught me that unerring discipline and it didn't matter... I was always ill. I had abscesses in the ear and I caught one germ after the other but I think it served to make me very strong later.

SB: Mmm.

GL: But at the time I was always ill but unless I was half-dead, that practice went on.

SB: That's fantastic.

GL: So, she taught me so much that I've hung on to, ever since.

SB: Mmm. [Pause]. So, when you were up with John Gilpin. How many people were up at the school in Leicestershire?

GL: Eighty-five.

SB: Oh, gosh. There were a lot.

GL: Eighty-four girls and one boy! [Both laugh] But he was already...you know, that's why I was saying about that child you were telling me about...

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: You could already see he was going to be a world-beater. He was just wonderful. He was a very good tapper, actually.

SB: Oh, was he?

GL: Although, obviously he was going to be a Classical Dancer. But, we all learned tap. We all did mod... we all did something terrible called *MusCom*. [Musical Comedy]. Which was mod... it wasn't modern dance, because there was no modern dance in England, but it was Musical Comedy. It was like... happening in shows.

SB: Yes.

GL: Yes, we did that. We did ballet and acro and tap... and muscom! [Both laugh]

SB: That's amazing. So, how long were you there for?

GL: Well...

SB: I mean, until the end of the War?

GL: No. Oh, no. I was in the ballet by then.

SB: Oh, gosh.

GL: No, I was there for a while and it wasn't the easiest thing for me because my Dad couldn't get away, so when there were half-terms and things like that I often had to stay in school which was a bit sad, you know.

SB: Mmm.

GL: A bit sorry for myself.

SB: Mmm. I had the same experience.

GL: Really?

SB: Mmm.

GL: But then, this girl I told you about that had come to me and said, 'Why don't you dance?', by now we were firm friends and she and I were very good and so, if they... we were Babes in Pantomime.

SB: Oh, were you?

GL: At the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, for instance. Because the schoolhouse they'd found was in Leicestershire so I suppose that wasn't far, was it?

SB: Oh, no. Not far at all.

GL: To the Arts Theatre. I think I went there twice and then - we learned acting, as well. I forgot to say that. We did acting...

SB: Mmm.

GL:.. and I was rather good at that, and some theatre, I think again in Leicester, where there was a Repertory – it may not have been Leicester, it could have been Cambridge... it could have been Coventry? I don't think it was. I can't remember the place – they were doing Dear Octopus...

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: the play... and in Dear Octopus there is a part for a little girl called Scrap Kenton who has lost her mother and she's heartbroken but she's very feisty as well – which I was, both – and anyway, I was sent to audition and, I mean, I got it because that's... I was just being myself.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And I got absolute rave reviews because, again, I wasn't acting really, I was being me, and so... and then, I was improving quite rapidly, and so was Maggie and so was John and so was a girl called Sonia Arova. Do you remember hearing about her? She became a bit of a ballerina somewhere – not in the Royal, but...

SB: Yes. Mmm.

GL: it was some foreign company. We were all zooming off.

SB: What was Maggie's last name?

GL: Crews. [née Roseby]

SB: Oh, right.

GL: And Maggie... she did an amazing thing at the Palladium, called The Jackdaw of Rheims. She got rave reviews... because she was the Jackdaw. I don't remember who choreographed it.

SB: Really? I'll have to have a look and see if I can find out.

GL: I think you'd be able to because... it was in Variety, I think.

SB: Yes. Well, I would be able to.

GL: Or, if it wasn't in Variety, it was in a musical – but they didn't do a lot of musicals, did they?

SB: Not really, no.

GL: No. So, I was seen somewhere by Molly Lake, who ran something called The Ballet Guild, which was quite powerful in the War because, of course, Sadler's Wells had lost its orchestra and most of its men to the forces and so, there was this company of Molly Lake's and there was another company of Mona Ingle...Inglebridge?

SB: Mona Inglebridge? That rings a bell. Mona Ingle...

GL: Mona Ingle something. [Inglesby]. She had a little company. Molly Lake who'd worked a great deal with Pavlova...

SB: Mmm.

GL: ... and was almost – and I've worked with superb teachers all over the world – but Mollie was, almost, the best teacher I have ever known and she saw me and she thought, 'Ah!' and her company was doing a big show at the Arts Theatre in London and all sorts of people like Beryl Kaye, who was a star dancer then, and Wendy Toye, who was a star dancer and Peggy Van Prague, danced in it and she got the idea that this little whippet from boarding school would dance Papillon, because it's quite suitable for somebody very young.

SB: Oh, yes!

GL: Because it's so difficult, but it's a Butterfly, after all. [Both laugh]. And so, I did this. She came down to the school and taught me the dance and then my ballet teacher down there was charged with keeping it up and rehearsing me. And up I came to do this one performance and I made a bit of a stir. And so, she kept sending for me and in the end we thought... My Aunt, who had – Mummy's sister, who had been looking after me while I had no-one – and Daddy thought, well that was obviously going to be my future, this women believed in me. She thought I was going to be the next... sort of second coming. And she was teaching me all the big roles and all that. So, I came up to London – left boarding school – came to London and by now, this is '43 – '42, '43 – and as I said, she taught me all the big roles and her company kept doing things like a week at Wolverhampton, a week at Brighton...

SB: Oh, really?

GL: Well, because in the War there weren't a lot of companies around.

SB: Yes.

GL: And, so I had very good experience, and I had class – she made me take my Advanced Ceccetti.

SB: Gosh!

GL: Because, she said, you know, 'that fiendish technique will stand you in good stead'. And, anyway, the company was going to do a huge performance at the People's Palace, in London and it was going to be in honour of the critic of the time called A.V. Coton. I remember his name, just... A.V. Coton. Anyway, I was dancing Swan Lake. Act 2. The Swan Queen... and I was fifteen!

SB: Gosh!

GL: And who came to that performance but Ninette de Valois and she said to Molly, 'I want that child'. And Mollie said, 'She's not ready', because Mollie wanted me and she was quite right because if I'd done another year with Mollie, I think I would have become a ballerina very quickly, but I wanted to get... every child in England wanted to get into the ballet. And so Mollie gave her my Aunt's telephone number and Ninette De Valois rang and said, 'I want this child', and my Aunt said, 'No, she's too young. Besides which, she hasn't got her period yet' - which I hadn't - and she said, 'No, you'll have to wait!'. Both laugh] To Ninette de Valois! And when my Aunt told me this, of course, I nearly committed suicide! [SB laughs]. I thought, 'Well, that's my career finished, before I'd begun'. [pause]

aAnd, it turns out, there was a wonderful girl, who'd been one of the Head Girls at Loddington and she was a great friend. And, I went to her in tears and what I said to you, 'I would have had a career but it's been slashed at the beginning!' [Both laugh]. And she knew Donald Albery – this girl – well. And Donald Albery at that time was running Sadler's Wells ballet. And so Nancy – this girl's name was – said, 'Will you see her?' So, up I go – I was tiny – and said, 'I'm ruined'. And Ninette de Valois obviously said, 'We must keep tabs on this girl'. And so, he said, 'Listen, I can see your Aunt has a terrible task. Your Mummy's dead, she's trying to do her job and look after you and I think we can wait a year'. [pause]

SB: Wow!

GL: And my Aunt said, 'Well, all right, if we wait a year'. And so, in that year I danced everything. In fact, I was always dancing for Molly and I did Casse Noisette and God knows what else. Which was wonderful training.

SB: Yes.

GL: And then, after a year, they sent for me and in 1944, I joined them.

SB: That's amazing. Isn't it? Well, you must have been very, very good, for them to wait.

GL: I was very good. When I think back. I had a soul. There were lots of very beautiful dancers, technically, but I had two things. I had what they call 'The Grand Manner'. I had a totally Russian 'au tour', you know, totally grand and... but I had this heart which had been broken, so I could give a lot, which is quite an unusual combination in a youngster, isn't it?

SB: Absolutely. Yes. Well, everybody I've spoken to... I always remember my father saying you were absolutely exceptional.

GL: Did he?

SB: When he knew you were choreographing 'Quilp' he was like... 'I remember how amazing...' So, he must have seen you.

GL: He must have seen me at the Palladium, maybe? Or... did he go to ballet?

SB: Yes. I think he did.

GL: He might have seen me in Mollie's company.

SB: Yes. So, how long were you with S...

GL: From '44 to '51.

SB: Gosh.

GL: And the reason I left? And I was sixth from the top, when I left. And no one, who had attained that position, had ever left.

SB: No.

GL: And Ninette de Valois practically went into a state of deep depression. She used to be sitting like that [demonstrates], looking, because she always sat like that. We used to laugh. She sat and used to say, 'Do it again. Do it again'. And then – I can't do it now with my hips – but she used to fling this leg, and it hook round...

SB: Go underneath?

GL: And then she'd get up and say, 'No, no, let me show you', and her stockings – as they were in those days – but all the seams had come round (to the front). [Both laugh] And we behaved badly and laughed about it.

SB: But was she a very hard...

GL: Very strict

SB: Very strict? Yes?

GL: But I liked that, you see.

SB: Yes.

GL: I'm quite strict as a choreographer myself.

SB: Yes.

GL: Because, I think it's the way you learn.

SB: I agree.

GL: I can't bear soft and kind. Of course, you have to be kind. You have to have love with the strictness but you can't have an easy thing and say, 'All right, Darling, if you're tired we won't do it again'. I say, 'If you're tired, you do it again now and then once you've got through it when you're tired, you'll suddenly find you've got a breakthrough'. That's my attitude.

SB: Well, yes.

GL: Because that's what I was taught.

SB: Yes. So... what made you leave?

GL: I saw... We did two American tours. One in '49 and one in '51. Both dancing at the Met [The Metropolitan Opera House, New York]. The old Met. Metropolitan. I can't tell you what a beautiful theatre that was. I'd always heard about the Diamond Horseshoe [The Royal/Dress Circle], which was the Circle. I'd heard about it but God! When you dance, especially.... The first tour, we were all demoted. She had only Margot [Fonteyn], Pamela, Moira [Shearer] and Beryl [Grey] dancing the leads of which all of us were taking turns – well, not all of us, but the next line were already... but no, not that first tour. Not in New York. But, after that we reverted back... So, I learned things like Floral Dance and The Friends and things like that... and the little four Swans – because I'd been doing the big Swans for ages by then but by the second tour we were allowed to do our proper roles and so, I was dancing quite a lot of leads then and certainly taking my solo call after Checkmate, in which I danced The Black Queen.

SB: Yes.

GL: I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. A very funny thing happened: I was so kind of humble and so, I thought, 'I am on the stage at The Metropolitan Opera House in New York!', and taking a curtain call and I was so overcome, I did the deepest curtsey, got up and went off the stage and the Stage Manager said to me, 'Gillian! Gillian! We've got to wipe your nose, it's got.... You've gone so low, you've got the dirt from the stage on your nose!' [Both laugh]. And I had this black... [Both laugh]. But, in the second tour, everyone in New York was talking about a show called South Pacific. Now, I had never seen a musical.

SB: Really?

GL: I'd just dance... the company and that was it you know. And then fighting to see my Dad and then we did incredible tours... I mean, for ENSA, in uniform, you know.

SB: Mmm. Were those all in Britain or...?

GL: Oh, no.

SB: Everywhere?

GL: Paris, Brussels. We were in Hamburg and you could hear the guns from front.

SB: Really?

GL: Oh, no. We were in the most incredible war. We were in the Reichstag about three days after it had been razed to the ground. In fact, I've got a picture of Maggie and me, standing [Both laugh] in the courtyard.

SB: Oh, my gosh!

GL: But...

SB: In New York, did you go to South Pacific or did you just...?

GL: Well, it's very interesting because by then I loved dancing and I had endless energy and I was a fighter so I was in everything. I was dancing Symphonic, I was dancing Checkmate, I was doing a lot of these but I was, also, doing a Court Lady in Hamlet and things like that because in those days... I think it's right.

SB: Mmm.

GL: I don't agree with... now you do a performance one week and then the next performance in that week is the second cast and then you perhaps get to do it and then in between you're not on.

SB: Yes.

GL: I don't believe in that at all and I'm sure that's why my generation had a lot of stamina.

SB: Yes.

GL: Because we were never off, you know.

SB: Yes.

GL: Anyway, Ninette was suddenly sitting like this [demonstrates] one day. She said, 'That child, Lynne. She's never had a moment off! She's on all the time. I mean, in every ballet. You must give her the matinee off'. So... it nearly killed me, actually, because when you've got that kind of circle going, you know?

SB: Yes.

GL: And suddenly, I had an afternoon off and I was like, 'What?' [Both laugh] And I was really, 'Where am I'. The performance I did after that matinee... I was very nervous, just because I'd had one afternoon. Anyway, I went to the Stage Manager of the Met and said, 'I've heard there's this wonderful show called South Pacific and I have got a matinee off. Can you get me in?' And he laughed and he said, 'Gillian, everybody in New York wants to see that show...' – because it was the absolute rage – I said, 'I know, but I've never seen a musical. It's my one chance'. So, he took pity on me, and he rang up the Stage Management of the Shubert Theatre – little did I know that my first musical, as a choreographer would be in that theatre – but he said, 'I've got this girl... we've got to get her in. My suggestion is... you get a little stool and when the lights go down you just put it on the inside of the curtains and you let her watch and then you move it out in the interval and then...' and that's what happened.

SB: Wow!

GL: And so I saw it and of course, it was incredible.

SB: Mmm.

GL: It's still one of the most beautiful shows that has ever been written.

SB: It was Mary Martin, was it?

GL: It was. And then I thought, 'There's something else...something else as well as ballet' and then I had a big do... I still wouldn't have left but I had a big disappointment because Massine [Leonide Massine] came over... You know, Massine?

SB: Yes.

GL: ... was coming to work with the company and he was going to do Three Cornered Hat and he said, 'I don't know this company. The only thing I'm going to do... I have to give them class, daily'. So he gave us all class – from top to bottom – every day for a week and then we would do class and then there would be a little break and then we would do enchainement and he used to make up Series One, Series Two, Series Three, Series Four... and you had to remember them. And he said, 'Right, now, I want two and five and next we will do three and four'. And you were like... [Both laugh].

SB: Oh, gosh!

GL: And Russian, Vera Volkova, with whom I'd been working in London – illicitly because Ninette [De Valois] didn't like it if we went outside – and I went out all the time to work with people. [Both laugh] And then the glorious designer of Symphonic and many other things... I've forgotten her name right now – also, Russian. Anyway,

naturally when Massine came to London to work – Vera didn't work at Covent Garden because she was teaching at West Street –

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: so it was easy to get there. What was her name – she is so famous – Sophie Fedorovitch.

SB: Oh, yes!

GL: But, who did he spend his time with... those two! I was already in Symphonic Variations so Sophie liked me a lot and Vera... I was one of her best pupils... if not the one she really favoured because of this Russian soul they thought I had. And so, he said to them, 'This one child, I want. I don't know if I will be allowed to get her, but that's who I want to play the Miller's Wife with me', and they said, 'Who?' and he said, 'There's one person with a Russian soul'. And then they knew. And then, they said, 'Not Gillian?' and he said, 'Yes, that's who I want'. And then, unfortunately – I was married then, to a Barrister – unfortunately, they were so thrilled, they rang our home and I think I was in the bath so I couldn't talk to them, so they talked to my husband and I heard him say, 'What! Well, that's incredible. Are you sure?' 'Yes', so they told him what Massine wanted and unfortunately, he told me – that was a Saturday – and I went into work on the Monday and your life – it's not like now, where they go - if you're a very big Principal – which I was – you're allowed to go and say... apparently, 'Oh no, I'd rather not do that'.

SB: Oh, are you?

GL: I think Monica may have changed that. Monica Mason. It got a bit like that after Ninette and before Monica, there was a bit of ...you know. The cast lists were always put on the board – and I'll never forget it – I went and looked on the board and it said 'The Miller's Wife – Fonteyne, Elvin... I think it was, Farron, someone else.... Lynne'. I was fifth, and it absolutely broke my heart because – you see, it had to be Fonteyn because you couldn't have the great.... Massine coming to The Royal Ballet – Sadler's Wells, we weren't The Royal Ballet then – and using the youngest one, which I was... and not your Ballerina. So, I see why Ninette had to do it but at the same time I think she was wrong... she should have let me be second.

SB: Mmm. Yes.

GL: Because if he saw something so big in me, she should have thought, 'Right'. You know?

SB: Mmm.

GL: But she thought, 'No, she'll get there in the end'. I can see... I know exactly what she thought. But she... and also I'd got married, which in her eyes was a mistake.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And it was a mistake, but I wanted a home. I hadn't had a home of my own for so long, you know.

SB: Yes.

GL: And I think that's why I got married, to be honest.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And so there were two things. She thought I wasn't serious... and I was the most serious of the lot of them – I mean, people stopped doing it – I mean, I'm the only one who's gone on in theatre and worked and worked and worked.

SB: Yes. Mmm.

GL: How wrong she was. She came to see me at the Palladium when I'd become a sort of dancing star there. She came to see the ballet that everybody talked about and 'I want you to come back. Your technique has gone on incredibly, Lynne. I want you to come back'. But by then... I'd seen South Pacific, I'd been at the Palladium where I smelled all sorts of things. I knew what it was like to get out and hold an audience that doesn't want to see dance and fight for it. And I thought, 'Going back isn't a good thing' So, I said, 'No'.

SB: So, when that list went up, did you leave very soon?

GL: I actually went and I was actually... you know that statement, 'Sick with disappointment'... well, I now know it's true.

SB: Yes.

GL: I was sick. Anyway, I got over that. I was in it, just in the Corps [de ballet], you know. I think I had a little bit which he [Massine] manufactured for me but, I mean, he wasn't pleased about it and I heard he put up a fight but... No, a little while later – a few months later – and of course, Robert Helpmann knew all about it and Robert Helpmann had been my fan from the beginning because I could act as well as dance and that's what he was. He came to me and said, 'They want someone to become a dancing

star at the Palladium, and they've come to me and said do I know anyone who's got the technique and the personality and the guts to hold it and I think it's you, Gillian. I think you should do it'.

SB: Mmm.

GL: Now, if it had been before *The Three Cornered Hat* I would have said, 'Oh, no Bobby, how lovely but no, this is my home'. But, it was after that huge disappointment. And so I thought about it and I handed in my notice and there was a sort of – I think *Ninette* was ill – because it had never happened.

SB: No.

GL: And Margot's mother came to me and said, 'But, Gillian, you're one of our brightest hopes' and I thought, 'Not while your daughter is still there'.

SB: Mmm.

GL: You know, because I know that I was sort of held back. Because I was unusual.

SB: Yes. So, who actually offered you the job at the Palladium?

GL: Er... Charlie Henry.

SB: Oh, was it?

GL: Yes. Charlie Henry, Val Parnell. There were three of them. There was Val Parnell, Charlie Henry and one other. I can't think who it could have been, darling. Anyway, the first show I did there was, I think, awful but it was lovely because it meant I met Vera Lynn. It was called *Peep Show* starring Vera Lynn.

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: And in the end – Bobby was going to choreograph it – and in the end he couldn't because he got a film with Laurence Olivier, who was his best mate and so it was choreographed really excruciatingly badly by Anne Negus - who was in the company with me and who wasn't a choreographer - and a man called Joe someone, who was from variety so they knocked it together - it wasn't choreographed – knocked together but however, the Palladium sort of liked me enough that they started to think about putting ballet back into variety and so first of all I did a pantomime and Pauline Grant choreographed it.

SB: Oh, did she?

GL: And then they said... they obviously tried me out with her – in the pantomime and then they said, 'We want to make these ballets', and at that time Leroy Anderson's music was the rage in America and Pauline, very cleverly, said, 'Well, if I'm going to do that, I want special music and this is who I want. Can you get on to him and see if it's possible'. And got the permission and the first ballet she did was called *Mischief in the Wind*... forgotten the name of the music but it was an absolute smash hit. But she trained me for that. I mean, she used to have the front cloths at the Palladium put down... and the tap mat... and then I had to do thirty two pirouettes from fifth to fifth, to the right and then to the left. Then I had to do fouettes, and you know I don't know why I didn't fall in [to the pit] and break my...

SB: Oh, gosh!

GL: She was so harsh on me, but she wanted me to go on and flip – trick after trick – which I did, entirely because of her. She just... and you know at that time I had one of those bodies. It could do anything as long as somebody trained it.

SB: Mmm. Was she a hard taskmaster?

GL: Oh.... I mean the other girls used to come up and say, 'Gill... your pointe shoes are blood red... your feet are bleeding... you must tell her to stop' and I'd say, 'Don't be silly, I'm learning more than I have ever learned in my life'.

SB: Mmm. I did something with her...

GL: Was she tough then?

SB: Yes, very, very, tough.

GL: But I knew she adored me and I knew she thought I could do everything.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And so I wasn't going to let her down. It was one of those relationships.

SB: Yes.

GL: She was a wonderful woman. She was married to a very handsome – he had been a fighter pilot...

SB: Oh, really?

GL: Or was he a bomber pilot? And he was very high up in the RAF and he was captured and he was tortured at the Nazi headquarters in Paris, which was... is now the Crillon [Hotel de Crillon].

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: The hotel...

SB: Yes, yes.

GL: ...which was the Nazi headquarters.

SB: Oh, I didn't know that. Gosh!

GL: And, unfortunately, they adored each other but he was a gambler and I think that experience of torture and everything... when he finally got out ... they didn't kill him. They almost did. He went through the whole thing with the head in the bath, all of that.

SB: Oh, no.

GL: Dreadful stuff. I think he must have thought, 'Well, fuck it!'. And they were together for a long time and then what really broke her was ... she was a wonderful little pianist. Music was of great importance to her and she went home one night and everything had gone – not the bed. The bed was still there and the bedroom chairs but her piano had gone because he was selling everything off to feed his gambling.

SB: Ahh.

GL: And that did it. That broke her.

SB: Mmm.

GL: Because she knew it was useless. He knew how much that meant to her.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And he couldn't stop himself. I've never known a gambler, but apparently it's terrible.

SB: Well, it's an obsession, isn't it?

GL: A total obsession.

SB: Ahh...so, at the Palladium, those Variety bills... did they...

GL: Twice nightly. Three on Saturdays! Each ballet built round me so I... once I was on I never went off.

SB: I was going to say... how long were they?

GL: Ten to fifteen minutes.

SB: Oh, gosh.

GL: Each of them were... with one show-off trick – and everything - after another.

SB: Mmm. That's amazing.

GL: Wonderful for the stamina.

SB: Did you ever go on tour at all?

GL: No. Always in variety.

SB: Always at the Palladium.

GL: And that's how I did my film with Errol Flynn, because they saw me at the Palladium. I got that. I got ABT [American Ballet Theatre] saw me there and said would I go and dance the lead in Rodeo.

SB: Oh, gosh.

GL: And the Palladium wouldn't let me go. And I still don't know how they let me do the film with Errol Flynn. Except that they thought it would be very good publicity when I came back – For their little star dancer and all of that... but I absolutely adored it, of course. And in the middle of it all they asked me to go back and dance the lead in Aida at the Garden [Covent Garden]. So, I went back with all this new-found technique and a lot of... able to hold... I sort of tore the place apart. [Both laugh]

SB: I bet you did!

GL: It's only because I had this...

SB: Performing!

GL: Do you know, I couldn't see a thing at my first performances there [the Palladium]... the lights were so bright compared with Covent Garden. I used to say to Malcolm... Goddard, who was my partner...

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: I used to say, 'I'm coming!' [Both laugh] because I was blinded. You couldn't see.... He was there and I ran where I thought he was and leapt and hoped.

SB: Well, it's quite... I have noticed... it's a bit like when we did... when they filmed Barnum...I kept saying the lighting was too dark because it wasn't sort of Circus or Variety.

GL: Circus. No.

SB: It was subtle.

GL: Nothing was subtle, was it? [in variety].

SB: I think it was John Hughes who directed, and I kept saying to Michael 'it's too dark. It needs to be...'

GL: How right you were.

SB: That was the only thing wrong with it. Only them trying to be too clever and it wasn't brash enough.

GL: Well, it's... I mean, I think.... Everybody came to see me. Ninette came to persuade me to go back. Margot's mother came again.

SB: Really?

GL: Shocked! She thought... She said, 'You've lowered yourself'. And I said, 'No, I don't think I have. I'm learning so much. It's a different side of theatre but I go to class each morning exactly the same. I do two shows every night. That means two barre works in spite of my class and then one barre work flat out – 30 minutes – for the first show, maybe an hour off and then repeat the whole process and three times on Wednesdays and Saturdays so...', I said, 'I'm getting such stamina, Black Queen'. We used to call Margot's mother the Black Queen.

SB: So, did you go from one show to the next? I mean, how long did they run, those shows?

GL: No. I think each one was like six weeks or a month.

SB: Was it?

GL: And then there was a bit of a gap and then in those gaps I went off and did other things and then there was another one and so on... I can't remember how long the gaps were.

SB: So, how long... did they fit you into the pantomimes?

GL: Those scenes were always built round me. You know, I was either the Queen of Cats or Oceana with huge, big, big sets.

SB: Yes.

GL: I worked with Norman Evans and Betty Jumel. I worked with Terry Thomas in variety. I adored him. He and I made such a friendship.

SB: Really?

GL: I adored that man. I couldn't bear it when he died, quite young. He wasn't very old. Sixty or something.

SB: He wasn't very old.

GL: He wasn't old, old, was he?

SB: No... My grandfather did a pantomime with Betty Jumel that I've got posters of.

GL: So, it was another whole world and maybe in a way you would have felt you'd lowered yourself if you'd gone anywhere else but The London Palladium was The London Palladium. And the stars coming over [from America]. Schnozzle came over [Jimmy Durante]. Billy Daniels came over.

SB: Yes.

GL: The Weir Brothers were there. That famous... Joe Stafford came over. So, I didn't feel I was totally lowering myself, you know.

SB: No.

GL: Though I could see in a way I was, but...

SB: It is different but also, don't you think you were showing ballet to people who wouldn't normally see it?

GL: Well, I was you see and that's the whole thing... that was their idea. And so had Pavlova and so had... not that I'm saying I was in the same league as her, but she'd danced in Variety. Phyllis Bedelles danced in Variety and another famous one... [pause] I can't remember, but there were some quite serious – and Markova and Dolin danced in Variety – so I thought 'Oh, hold on...."

SB: Yes, they had and I think because of that a lot more people probably saw or got interested in ballet.

GL: I think they did because I remember the first night that we did this Mischief in the Wind that the whole place stood up and yelled – you know – and Val and darling... who did I say...

SB: Charles Henry.

GL: Charles, who I worshiped. At his first meeting he said, 'Gill, you and I will get on, because we both know that discipline is the only word that matters!' [Both laugh]. That

was the opening gambit! And, of course, I was like that anyway so we got on like a house on fire. But, they all came round after the first performance of it and all said, 'We wouldn't have believed it! We would not have believed that dance could do this'. It is so interesting now, isn't it? That every Tom, Dick... where everything is dance. I mean it's gone the other way.

SB: Oh, yes it has.

GL: I mean it's gone ridiculous.

SB: Yes... So, how long did you do those [ballets] for?

GL: Well, it was about a year and a half.

SB: Mmm.

GL: Two years, I suppose. And I was starting to act. I played the lead in Goody Two Shoes in Windsor. That was written for me. And then I went into rep. [Repertory Theatre].

SB: Oh, did you?

GL: Mmm. I thought, 'I'm falling between six stools here'!"

SB: Mmm.

GL: I don't quite know... because I was acting one minute. I used to dance big Pas de Deux on television with Alexis Rassiné. Classical – always Classical.

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: I was going off and doing things like Goody Two Shoes. I was rushing back to Covent Garden, so it was an absolute... But of course, it was an incredible training.

SB: Mm. And did they, when television started to become popular...?

GL: I was never off! I was on all the time.

SB: Mm.

GL: Never off. All those big variety shows.

SB: Yes.

GL: And then Music at Ten, you know all those big [shows]... I was never off. And April Olridge, who had been at the Covent Garden with me. She'd left. She'd got fed up and she and I became quite famous. We... they made all sorts of strange dances for us. We did The Billy Cotton Band Show.

SB: Oh, did you?

GL: I did Perry Como [Show] and so on and so forth. And so, it was an incredible training.

SB: Mm. And I'm sure it did a lot for dance because the people that go to Covent Garden aren't necessarily the people who watch variety television shows and things.

GL: Not at all. In fact, it's such a shame they've all gone. Well, don't get me started on Reality T.V. I am so against it. I think it has done and is doing such harm to the theatre.

SB: It is.

GL: I'm furious with Andrew [Lloyd-Webber] for doing it. He doesn't need it. He doesn't need the money. He was famous anyway. [Picks up bottle of water].

SB: Shall I do that for you?

GL: I want to learn how to do it. Do you push these up?

SB: You push that away.

GL: Oh, I see. Everybody else

SB: So, after the Palladium and that kind of thing did you... what did you do then?

GL: Well, you see I did that film with Errol Flynn and that opened up all sorts of doors.

SB: Did it?

GL: Yes. That's why I was able to go into rep. and things like that because I'd played a role in a big movie.

SB: What was it? What was that movie called?

GL: It was called The Master of Ballantrae

SB: Oh, yes. I'll have to watch it again.

GL: And I got that entirely because I was at the Palladium and the Casting Director came to see it. And he'd gone through fifteen people and Errol had turned them all down. He didn't like any of them and one night that Casting Director thought, 'Oh, bugger it', poured himself a big drink and said, 'I'll go and see the show at the Palladium'. Because people were talking about that ballet.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And he said, 'Maybe...' to himself. But, he'd been looking for a blond with big bosoms and I was dark with no... I mean, they were danced off! But, he liked what he saw and he liked my sexuality. I was a very sexy dancer and he liked that and he thought, 'Maybe...' Sent me to meet the Director and it's a long story but anyway, I got the role.

SB: Fantastic!

GL: And that meant that it opened up doors – in the repertory companies that wouldn't have taken me.

SB: And whereabouts was that filmed?

GL: In Sicily. It started my enduring love for Sicily.

SB: Oh, wow!

GL: My whole section was shot in Sicily, in Palermo.

SB: That was good, wasn't it?

GL: I had an affair with Errol, because my marriage was, by then... I told you it was, you know... I absolutely loved my chap and he's very tall, exactly like my present husband. Tall and good looking and spoke English so beautifully because he was a barrister and I had absolutely no schooling - I told you - What with the War and Mummy's loss, my schooling was absolutely nil. And I've always loved language and so I wanted to learn and so I learned from him.

SB: Yes.

GL: But sexually we were not a good match. And he used to say to me, 'Oh, Gill. You're such a sensual dancer but getting you to make love in the afternoon is like getting blood out of a stone!' [Both laugh]

SB: You were probably exhausted!

GL: Well, I was so ashamed because I knew I was a sexy being but I didn't feel it for him.

SB: Mmm.

GL: It was terrible. So, when I did this movie with Errol, and then Errol was charming and taught me how to act, it was inevitable.

SB: Mmm.

GL: It was just inevitable. So, I'm a very truthful person and when I came back I told this poor man but I said, 'Listen, you know I've been trying to get things right between us for over a year' so, it wasn't as if it was all peachy.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And so of course he divorced me.

SB: Because of that? Did he?

GL: Yes. And I was so naïve, I gave him the house, which was our house, in Walton Street, which I had bought.

SB: Oh, no.

GL: And I said, 'I'm so sorry, darling... you know... have the house' and of course my friends said, 'What! What are you doing?!' but that's me. That's how I'm made.

SB: So, then you did a lot of rep and ...?

GL: So then I did a lot of rep, a lot of different things. Started to do an amazing amount on television. They made Salome on television and they wanted somebody to do the dance – The Dance of the Seven Veils – and they had a wonderful girl who started it and finished it – Helga Pilarczyk, her name was – a beautiful singer but dance... it was a long dance – The Seven Veils – and so Margaret Dale who had been at the Royal, at the Garden with me, choreographed it and the Director was Rudolph Cartier, who was like the God of the BBC.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And he connived such a lust for me which I did not have for him but however, I played Puck. He did an amazing – and I think he did it for me, honestly – he did this amazing production of A Midsummer Night's Dream on television with John Justin and Natasha Parry and half the great character actors you've ever thought of. And I was so nervous at the first read-through because I'd never done Shakespeare. I'd done some acting by then – not much, you know – and here I was playing this enormous role. And so, the first read-through we all sat round a large table like this and I'm looking and thinking, 'It's coming up! It's coming up!' and by the time... my heart... I don't know how I uttered one word. Anyway, it's extraordinary...

SB: No, that's true – it was live.

GL: But, last year Peter and I were doing a play together at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington [D.C.] and there was a big press thing and all the actors and the Director was there and I was there as the person who was going to do all the staging because there's a lot of musical staging in Molière because that's how he writes. And this total stranger came up to me at the end and said, 'Miss Lynne?' and I said, 'Yes' and he said, 'Did you ever play Puck?' I said, 'Well, as a matter of fact... how incredible that you should say that! Yes, I did for BBC television'. And he said, 'Well, they have it here in the archival libraries'.

SB: Good gracious!

GL: 'You must go and see it', he said. So, he told us where to go and Peter and I went and took a bit of time to arrange it all and finally - we weren't allowed to take it out – we had to go into a special private theatre in this huge place in Washington and we saw it and it was incredible. Really, it was built round Puck. I mean the opening shot [SB: laughs] – A Midsummer Night's Dream starring John Justin and ... da di da and Gillian

Lynne and the camera, all the time, was doing a very slow track in – very slow – in the studio there was the forest...

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: And it went in and in. And in the middle of the forest was a little sapling [SB: laughs]. I looked exactly like a sapling because I was very slim. I had nothing on... well, I had net pants – flesh coloured net pants – and I had bandages round here [chest] to make me totally flat and I had net over there. And they put glue all over me and stuck real leaves all over me. I had tiny little horns and he had had my hair cut to about that long [very short] and I was standing like this [demonstrates] with my legs crossed like that and the camera came up to this – and he had had other saplings built – and suddenly, this sapling went [demonstrates] and... big close-up! And it went on like that. [both laugh] But it was... well, Peter thought it was wonderful and it was very exciting.

SB: But, how wonderful that they've got it, though.

GL: Isn't it! Why have they got it?

SB: Yes, how did they come to have it?

GL: Anyway, he then put me in a play opposite Wilfred Pickles. So, I did Salome for him. I did this play with Wilfred Pickles. I did Puck. So all the time I was enlarging what I could do and then a woman called Elizabeth West, who ran the Western Theatre Ballet, came to me and she said, 'I'm – Oh, and I'd been in lots of revues by then. I'd learned to sing and speak...'

SB: Oh, had you?

GL: Yes. Yes I did all those revues at the – I'm trying to think of the name of the theatre at Notting Hill Gate... it's called... do you remember there were two revue theatres... famous.

SB: Yes, there were.

GL: Well, I was always appearing in revue in them, which is very good training.

SB: Yes.

GL: Because you know you have to do absolutely everything.

SB: Yes. I mean, so many... what I have discovered – and I kind of knew before, but – how many people would do variety, revue... in other words... you would take whatever work came.

GL: You would.

SB: So you were all doing everything.

GL: Yes, and people were co-casted so there would be somebody from variety, revue and then I would go back to the Palladium and do a ballet and so it was very intermingled.

SB: Yes.

GL: London was so lovely then. It was so much smaller. And we all sort of knew each other and we all used to go to the same restaurants and clubs. It was so much nicer than it is now.

SB: Yes.

GL: And so I'd been in a couple of revues where the Choreographer had walked out. One was Tutte Lemkow who was very, very full of – what's the word? He was over the top – extravagant. Clever – married to Mai Zetterling, the film star.

SB: Oh.

GL: But he walked out of this one revue I was in and all the cast said - with one voice - 'You must do it'. And I said, 'Why me?' And they said, 'Because you can!' So, I took over the choreography but no, I didn't want to be a Choreographer or anything. And I took over the staging of that revue and that got good reviews and then...

SB: Did you enjoy doing it?

GL: I found that I could do it.

SB: Mmm.

GL: I found that, to my amazement, it wasn't hard. To my amazement! I thought, 'Oh, all right!' and got on with it and did it. I mean it was as simple as that. And then I did one other and then this woman came and said, 'I want to make a Jazz Ballet for my

company, and I want you to do it with Dudley Moore and I've spoken to Dudley Moore and he's keen to do a Jazz Ballet'. So, then I started to go and see The Fringe and there was Dudley and I used to go and hear him play at - I can't remember the name of that club - Not The Exhibition... what was it? In Wardour Street. Famous club.

SB: Oh, I know...oh...

GL: Anyway, I got to know all the boys. You know, all The Fringe boys and to cut a long story short, he and I made this Jazz Ballet The Owl and the Pussycat for her company. And, I don't think it was very good... it was all right probably but it was jazz, it was different. And so I got started to be talked about as a choreographer. Against my will, I didn't want to be a choreographer. I wanted to be Jessie Matthews actually.

SB: Mmm. Did you? [Both laugh]

GL: And what sort of clinched it was that Dudley and I became great friends and we started talking and we thought - then there was no Jazz Dance in England and somebody came to me from Covent Garden and said, 'I've been left £900 by an aunt. I want to make a Jazz Ballet. You must do it'. And I said, 'Yes, for what company?' and they said, 'Oh, hadn't thought of that... of course...' So I said, "Well, we'll have to create one then". And so we created this little company called Collage in 1963 for the Edinburgh Festival and Dudley Moore wrote all the music, which was superb of course, as you can imagine, it was superb.

SB: Yes. Mmm. Now, did you use choreo... when you say it was a Jazz Ballet...

GL: Well, it was Jazz, Classical and words. It was light years ahead of that show called Contact.

SB: Yes.

GL: I mean, this was '63. But, I found - by then I was doing a pantomime with Frankie Vaughan, Dick Emery and Jimmy Edwards.

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: That was the bill. And me.

SB: Oh, was it.

GL: Yes.

SB: And where was that?

GL: At the Palladium.

SB: Was it?

GL: And so Bernie Delfont said, 'Gillie, we're hiring you'. Who was the man that always directed his shows?

SB: Oh...Not Dickie Hurrans was it? Before that, was it?

GL: No, it wasn't Dickie Hurrans. It was someone slightly better than Dickie. So famous, darling, married to a... his wife is like a Dowager Duchess... she's so lovely. [pause]

SB: Not Robert Nesbitt?

GL: Yes! Robert Nesbitt. And Robert Nesbitt came all the way up and by then I was... no, before I did that pantomime I was playing the lead in the Five Past Eight show.

SB: Oh, were you? Yes.

GL: With Rickie Fulton and Jack Milroy.

SB: Oh, wow!

GL: That's a very funny story. I went – it was the first time I had been billed above the title... as a leading lady. I sang. I acted. I did sketches with them. I danced the Rose Adagio; I mean... you've never seen anything like it! And the first day I got there, in Edinburgh.... Or Glasgow? Did we start in Glasgow? Anyway, it doesn't matter because in the Five Past Eight show you did each city. But, I thought, 'I'll go and look at the theatre', so I dumped my stuff in my digs and I went and looked at the theatre and there was my name – I've forgotten who'd got the lead but it was either Rickie Fulton or Jack Milroy, with Gillian Lynne. And there were these two Scottish women standing – and there I am going 'Ohhh...' and they're saying, 'Oh, look... Rickie Fulton and Jack Milroy and....? Gullian Lung?' [Both laugh] So, that brought me down a bit! [SB: laughs]

SB: But, they were good shows, the Five Past Eight shows.

GL: Hugely good. And again, fantastic if you had across-the-board talents. And I did – except for the singing which was dia...- but, none the less, I sang a lot in them, which was pretty awful.

SB: But, you got by?

GL: Well, Yes, I did get by with it, but it was.... Anyway, he [Bernard Delfont] came up and said, 'Gillie, I want you to come and do my next pantomime at the Palladium and I'm hiring you for one purpose. I'm going to give you the whole of the end of Act 1 and I want you to close Act 1 with a bang!'. That was my brief.

SB: Oh, really?

GL: So, I danced on pointe. I did Pas de Deux. I did tricks. I did everything and then I went in the wings, threw off my pointe shoes, put on my high heels and then I came back with a big feather boa and came back and sang with Frankie Vaughan. And did sketches with him and so that was pretty good training. And that was the one that in-between... I used to finish that, get into my practice clothes, go in full make-up to West Street, give class – trying to find other people who like me who were sick of there being no Jazz dance or Modern dance in England and I began to find people who felt like I did and so I was forming a company, you see.

SB: That must have been good, mustn't it? And inspiring?

GL: So, we did this show called Collage and do you remember a wonderful musician called – I'm trying to think of his name, I can see him – Ant Bowles, Anthony Bowles?

SB: Oh, yes. Anthony Bowles. Yes.

GL: So, we had five – only – superb players of Jazz.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And we had Dudley's music. And it was unlike anything anyone had ever done. It was totally original. And David Merrick was staying with Binkie Beaumont in London and they were reading their papers over breakfast and Binkie said, 'Oh, how interesting. This girl that we've all known of as a terribly clever performer and lovely dancer and everything... she's done this show in Edinburgh... and she's got brilliant reviews'. So, he said to David, 'You'd better go and have a look at it'. Now, the likelihood of David Merrick, who's the biggest producer in the world saying, 'All right, I will'. But, he did. Flew up to Edinburgh and came to see it.

SB: Really? Gosh!

GL: And my agent came round in the interval and said, 'Listen, Gillie, please after the show get dressed quickly and come up to the hall because David Merrick wants to speak to you'. And I thought, 'Oh, yes and the sea's going to flood the whole of Edinburgh!' I didn't believe him. So, I was sitting there talking to my kids in my dirty old dressing gown with make-up on it and my agent came and literally got me by the ear and... And David said, 'You are very clever. This is one of the most unusual things I've ever seen and I will have you on Broadway within a year'. And I didn't believe that either. And I was slightly... I thought, 'What's happening to me. I don't want to be a Choreographer'. Because, it was all happening. The BBC sent Melvyn Bragg, who was then a young Director, up to make a film of the show and me. That's in the Archives.

SB: Really.

GL: And, I mean, I was thrilled but it wasn't my plan.

SB: Mmm.

GL: Anyway, I did go on Broadway, within a year and I did The Roar of the Greasepaint [the smell of the crowd] with Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse.

SB: Yes.

GL: And then I did three films in a row. And then Merrick said he'd take Pickwick over to Broadway only if I choreographed it though and it was already on here.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And I was not a choreographer even, when it was done and so that was awkward because he insisted – the poor chap was fired. So, suddenly...

SB: ...You were a choreographer!

GL: But I was the choreographer – that was what was so stupid – I mean, one minute I was the performer, well-known performer by then – and the next minute I was the choreographer and there was no build into it really.

SB: So, did you not work... actually, dance again? Or... ?

GL: [Shakes head]

SB: You didn't?

GL: But it was why I could do Cats because I kept all my dancing up and Cats I found on my own body and I showed every step, every move.

SB: I saw you do it. A rehearsal.

GL: Did you?

SB: Mmm. Well, Cats opened when Barnum opened and...

GL: Did it?

SB: Well, it was within two weeks... but we actually had a day off or something and I came and watched some of the rehearsal. Yes. And you did look just like a cat.

GL: But, you know, I couldn't have done that show if I hadn't been a superb dancer.

SB: No.

GL: And that's so worrying about now, when half of them with big names actually don't do their own steps. Their assistants do it, and then they come in and say, 'Ah, yes. No. And then you can do that'.

SB: Do they?

GL: Very much, darling. And I won't say the names but they are famous. And I think to myself, 'How can they do that? Why then say you're a choreographer'. Anyway, that's the way it's gone.

SB: Mmm.

GL: But in those days.... But, you know, I've forgotten one thing that is the other reason that I could pull Cats off well. The BBC – when you asked about television... At the end of the fifties... The BBC – and I had been doing so much for them because of Rudolph Cartier – sent for me and said, 'We want you to narrate and mime, live, Peter and the Wolf with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra', so I said, 'Er... Oooh... I'm sorry but 'live'? How am I going to do...', you know, the end of Peter and the Wolf is that

procession, one after the other and they said, 'Because we're sending you to Paris to work with Jacques Lecoq for a month'. Well, I mean, you couldn't have prayed to God for something like that.

SB: No.

GL: So, I went to Paris and because he was going to come back and direct me, he used to give three classes a day for 1st Year, 2nd Year, 3rd Year... I had to do them all.

SB: Really.

GL: And what I didn't learn from that man... And that's all in Cats. So much of it. So much of the character building.

SB: Is it?

GL: How to totally forget yourself and be able to put your body into another person.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And speak with a different way with your body and your hands. I found that when it came to build those characters of T.S. Eliot's I kind of had the wherewithal to do it.

SB: And they were all sort of individual as well, weren't they?

GL: That's how he wrote them. And so actually... one of my proudest moments was when I put it on in Paris all on my own. They sent me off - Cameron [Mackintosh] and the Really Useful Group - to Paris. I didn't have any of the lighting... I was just sent out because they knew that on the whole musicals don't work in Paris and they thought, 'Well, let her go and try'. Male chauvinists! And, Jacques - once I'd got it on, which nearly killed me - came one night and he came - I think I met him in the foyer. I knew he was going to be there - And I just stood and looked at him and he looked at me and I said, 'I'm hoping you'll see some of yourself in this, Jacques'. And he said, '...You haven't forgotten a thing!'

SB: Oh! Really?

GL: That was so marvellous.

SB: Mmm. He must have loved it too. The fact that....

GL: He was thrilled – out of his mind. Yes, he was.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And you know, he came back and directed me and that's on tape [Peter and the Wolf]. That is on tape, that, one can see. So much of what I did though, isn't.

SB: Mmm. That is the sad thing about

GL: That's why I'm amazed we've got that. But, my saddest thing is that I danced Symphonic Variations with Margot [Fonteyn] and Pamela on T.V. and they filmed that from Alexandra Palace. They filmed the entire show...

SB: Did they?

GL: ... and I've never seen it. Don't know where it is. I'm sure it's gone.

SB: Mmm.

GL: We've tried to get hold of it but....

SB: That's sad... Can I just ask you... When you were in the Five Past Eight show and you mentioned digs... How did you come to find the digs there?

GL: I think we wrote. We used to write off. Because I shared digs with David Watson, who's now an agent and Roy someone whose name I've forgotten – little tiny dancer – so we were writing off because we wanted to be [together]. We wanted to take a flat.

SB: Oh, yes.

GL: We took flats and shared. And that was great fun! I used to love it.

SB: Yes.

GL: Again, you know I don't mind living like that. My husband, my present husband doesn't but he's very much a loner and he can't understand it. [Both laugh]. But, I said, 'It's because Mummy's death and the War and boarding school and having nobody. Ever since I've loved...'

SB: You like being with people? Yes. Well, I think it is quite good – it is fun to share. In the ballet companies did you all.... You used to do tours abroad.... Did you ever share?

GL: Oh, yes. When we went abroad I was always in a room on my own with a soldier standing on guard outside the room all night because I was underage.

SB: Oh, really?

GL: And Ninette de Valois used to have to swear to my Dad, in front of a Judge that I would be cared for and guarded.

SB: Oh, God!

GL: In order to be able to take me. And so there was this poor sod so I used to always go and find my way into the kitchens to get the Chef to make me two mugs of hot chocolate and I used to take it to him! [Both laugh]. No, but we toured all the time in England. We went to all those famous digs. The one in Acker Street in Manchester.

SB: Oh, yes!

GL: And a terrible place where we couldn't get anywhere. We had to go to the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. And then in Edinburgh, I remember some lovely digs... Oh, no, I used to love digs...

SB: I was looking through the Actor's Church Union Digs Book the other day – last night – with all the addresses and they were sort of ringing a bell.

GL: My favourite was.... I played Frou Frou in *The Merry Widow*, on tour with Peter Graves – The Honourable Peter Graves – [later Sir Peter Graves].

SB: Mmm.

GL: And Vanessa Lee.

SB: Oh, did you?

GL: And we did about three weeks in Newcastle, at the Theatre Royal and I found the most wonderful digs. I had a bedroom, a bathroom and a little sitting room. And my landlady had always got this wonderful blazing fire ready for me at night.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And things like that and I went to the... What is the famous football team that comes out of Newcastle? [pause] Newcastle United.

SB: Newcastle United.

GL: And I went to them and I said, 'I need a Masseur'. And I used to go to them and I'd have my massage and then I used to sometimes work out with the guys and teach them some of my exercises and things [Both laugh]

SB: Oh, really?

GL: Yes. So, I used to find touring enormous fun.

SB: Mmm. And did you always, as a dancer, have massages?

GL: From very early on. From sixteen on.

SB: Did you?

GL: Mmm.

SB: That's interesting.

GL: ...because I was always dancing difficult stuff. And strength. Real hard-graft strength I had to produce. It was hard. Well, that's why I've got metal everywhere now.

SB: Yes.

GL: It was hard on my body. And I had to have massages.

SB: Did you find it was hard at the time? I mean, did you have...

GL: No. I didn't find anything hard! No. It's only... and I didn't really before Cats, but Cats ruined my body to be honest, but I've gained so much from it.

SB: Mmm. Yes. That's true.

GL: But, you see, when it first happened and I had done it – I mean, I did all the staging – Trevor found some lyrics and directed it but not really. It was all choreography. It was all me, so it was very tiring. And then the next thing was Broadway and so, Lindsay Dolan had been my assistant on Cats because my only assistant for the last five years decided at that moment to break and try to be a Film Director and I said, 'Of course I understand, and of course you must but is this the moment, when we've got this show with this famous man?' But he was adamant and so I had happened to meet Lindsay in the street – because I was desperate – and Lindsay had worked a lot for me in my televisions that I'd staged as a choreographer and he'd just given up being the choreographer for The Sporting Club in Monte Carlo.

SB: Oh, he had?

GL: He thought, 'Oh, I can't stay here forever, I must go and make my own career in England'.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And he said, 'Yes, I'd would be proud and love to do it, on condition that you don't expect me to stay with it, because otherwise it makes no point in my having come back' and I was so desperate that I said, 'OK, OK', and that was a mistake actually because there's nothing like the first one. But, Jo-Anne Robinson... came in on the last three weeks – the last two weeks of the pre-work as the Dance Captain so I took her to New York with me but she was nowhere near ready to put it on, on her own. Then the next thing immediately, I did Vienna without anybody else - absolutely - they sent me... because it was a pros arch [proscenium arch] and they didn't think it would work so they said, 'Well...'. And the Viennese were clever because they looked at the show and they thought, 'It's all her. We want her. We don't need anybody else'. And so I went and did that which was thrilling because I had total power. And I had ten weeks' rehearsal, which I insisted on with a pros arch – to try to make it work, not in the round.

SB: I remember. I worked in Berlin – did Barnum in Berlin with a few people who came straight from there.

GL: Well, we had a huge hit there. And then I went straight from there to put it on in the first. – So, we'd done London, Broadway, Vienna – then we did the first National Tour of America and I trained a new – because I couldn't take Jo because she couldn't stay with it and anyway by then I think she'd gone back to Australia to join her husband. So, I trained a new assistant there, which was tough. So, that's already four productions with the whole thing... was me showing every step of the way and the fifth one, I think, was Australia but by then I'd become a Television Director, so I never stopped working. Never.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And Jo-Anne prepared the first ten days of that. The first time on her own and she was very good. And then, gradually Jo-Anne has taken over the East – Australia...

SB: Yes. That's great.

GL: But for the first five years I was really – and then we did it in Holland and... John did the first two weeks of that and we never let anybody do a whole one on their own...

SB: No.

GL: ...for a very long time, until Chrissie Cartwright.

SB: Yes... who I was in Barnum with.

GL: Who was brilliant at it. A lovely girl. Terribly good.

SB: So, I mean, that's been huge, hasn't it? When you think of something suddenly becoming worldwide. You know when you were saying about South Pacific and Oklahoma! and all those kind of things did run for long.

GL: But not that long.

SB: Well, no. I was going to say but then, a few years was a long run. And then musicals seemed to be hardly...

GL: Well, it's Andrew, isn't it? It's Andrew. Andrew's shows hit the jackpot.

SB: Yes. And stay on.

GL: And even his shows – Cats was the first of the mammoth things.

SB: Oh, yes. So, what are you planning to do in the future?

GL: I can't do another big show.

SB: Well, it's exhausting, isn't it?

GL: That doesn't worry me and I'm very lucky because often choreographers when they get old can't think it up any more. I can think it up... remembering it is not easy... I think up on Monday a whole lot of stuff and by Tuesday I'm going on but I've forgotten what I did on Monday but that's what you have an assistant for. And I've talked to all sorts of choreographers and they all say, 'Oh, don't be silly... it happened to me when I was forty!' [Both laugh].

SB: I can believe that.

GL: But this... it's really ruined... [pointing to legs]. I've had to have this right foot fused – it's got two nails through it. This hip... and this shoulder's got a terrible, terrible tear of it.

SB: So, it's the physical side, is it?

GL: Mmm. But I've got a film I can do and I'm preparing one and I can write... so, I'm in the middle of a book.

SB: Oh, that's good.

GL: But, it upsets me really to think that I won't do another musical, but on the other hand, if you've done the two biggest and best - Cats and Phantom - I suppose you can't want more. I mean, I'm very happy to have done those.

SB: Mmm.

GL: And I love my husband very much and we have too little time together and so now I want to have more time with him, you know.

SB: Yes. Well, I think on that note it's a good place to finish, so I'd like to say thank you very much indeed.

GL: It's been fun.

SB: It's been lovely to talk to you. Thank you.

GL: Thank you.