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Maroussia Richardson – interview transcript

Interviewer: Marie-Claire Wyatt

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Actress. Aldwych Theatre; Arts Theatre; ASM; Peggy Ashcroft; Peter Brook; casting; critics; Dangerous Corner; digs; Peter Hall; Look Back in Anger; Marat/Sade; music in Marat/Sade; Old Vic; Oxford Playhouse; props; Ian Richardson; Royal Variety Performance; RSC; Shakespeare; technical rehearsals; touring; understudying; variety; Worthing Rep.

MCW: Thank you very much for coming. May I have your permission that the copyright for this interview lies with the British Library Sound Archive?

MR: Yes, certainly.

MCW: Sorry I should have mentioned! This is Marie-Claire Wyatt interviewing Maroussia Richardson on the 23rd August, 2007. As we mentioned before, what was your first experience of the theatre and...?

MR: My mother had been a dancer, and then became a dramatic critic. So first of all she sent me to dancing school, where I was for ten years without ever getting any good at it at all. And I also went to a lot of theatre, because she got free seats of course. And I don't know what the first thing I saw was... I know I saw Alice Through the Looking Glass and The Wizard of Oz on stage somewhere, and hid under the seat when the witch came on. Anyway when it transpired that I wasn't going to be a dancer, my mother said, 'Oh well, you'd better be an actress then!', because the whole family were very into theatre. My grandmother had wanted to be an actress and her mother wouldn't let her. And my mother had been successively a chorus girl, a ballet dancer and then, as I say, a journalist – so always concerned with theatre. So I went to quite a lot.

I don't remember a huge amount of the actual productions, but I do remember seeing John Gielgud doing the Ages of Man, and it was the first time I had heard certain speeches that are of course terribly well known and terribly hacked, then you hear then, 'Oh it's that bit!'. But I'd never actually heard the seven ages' speech, I'd never heard the death of Clarence – of Clarence's dream – and all the things that he did. And it really impressed me, because one man who gets all the sense out of Shakespeare was Gielgud. And he used to go terribly fast, but every thought was in the right place, and he was wonderful.

You'll have to ask me a question and just steer me into which direction you want me to go. Or shall I just say 'then I went to drama school'?

MCW: If you want to talk some more about the productions you saw first, or...

MR: Well yes of course I do remember because the school used to take us to the Old Vic, which at that time did exclusively Shakespeare. And I saw Richard Burton playing Henry V, and also John Neville and Richard Burton alternating Iago and Othello.

MCW: Oh, that production.

MR: Yes, and I saw Claire Bloom playing Juliet. I saw pretty well everything at the Old Vic for about three or four seasons running I think, because also my mother used to take me to them as well, and the school used to take us. So we were well-grounded in Shakespeare. That would be when I was in sort of 13, 14, 15, that sort of age.

MCW: An enlightened school policy, as well as...

MR: Mmm. It was a wonderful company at the Vic. I mean, it was a resident company, it changed slightly, each year some people left, more people came in. But the core of the smaller part players remained very much the same. It was like a repertory company.

MCW: So you could recognise people if they came...

MR: Yes.

MCW: Absolutely fascinating. If you want to move on to...

MR: Well then I went - I may go back of course, I probably ramble - I went to RADA, at 16. I didn't bother taking A-Levels or anything. I took my O-Levels and then left and went to RADA, where I made a lot of friends. I don't think I learnt a great deal. [Laughs] But I made a lot of friends and we had a jolly time.

And in the holidays I did two things: in the shorter holidays I went and worked at the Arts Theatre Club as a receptionist, and selling programmes and tearing tickets and that sort of thing, and babysitting for the owners; and in the longer holidays I went to the Worthing Rep, at the Connaught Theatre in Worthing, as a student ASM. For which I got paid the princely sum of £1.50 – 30/- , if I was acting. But the rest of the time, if I was just doing all the other things that an ASM does, which is everything basically from painting the set to making the props, to making the tea, to marking out the stage with tape etc, etc, etc, that's all done by the ASM, and I didn't get paid anything for that – unless I was acting.

MCW: So in other words the guaranteed work wasn't paid for and...

MR: No, no. I did act in Worthing, about five plays I think. My very first one was *Reluctant Debutante* when I played the friend - Clarissa. The first time I was allowed on, and I was very pleased with myself! John Standing was in that, it was his first job, and he was very inept with the props, he was always... suddenly should have had a cocktail shaker in one hand, and had forgotten to pick it up. So it was... And he used to wear a trilby hat at all moments off stage, even if he was prancing about in his underpants, you know, outside the dressing room! He always had this trilby on. Anyway that's probably not germane to the research.

So that I did for two years running, and in the meanwhile kept on working at the Arts. And one of the things I had to do at that Arts was to read the cues if people were reading for jobs and parts you know, for plays that were being cast. And I would go and just read the cues so that they could do it. And so I eventually got cast myself after... as a maid classically, in a dreadful play called *Ariadne* by a French writer, which was universally panned by everybody! Directed by somebody who shall be nameless, who - middle European - who said to me the very first day as I... [accented] 'Do you always walk like that?' which meant I was totally incapable of walking of course ever again!

MCW: Guaranteed self-conscious making.

MR: Yes! Anyway, I saw a lot of plays when I was there of course, because I was selling programmes and tearing tickets. So I saw a wonderful production of *The Iceman Cometh*, directed by Peter Wood, with everybody you can think of in it. And they used the whole stage, because it was quite a small theatre, they literally went back to the back wall. And there was no set at all, it really was the whole stage, including the wings.

MCW: Good heavens!

MR: It was just after, I think, Peter Hall's season at the Arts, where he did very innovative things like *Waiting for Godot* and he was very arty you know. We didn't do such good... apart from *Iceman Cometh* we didn't do a lot that was very good. Oh and I was a wardrobe mistress at one moment there as well - that meant I ironed the shirts! So I was always, you know, I'd always get an odd-job at the Arts when I wasn't doing anything, which I wasn't doing much for quite a bit of the time, like most actors.

Anyway, the first job I properly got after leaving was an Arts Council tour - now it would be called TIE, but it was then called an Arts Council Tour - and we took *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Romanoff and Juliet*, which is played by Peter Ustinov. We took those to, initially Middlesbrough, [Laughs] Newcastle, and then we got on a coach and we went to Swansea, Cardiff, Llangothlan, Llandudno, Aberystwyth, Bangor - all over darkest Wales. By this time it was November, and it was not much fun! We used to play the schools with *Romeo and Juliet*, and then we'd play *Romanoff and Juliet* in the evening, in sort of Welfare Halls and wherever - the Pier, Aberystwyth. [Laughs] And we didn't get huge houses. The school kids were great, because it was lovely to play *Romeo and Juliet* to children who didn't know the story. I mean, they had no idea what was going to happen. And they'd cheer and whistle and boo, and you know it was wonderful.

MCW: Fantastic. The adult audiences, were they as...?

MR: They were all right. They didn't come in large numbers. I mean you were playing... where did we play, Blackpool? No that was later, that was with something else. But no we didn't do wonderfully, but we didn't... we did one night stands. I mean, we went round. We would be based in say, Swansea, but we would actually be playing little places all round – same with Cardiff.

MCW: Neath, Port Talbot...?

MR: Yes, all that. Then after that I went to the Oxford Playhouse as an ASM, same deal but I got paid all the way through - £8 a week.

MCW: Quite a rise!

MR: Absolutely, you could live on that. So I was at Oxford two seasons, as ASM and small parts. And that was great; it was a very good company. Frank Hauser ran it, and he got... he had a core company, but people would come in for different plays. Sort of sometimes slightly starrier would be brought in for any particular play. And we would do one week – probably two weeks in Oxford – and then we'd play one week in Cambridge, and one week somewhere else, and then go back – all the time rehearsing the next play of course. And then we'd come back and open the next play in Oxford, do the two weeks... And we used to share the theatre with the OUDS. So... which I didn't like at all as ASM, because they made a terrible mess! They were very unprofessional, didn't tidy up after themselves. [Laughs] And I had to do all the tidying up.

But being an ASM was the greatest possible education, because you learned so many things. Not sort of classy things about theatre, but you learn screw sizes, and you're sent to buy $\frac{3}{4}$ 8's and nails, and how to wire a plug, and how to edit a tape, and all this sort of thing. How to paint the set, where to put the highlights and the shadows, I mean all sorts of things that you don't think of immediately as being your job. How to wheedle people out of props you want to borrow for the week! [Laughs]

MCW: They used to get an acknowledgement in the program didn't they?

MR: That's right, credit in the program yes, yes. And you were very busy. I mean, I would get to the theatre half past eight in the morning, and I probably would – after the evening show – I would probably stay on for an hour or so making props or something in the prop room. And probably get home about you know, one or two.

MCW: At which point you start learning lines for the next week or...?

MR: Well, I never got anything large enough to warrant that you're having to learn them, because you knew them by the time you'd blocked it! But it was wonderful! I adored that, and worked terribly, terribly hard. But it was great. What else to say about the reps? Cambridge was always a very good audience, but the fourth week it was

variable. Sometimes we went... we went to Newcastle once, we went to Blackpool... can you imagine, Blackpool with *The School for Wives* – Molière - in November, in an enormous theatre, with a full orchestra that played selections from *South Pacific*?

[Laughter]

MCW: Very appropriate!

MR: And then we went to Cardiff with *Alice Through the Looking Glass* – Jane Asher was playing Alice by the way, aged 12. And Cardiff they didn't... I mean *Alice Through the Looking Glass* had gone down a bomb in Oxford and Cambridge, but in Cardiff, no, didn't like it, didn't laugh. So you never could tell.

MCW: They're really quite long jaunts from a sort of central point in Oxford.

MR: Oh I know, and you... we used to have to change at Bletchley, and you had to wait, I mean, at least an hour and a half – it was always Sunday you see, you trained on Sunday. And so you had to wait at Bletchley and look at that pork pie that had been there since the last time you were there in the...

[Laughter]

MR: And yes, I mean we never got a day off because we were always travelling on the Sunday.

MCW: Yes, I can see why you got rather fed up with OUDS not tidying up and...

MR: Yes, they were very untidy. Well they were not professionals you see. Because you had to, you know, you had to be tidy all the time, because you had to know where everything was, you had to... and you had to mark out the stage with tape for the rehearsing the play so that the set would be marked out in gaffer tape on the ground, so that you knew where everything was. And you had to do that every morning before they came into rehearse, and then of course you take it all up again for the show. So there was an awful lot of incidentals. Not to mention making coffee and seeing people didn't nick the teaspoons, and throwing a temperament if they did. You know, I had to buy them out of my miserable earnings!

MCW: Which does concentrate the mind!

MR: Yes, so anyway while I was at the last season at Oxford I auditioned for the RSC, and got taken on as a walk on understudy. I had I think a couple of lines, but not... mostly just walking on. And I was with Diana Rigg... I can't think... the other walk-on's

didn't become stars really. But it was a wonderful season. We had Peggy Ash... no Peggy Ashcroft came in a bit later. But we had... I'm trying to think who were the leads. Well we had Peter O'Toole of course playing Shylock. Dorothy Tutin who played all the heroines, who was a wonderful actress, and rather sadly sort of faded out a bit over in her middle years. But she was fabulously good. And O'Toole played, as I say he played Petruchio, he played Shylock and he played Thersites in Troilus and Cressida. And there was Max Adrian who was a wonderful old... well, sort of revue artist really, he'd been in his day, very waspish. And lovely company.

And it was Peter Hall's first season as overall in charge. And it was the... that time it was the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre; it got made the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at the end of that year. And we got the Aldwych so that things could go into London, which completely sort of altered the nature of the company in a way, because up to that point, if you were at Stratford you were at Stratford. And you were probably going to be at Stratford next year if you... you know. So you lived in Stratford, your kids went to school in Stratford, and that's where you lived. And then if you were lucky in the winter, you'd maybe get a couple of tellies in the off season, when they weren't playing. But if not, well you know, you just wait 'till the next season started. It would be February, start rehearsals. And there was a whole core of people who actually lived there and had their families. And of course as soon as you brought London into the equation, then everybody was going living in London and just commuting, or just going down for the season and going back to London. So you never again got the total family feel that we had in 1960, which was the... You know the babies would all be brought in on payday, you know they'd all be all over the Green Room. It was lovely, but unrecractable - you couldn't do that now.

MCW: I imagine. And of course... and I suppose moving was... moving a centre to London just cut that in...

MR: Well because then people had the option to live in London, and do work in London, and maybe not always have to be working for the RSC. Because otherwise people who were playing sort of middle range parts would quite likely stay there for years, because their kids were at school there you know, and they had built a house and...

MCW: Yes.

MR: Then it, as I say, became quite different, because people were coming down just to do a play, or two plays. Because we used to do six plays a season... everybody was in five plays, and one play out, which was quite... and then they were in repertoire of course. So at the end of the season you were doing a different play every night, and sometimes different matinée to evening performance.

MCW: That must have been an absolute nightmare for the stage managers and stuff.

MR: Yes, well, they got used to it! [Laughs] But it was pretty extraordinary for the actors. I remember one season when Ian was playing Malcolm in Macbeth, Coriolanus, Oberon, probably another couple of things as well. And we were filming Midsummer

Night's Dream at the same time during the day, and then going back and, you know, he was green all over for Oberon so he'd have to shower off, painted white you know and then – for Malcolm – and then that's all off and brown Coriolanus and he was in and out of the shower! [Laughs] And sometimes in one day you'd do the morning filming, a matinée of Coriolanus, and an evening performance of Macbeth.

MCW: Good God!

MR: Well they don't do that any more, because they... for one thing when they moved to London, the overtime became enormously expensive for the stage crew. Sort of different from Stratford, because Stratford ones had grown up with it, and they were used to it, and they it was sort of the deal. But when we went to the Aldwych they were the boys who were already there, and they had their own kind of idea of a run, which was you put on a play and it ran, you know. And you didn't have to do anything except reset to the beginning. So they became very expensive, the stage staff. And so then it became less and less possible to do repertoire.

MCW: Did that create a different feel between... and did Stratford follow that or was that...

MR: Stratford followed that. I think because it just got too... well it is expensive - I mean, it was expensive even in Stratford to have to change everything all the time, and everybody on overtime. And we used to do – also which is not allowed now – we used to do technical rehearsals that simply went on until you finished – which could be five o'clock in the morning. And you know, there was no question of, 'Oh, sorry chaps. It's...' you know – 'it's ten thirty, we have stop', it was no, you just went on 'til you'd done it.

MCW: Goodness!

MR: You sort of get your second wind round about three you know. You think 'hhhh' and you get quite light headed and stupid.

MCW: One does wonder whether that was actually time well spent to an extent.

MR: Well it was a technical rehearsal. You know, it's to do with getting the lights right, and making sure the quick changes work and that sort of thing. So it has to be done at some point. But they have longer... they take longer now. They take several days to do the technicals – if they need to.

And of course it was the days when you had an opening night, and the reviews came out the next day. So now they can come out any time you know. Most people do previews, and then they do have an official press night, and then the reviews may be next week, or when people feel like doing it. But this is because it was the next day, the curtain used to go up at six thirty on press nights. And there was one wonderful occasion when... somebody who'd just joined the company for The Tempest I think.

Yes, he was playing the boatswain at the beginning in the shipwreck scene, and he didn't know it was six thirty.

MCW: Oh no!

MR: He didn't know... nobody had told him, because he hadn't in the earlier play so he didn't know it was six thirty. So he didn't arrive for the half hour. So... and he wasn't on the phone. And he was living in some farm, you know, out of Stratford. And the stage manager went, got in the car and went to get him – and turned his car over in a ditch.

MCW: Oh no!

MR: So this character did not appear... well he did appear eventually in his own car when they'd got the... but meanwhile the curtain had been held for 45 minutes. And everybody of course is thinking 'well it's the...' - you know, obviously the star's not ready, because they all thought it was Ian's fault, who was playing Prospero. And they were just waiting for this one man. And he didn't have an understudy, because they don't... because usually they were very slow about allotting understudies: you'd wait 'til you were open and then you sorted it out. Didn't have an understudy, and everybody was on stage at the beginning, and he had to... It was just a nightmare! [Laughs]

MCW: Oh dear.

MR: No. You were asking earlier about how we met, Ian and I. And this was a production of Merchant of Venice, in which Ian was playing the Prince of Aragon. And the director, Michael Langham, had decided the Prince of Aragon was the end of a very long and effete line, and that he was sort of totally inbred and hopeless, and he went everywhere with his mother and his tutor. So I was his mother – I was 19 at the time! And I had this big mantilla and sort of black Jet and a huge skirt like Velasquez you know, because it was set kind of 18th Century or a bit earlier. And I got reviews, it was...

But before that the director said to Ian that he would like him to speak – he didn't put it in so many words – but what he meant was like the Queen. And he said, 'Any of you girls know how to do the Queen?' you know, and I said 'Well, I do actually, I do the Queen.'. So he said, 'Well, take Mr Richardson out on a boat on the river, he can pay, and you teach him to do [regal accent] oh you know that very high, that very high little girlish sort of voice she does'. I mean my... mine's gone a bit down since then, but it was [regal accent] 'I am enjoined by oath to observe three things...' - this is the beginning of Aragon's speech you see. So that was how we got to know each other. He was engaged to other people at the time and... [Laughs] and I'd just had my heart broken by an elderly actor. So, anyway we were married for 46 years, so it all worked out.

MCW: He went off on the big 1964 tour with...

MR: That's right, the world tour.

MCW: Did you go with him or...

MR: No I didn't because I'd just had a baby, so the baby was only what, six months old. So when he went... and he was away for... I mean, they were away for ages. It was a long, long, long, long tour.

MCW: Yes, because they went all around Eastern Europe and then...

MR: That's right, and then America. So it was... I did go out and join him... I sort of parked the baby somewhere and I went for a week to Finland. And then I parked the babies again and I went out to Washington for a week – Washington and Philadelphia. But that was it.

MCW: Was it possible to see how the audiences were reacting to that, or was it... to the performances, or was it you know...?

MR: What on the tour?

MCW: Mmm.

MR: I'm sure he must have told you. I mean it was a huge success, absolutely mega.

MCW: It made the reputation of the company didn't it?

MR: Yes, I think so. It was... Ian used to say it was the first tour behind the Iron Curtain, but it wasn't actually. There had been one other. I can't remember who it was, somebody's Shakespearean company went quite some time before.

MCW: I'm just trying to think. I'm sure...

MR: I mean since the war. Since the Second World War, there was one other who went. What else can I tell you?

MCW: Well one of the things that... you were saying that your mother had been a critic in her own right.

MR: Yes, that's right.

MCW: How aware were you... and the period was known for its critics and the...

MR: Yes, we knew quite a lot of them of course, because my mother knew them. And naturally because they all used go to the theatre at the time, and so Milton Shulman for instance I knew. David Nathan, Bill Darlington, Jock Dent – who was actually the principle drama critic on the News Chronicle, my mother was the number two and the ballet critic. So she would go to things that Jock Dent didn't want to go to. Alan Dent his name was really, but he was called Jock. Tynan of course, Bernard Levin – who we hated. [Laughs]

MCW: Any particular reason or...?

MR: Well he didn't really like theatre very much. He loved opera. And he had been working for the Express as an economist. He was brilliant apparently, economist. And so with typical Beaverbrook logic, they decided to make him the theatre critic.

[Laughter]

MR: And he was... Oh I mean he didn't like anything. And he was... or he liked things you know, which nobody else liked or... No, our favourite was J.C. Trewin who used to write for the Birmingham Post who was... and also for The Lady magazine. And he was a great fan of Ian's, he always gave terrific reviews. And he was a dear, sweet man anyway. But we knew quite a lot of them personally.

I mean some were more intelligent than others. I mean, Jack Tinker we didn't hold too high a brief for, or Herbie Kretzmer either, because a lot of them are sort of thwarted either actors, playwrights. Herbie Kretzmer wrote plays I know. But we would meet them on occasions. You know, sometimes there'd be press receptions at Stratford.

MCW: Did that give a different appreciation of what their work was. I mean, especially with your mother having been one as well? I mean was it...?

MR: Well I suppose it depended on whether they gave you good reviews or bad reviews, what you thought about them! I suppose when they all gave you bad reviews, you could have to say there was something wrong with the production. But in general we would... I mean it sort of mattered more then than it seems to do now, because they all came out at the same time - they all were printed the next day. And they were all you know, telephoned through the night before, just immediately after the performance.

MCW: Goodness!

MR: So that they all came out in a block. So that it was somehow more of an event. But now you can you know... oh The Times are doing it next week, and they're doing this

week, and they didn't bother to do it all you know. I know they're all in Edinburgh at the moment for instance, so other things go unreported. But we didn't... I mean they weren't a huge part of your life really.

And some you read... I mean you always used to read Tynan because he wrote so amusingly. And even if he was being waspish and cruel, you knew exactly what he meant. Somebody was quoting him... yes, Charlie Kay was quoting Tynan talking about Anna Neagle in... I can't remember what he was in, but anyway he said, 'She shook her little voice at us like a tiny fist.'

[Laughter]

MCW: Which does say exactly how it was done, doesn't it?

MR: So what else can I tell you? I saw quite a lot of plays of course. I'm just trying to think if Marat/Sade comes into this. That was later wasn't it? That was not out of your period? Yes.

MCW: No, because it was... I think it was just... it was '64 wasn't it?

MR: Oh it was sixty... yes it was. So Marat/Sade was something quite interesting. Maybe one should talk a bit about that, yes.

MCW: Yes, definitely.

MR: Well first of all we didn't actually start rehearsing the play for about a month into rehearsals. What we did was research madness. And we were shown some films, we had to talk about anybody we knew who was bonkers or... And several actors turned out to have quite close relations, and some of them withdrew, and they didn't... they said 'I'd rather not be in this'. And anyway we examined madness. We went... we had a friend who was a psychiatrist, so we went round a mental home. And that took up... and then we started to improvise on our kind of madness.

We had to decide what type of madness we would have. And also, bearing in mind the fact this was supposed to take place in the 18th Century, that people would be in lunatic asylums then who wouldn't be now. And so people with quite different things wrong with them would be in there. And you had to decide what you were going to be, what your particular complaint was, and how it manifested itself, and how you could... at the same time, play the part you'd been given in the play, within the play.

Obviously if you were somebody who was dumb or stammered all the time, you couldn't have long speeches. Or if you were unable to walk for instance, if you were always going round on your knees or something, then you couldn't dance you know. So you had to fit your malady to what your part was in the play. And then you didn't... he didn't actually cast – apart from the principal three – he didn't actually cast the other roles until we'd decided what kind of mad person we were going to be, and then he said 'Well then, you can be this, and you can that' and he allotted the other roles between us. And then we started rehearsing.

MCW: Goodness.

MR: And of course it was... there was a lot of singing, a lot of music, so that took a while to learn. And then Brook likes to surprise you, so like the night before we opened he said, 'I just thought, shall we reverse everything, and everybody who used to be on the left side of the stage can be on the right side of the stage... and everybody who used to get into that bath can get into that bath...'.
And of course Ian was naked – the first naked man on the Broadway stage. And he probably told you that the noise as he came out of the bath, ostensibly naked, there was this funny noise. He couldn't think what it was. And somebody... he said to somebody out front, 'Can you see what happens when I go out of the bath?' And it was in the days when you opera glasses, you put a nickel and you get... and it was people with glasses on, putting this up to their glasses!

[Laughter]

MCW: Oh, wonderful!

MR: I mean, it must be very tame now. It was only from the back anyway. But it was quite a sensation, and we were quite expecting to be arrested. And they said it was possible you know.

MCW: Good heavens!

MR: The police might come in and arrest us. You wanted to talk about censorship didn't you, but I don't remember it really applying much, because we were mostly doing Shakespeare of course.

MCW: Did it come in with... were you aware of it when you were working at the Club Theatre, the...

MR: The Arts?

MCW: Mmm.

MR: Again it didn't arise, because we didn't do any plays which would have required censoring. I mean we did the O'Neal and... no I don't think anything was censorable actually. O'Neal was incredibly long, and his widow would not allow anything to be cut. You had to do the whole thing. So it was... we used to have picnic baskets for the interval. No, seriously we used to... because it was three and a half... at least three and a half hours.

MCW: Goodness, gracious me!

MR: But other than that censorship... the only censorship I can remember was for the Royal Command Performance. Now the Royal Command Performance you know is variety. But in the old days it had very classy people; it was not just stand up comics and pop singers. It had people like Danny Kaye, and The Crazy Gang always. I don't know, and proper actors and usually one musical – they would do a scene from one musical that was running at the time. And I had the great fortune to go to the dress rehearsal of this thing, every year with my mother because she was covering it for the newspaper. And at the dress rehearsal everybody's just milling around in the stalls, and you know getting up and rehearsing their bit and then coming back and milling around a bit. So I met all these fabulous people and got their autographs and got photographed with them and...

Anyway, the censorship thing. They were doing a scene from *Guys and Dolls*, the 'Sit Down you're Rocking the Boat'. And there's a bit of dialogue in the middle, and the Salvation Army Captain says, 'Tell us the problem on your soul.' And one of the gangsters says, 'Go on, tell him what a bum you are!' And they decided you couldn't say 'bum' in front of the Queen, even though it was a different kind of bum - you know, America it's a tramp or a... you know. So they cut it, and they had to say, 'Tell us the problem on your soul.' 'Go on [inaudible]' - whatever his name was - 'Tell us the problem on your soul.' and the whole cast you know, just collapsed!

MCW: Oh dear, yes!

MR: But it was a wond... it was the highlight of my year, that Sunday that I used to go to the Royal Command Performances, just wonderful. Jack Benny I remember and Noel Coward, Marlene Dietrich, Maurice Chevalier...

MCW: Goodness!

MR: Because Maurice Chevalier did the wonderful thing of singing to the Queen, 'You must have been a beautiful baby...'

[Laughter]

MR: 'Now Madam, I'm going to sing for you... [sings] You must have been a beautiful baby. You must have been a beautiful child...' [Laughs] Oh it's lovely. Anyway it's not germane I don't think.

MCW: No, it would be very interesting to hear more about the variety aspect, especially as you were saying one of the... one of the actors at Stratford had variety background, weren't you, earlier in the interview?

MR: Yes, I've forgot... just a minute. Max Adrian.

MCW: Yes.

MR: Well he wasn't variety so much. It was a sophisticated, intimate revue he used to do, that sort of thing. It wasn't really variety. But they were... I mean I remember seeing Noel Coward, and you know again, the first time you hear a particular song, that now everybody knows you know. And I heard him do Uncle Harry and 'Let's Do It', and...

MCW: Yes, because some of his songs are... at least had an edge... you know a real edge.

MR: Yes. No he was marvellous. And Chevalier and Dietrich and... I can't remember who else, because I mix the years up. I went from age sort of eight – or seven probably – up 'til sort of age 11 or 12, went every year.

MCW: Yes, definitely a highlight.

MR: I've got the picture of me and Danny Kaye on the wall. [Laughs]

MCW: Wonderful.

MR: What else, anything else?

MCW: There was something else that... Oh yes, while you were travelling off to... you know from Oxford, or indeed just on the tour, how did life continue? And the places you lived, the digs...

MR: Oh well the digs yes, well they were pretty awful in those days. I mean they really were. You paid your, whatever it was – not very much, 30/-, something like that. And you got breakfast, and usually they left you a sort of sandwich for after the show. But they were pretty rough. I mean I remember staying in one that was... I actually was sleeping on a billiard table, because she'd run out of beds. [Laughs] And then in Blackpool, oh Blackpool digs were just horrible! In Blackpool we used to have breakfast, she used to use pullets eggs which are little tiny things, I mean like the size of blackbirds egg, fried in about four and a half inches of lard.

MCW: Oh God!

MR: No, they were pretty rugged the digs usually in those days. Now we are terribly spoiled, we get much nicer digs. But you know, it was quite an art touring. I mean you

had to pack very intelligently. Fortunately with the Arts Council one, we were on a charabanc so we didn't have to carry out suitcases you know, all the time through trains and things. But with Oxford we were on trains. So you had to be clever with your packing.

MCW: Were you responsible for taking your own costumes as well or did they go centrally?

MR: No they go in a skip.

MCW: Oh right.

MR: In one of those big wicker things. And in those days – happy days – the railways, you could hire a goods truck to take the set and the costumes and everything, and with it came four train tickets. So you could... we could accompany the set. So we always went by train. And we didn't use the removals service, which they used to use sometimes if one was going just not very far, or wasn't on railway line, they'd use just... Lucking they were called, Lucking's Theatrical Removers, and they would transport the set. But otherwise we went by train with the skip.

And then the other awful thing that happened to me was with the Oxford – was it Oxford or was it... yes it must have been Oxford - a play called Prince Genji with Natasha Parry, who was Peter Brook's wife, playing the female lead. And we'd done our two weeks in Oxford and our week in Cambridge, and we were just going to do a week in Brighton. And we didn't carry understudies - it was always understood that if any of the women were off I'd do it, and if any of the men were off the male stage manager would cover. But we never actually officially learnt the lines or anything like that.

So Natasha's mother rang up, as we arrived in Brighton Natasha's mother rang up and said, 'Natasha's very ill, she's got a terrible cold. I don't think she's going to come in tonight.' So, OK, over to you Maroussia. I said, 'Yes, where's the script?' And we didn't have a script, because the scripts were coming with the set, which was coming via the train, which was not going to arrive until three or something in the afternoon. None of the actors were there, because they'd all gone back to London, because it's such a quite, you know, trip to Brighton. So they're all gone back to London. I mean, there was no script! We had... eventually we got one of the actors to come at once, which was still another hour you know, with the script. And I was mad... of course in the end she was perfectly all right to play... [Laughs]

MCW: That's life.

MR: I did go on a couple of times for things, yes, again never with any rehearsal at all. But I was... I used to alternate being on the book doing all the cues and prompting and all that, with the other job which was the sound and the props. So I'd be doing one or the other. So if I was on the book then obviously I would know it anyway, because we'd done it so many times. But if I'd been on music and the props, I might not.

MCW: Was there a skill to looking after the props, I mean did you have to... you know, was it the responsibility of the actors to remember the props or the...?

MR: No I mean it was... you had to dish out what they call the personals: I mean, if somebody had a lighter in their pocket or whatever, you'd go to the dressing room and say you know, that's your personal props - or your watch or whatever. And then you'd have a prop table, and you'd lay out the things that people would pick up as they went on, if they needed something. And they were responsible for taking it off the table, except if you were a... we had one old ex-star in Worthing, who wouldn't take on a prop unless it was put into her hand you know. It was there, she only had to pick it up, but she wouldn't do it. Anyway... but normally, no you were responsible for seeing that they were on all on the prop table and in proper condition, and nothing was broken. And usually then you were doing the sound as well, with the big reel-to-reel Grundigs. And we used to put on records for the interval music, we used to have that. So you had to do that.

But the being on the book, but you also had to do various... you had to do all the electrical cueing and the curtain, and everything else. And I remember we did a play by J.B. Priestley called *Dangerous Corner*, which starts in the dark. And you hear a shot, and a scream, and then the lights come up and you realise that they are people listening to the radio, and they've just turned on the light - it was a radio play they were listening to. So, OK, here am I in the prompt corner. I cue down house lights, I cue the elects, I've got a pistol in my other hand and a bucket of sand. I fire the pistol into the bucket of sand, I scream, I cue the elects - I forgot to take the curtain up!

[Laughter]

MCW: Oops!

MR: Just one too many things to think about.

MCW: Yes. That's the play that it starts and it goes through, and then it does it again at the end almost the exact...

MR: Yes, yes, I think it does. I've forgotten now. It was one of those... all sorts of terrible things come out as result of having heard this play. And they're all having a conversation. But I really can't remember how it ends. I think you're right, I think it goes back to the same point.

MCW: Yes. What was the variety of plays that you did, especially at Oxford?

MR: I'm trying to think. We did *The Prince Genji* that was the first one I went for, which was this Japanese play, based on an actual book by Lady Murasaki who was medieval; she was the wife of the real Prince Genji. And she wrote a book called *The Pillow Book of the Lady Murasaki*, and it was based on that. And we had to borrow things from the Japanese Embassy, and I had to make a lot of Japanese props. [Laughs] Very difficult.

And then we did... what else did we do? We did *The Bacchae* directed by Minos Volanakis, and a wonderful production, really great. We did the panto, which was a play by Beverley Cross actually, about pirates, I can't remember what it was called. We did... gosh... we did *School for Wives* and *School for Wives Criticised*. We did *The Relapse*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, well we did a lot more than that, but those are the ones I particularly remember.

MCW: Was that... did Oxford expect a certain, you know, a higher...

MR: Well it was classier than Worthing. I mean, Worthing used to do... they had quite a clever policy actually, because they used to do a sort of slightly classy play, and then rubbish the next week. It was weekly rep you see, Worthing, whereas Oxford was, well we had two weeks in Oxford and then the other week somewhere else. So it was much more leisurely really. Weekly rep, it was just class, rubbish, class, rubbish, class, rubbish. And people used to get... because it was sort of retirement town, even then. People had season tickets, you know so they'd go to everything, because it was cheaper than just buying the tickets by themselves. So we always got very good houses. And an awful lot of people started in Worthing. I mean, a lot of big stars, their first job was in Worthing Rep...

MCW: Oh right.

MR: People... well John Standing as I said. John Standing, Dan Massey, Susan Hampshire... I don't know, there were loads of them that all had... oh Elizabeth Spriggs, they all started off in Worthing.

MCW: Quite a hotbed.

MR: Mmm. And they were... as I say, because they did do quite interesting plays in-between the Agatha Christies and the *Sailor Beware* and that sort of thing.

MCW: Which was a draw I imagine.

MR: Yes.

MCW: I've just thought of something and I can't remember what it was. Anyway, one of the things that you mentioned about the Marat/Sade, going back a bit, was the music. I mean how did that... I mean that must have... and the Brecht plays, I know you...

MR: Yes, well we had a band. We had four – was it three or four – I think it was four musicians who sat in a box. But they were all lunatics as well, they were all wearing straight jackets, and they all had peculiar maladies as well. And one of them actually was

potty, one of them really was mad. The drummer was crazy, absolutely crazy – Brook loved that. [Laughs] He used to... suddenly in the middle of nothing he would get up and say, 'Three cheers for good old Dixie' and throw coins on the stage, and you think what. Yes, so... but the music was good music, it was good singable music.

And as I say we had this... we had a little... I think it was a harmonium... harmonium, drummer, oboe... what was the other one, there was one other but I can't remember what it was. And... no, it's gone. And so we would... you know they would play, and we would sing. And they were quite easy to learn, because they were not like music concrète or the stuff we had to learn for *The Bacchae* which was going to back to Oxford, which was written by Elizabeth Lutyens and was, you know twelve tone and all that sort of thing. That was quite difficult. Actually it was more difficult for the people who really could sing than it was for me, because I had no musical knowledge at all, so I just sort of... you know, it didn't bother me, whereas it bothered people who were musical.

But anyway *Marat/Sade*, they were good singable tunes. And we of course... we didn't exactly dance, no, but we did a lot of choreographed movement with it. And of course the first thing you did with the *Marat/Sade* also is you came on at the half hour onto the stage as just wandering about and looking at the audience as they came in. And we'd just be there, doing whatever we were doing you know. I chose for myself a very easy character, because I was... I was just sort of mentally three years old, I mean, that was all. And I used to suck my thumb and you know... and be on the floor a lot, which was quite easy, and sort of gaze at the audience. And so that was quite unnerving for a bit.

Strangely enough this play I'm in at the moment, Clifford Rose who plays the Pope – the first pope – he was playing *Monsieur Coulmier* in the *Marat/Sade* who was the director of the asylum. So he was in that as well. Now here we are together again. It was an extraordinary experience because people... I mean, in America it went down enormously well, I mean, they were so impressed. And it was a bit of a joke, because people always rushed up and started talking to you about Brecht you know. I don't know why Brecht, because it wasn't by Brecht. And you know, terrible pretentious people, talk about theories of drama you know. And all we were thinking was we've been here for three months, we want to go home. [Laughter] Because they kept on extending the run and we really thought we were never going to get home! You know because first of all it was three months, then it was four months, then it was five months. I think we were not allowed to stay up to six months, I think our visas would have expired, so we did eventually come home.

And that was another sort of – it's not really germane either because it's not theatre – but when we filmed it, the very last day was supposed to be the Friday. And Peter Brookes said, 'We've nearly got all the stuff we need, but not quite. So could you come in tomorrow?' Saturday, which would normally be a day off. So we all came in Saturday, and we did a bit more. And then he said, 'Now we've still got a bit more to do, so Lord Burkett has laid on...' who was the producer, 'Lord Burkett has laid on a buffet and some champagne, so have that and then we'll do the rest.' So we had that. And he said, 'Now what I want you to do' he said, 'we don't need this set anymore, because you've done this play. We don't need this set anymore, so why don't you just go and break it up.' So we all went berserk, and we rushed in and we tore the... people set things on fire, the guards turned their hoses on us. Oh, it was mayhem! One of the cameramen broke his ankle I think, and it was completely improvised. I mean, we didn't know what we were going to do, or what. It was just 'let's just rip everything apart!'. We'd been with this play for sort of about a year by then, so it was a very good feeling.

MCW: Very cathartic.

MR: Very cathartic yes.

MCW: Yes, it sounds...

MR: And the other good thing that Brook did was... he had some extras in who were just to be audience. And you only saw them in silhouette. And professional film extras can be a bit sort of dishonest in that they will... if it's getting near the end of the day, they may purposely mess up a shot, because then they'll get an extra day's work, if it's getting near knocking off time. And they did that. So Brook obviously realised what they were doing, and he said, 'Right, OK, I will not need you tomorrow because I think I'm going to replace you with cardboard cut-outs.' - which he did! [Laughter]

MCW: Goodness. How did the cardboard cut-outs work?

MR: Well because they were only in silhouette you see.

MCW: Oh of course yes.

MR: So you were looking at the stage, the asylum stage with bars, and you just saw the backs of the people sitting in the audience, just as black shapes. I mean, they were silhouettes, so they just didn't move. But then you could intercut with some... the bits he'd already got.

MCW: Again, I thought of something that's gone straight out of the window, I should have brought a pen.

MR: Gone?

MCW: Gone totally. It may come back to me, probably after we've finished the...

MR: How we doing? Oh it's all right.

MCW: Absolutely fine. Damn it. It was about that... Sorry. Complete and utter... why is it when one starts chasing thoughts...

MR: They disappear.

MCW: They run further away.

MR: And you're quite young, yes!

MCW: Yes, I know. It's very depressing! What... when... with the new writing at the time, I mean how... having acted in the Marat/Sade and being aware of things like John Osborne and Look Back in Anger and...

MR: Yes, well I saw Look Back in Anger at the time. And frankly I mean it made a great revolution in the fact that you now did plays that were set with ironing boards and you know, not in a drawing room drinking tea. But as a play, actually it was terribly middle class. I mean, it was pretending to be working class. Jimmy Porter wasn't working class at all. I mean he was... he didn't have an accent, he was... you know he was definitely middle class, but he was pretending to be working class. It was all supposed to be you know, the common man – rubbish. I mean... [Laughs] But around about that time, I mean after I really didn't see much theatre because I was working in it. So I didn't actually go to the theatre very much. And when I saw Waiting for Godot, which was when I was about 14 or 15 I should think, I really didn't like it at all. I mean I couldn't follow it, I didn't understand it. But maybe it was because I was 14 or 15 no doubt.

MCW: It is a very strange play.

MR: Yes.

MCW: I confess I've not seen it all the way through, but I've seen snippets of it.

MR: Yes. But you know I looked at... funnily enough yesterday I was just playing with YouTube and I put in Marat/Sade and I got some scenes from the film... we are on YouTube. And I was... there was a little dialogue between Ian and Patrick Magee who played de Sade, and I listened to it, and I thought 'actually that's a better...' - it's better dialogue than I remembered. Because I remembered thinking that a lot of the actual dialectic and the arguments, and I'm thinking what a load of rubbish. I mean it was the sort of concept of doing something in a lunatic asylum about the French Revolution that was the sort of producer's picnic, director's picnic you know. But that actually what it was saying was not that great. But when I looked at it again, and I heard this particular bit I thought 'well it isn't bad'.

MCW: I've remembered what I was going to ask. You said that, you know going on at the half and just being onstage while people came... the audience came in, how did they react to that? I mean, it was very different from the idea that the curtain goes up and it's all there to...

MR: Yes. Well I don't know how they reacted, because I was just looking at them.

MCW: Did you get feedback?

MR: No, my favourite view looking out front was when we looked out front and there was Dame Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, sitting in the middle of the front row – because they were both very deaf – and so we saw them obviously. And she was... he was much deafer than she was. So she was telling him what was happening and what people said. And afterwards he wrote a letter, a wonderful letter, saying how much he'd enjoyed it, and how wonderful it was. And she wrote a letter saying, 'Lewis has written a letter, but you won't be able to read his writing. So what he said was...' and then she wrote it all out all over again.[Laughter]

MCW: Two-way interpretation.

MR: Yes, it was lovely. Somebody had pinched it, it was on the notice board and then it was gone.

MCW: Yes, something one wishes they could have... that could have been left for the archives.

MR: Yes, yes.

MCW: Again, with the... the answer may be the same, but with the production you were talking about where it went right to the back wall and out to the wings, I mean that must have been a move away from the idea of the very sort of 'there' scenery with the... you know.

MR: Yes, well I mean it suited it perfectly. It was supposed to be this sort of basement bar. And you know, so it was just as this cube of... I think it was painted black. Or you know was already painted black. And then you had a spiral staircase that went up to the dressing rooms. And that's really... I mean at the onset that's how you got on to the stage, you had to come down the spiral staircase from the dressing rooms. And so it was perfectly suitable. In fact I don't think a lot of people realised that it was the whole stage, maybe they thought it was a set.

MCW: Fascinating.

MR: But another thing I wanted just to say with difference of then and now, is that for instance when we went to Stratford, you were offered probably one part and then play as cast. So you didn't know 'til the day before you started rehearsals on the next play, what you were going to be playing. And you'd go to the notice board and look, and they'd put up the castlist. And so that was quite exciting... and nobody does that now: you're always told, you know, or asked you know if you will play this, this and this. But in those days, 'play as cast', it was on your contract. And you had to do it you know, whether you liked it or not.

MCW: It sounds like the piece in other contracts today where it's 'and any other jobs that may...' [Laughter]

MR: Yes.

MCW: Which is a good catch-all again. Did that, you know, raise the game as it were?

MR: Well it was always just rather like looking for exam results. You'd say, 'Now am I going to get something to say in this one? No! Second Olivia Lady again!' In fact when I gave up theatre to sort of be Ian's PA, one of the reasons I gave up was that I was playing Lady Montague again, 25 years after I had first played Lady Montague in Romeo and Juliet. She has three lines, one of which you don't hear because there's a fight going on. The second one is Shakespeare at his naffest, and indeed so is the third one. And then she's dead by the interval. So... and I thought, '25 years in the business and what am I doing – Lady Montague, again?!'

MCW: What was it like being Ian's PA as well his...?

MR: Oh well it was very busy. I mean, I did literally everything. He acted, end of story. I did the... you know the mail, the bills, the business, the putting up shelves, changing plugs, whatever. Whatever else needed doing. And I was his dresser of course, and when he was on stage. Just sort of everything. Social secretary, appointments...

MCW: Very busy.

MR: Very busy yes, yes.

MCW: Well that's been absolutely fascinating.

MR: You've got some good stuff there?

MCW: Oh definitely, definitely.

MR: Good. Because you know one forgets to say things that you realise that actually are quite different now. I mean that play as cast thing, I remember to my horror, once I was waiting for a taxi I think at the Aldwych, and because I was waiting I was idly reading the notice board. And I suddenly saw the cast list for The Physicists which had just opened. And I was down as an understudy, but nobody had told me! [Laughter]

MR: And it had been running a week! I didn't know I was understudy in it.

MCW: At which point one thinks...

MR: Oh my God! [Laughter]

MCW: Yes, goodness gracious.

MR: Fortunately I didn't have to go on ever, so that was all right.

MCW: Bit of a relief.

MR: Yes.

MCW: But yes. The only other thing that I can think of, you were saying that... we were talking about the idea that... the Stratford idea of it being very much a family, did you feel part of the family even once you stopped as it were, for being...?

MR: Yes, but I mean already by the time I stopped it had stopped being quite such a family you know. Because Peter Hall very much encouraged families. Peter used to employ peoples husbands and wives, even... or you know, if not acting well maybe she'd do the wigs or you know she can be an usherette you know, or whatever. He used to like employing husbands and wives, which was nice you know. So it was much encouraged. But when he left, and then we had the auditioned people were doing one place another place, and then you got two companies instead of one, you know and it all sort of dispersed really.

MCW: And I suppose you don't get to know people the same way to an extent.

MR: No, I mean we lived absolutely in each other's pockets when we first went there. And I'm afraid we all behaved extremely badly, and we all went to the pub after the show, which used to stay open longer for us you know. And then we'd probably... somebody would say everybody back to my place and we... [Laughs] We had a lot of drunken parties, before we had the children.

MCW: Oh that's... you were mentioning that you'd... that Peggy Ashcroft came to act with and...

MR: She was... yes, she was the second year I think, she was... no she was the first year. She played Katharina in the Shrew, and she was with Peter O'Toole as Petruchio. And it was a wonderful pairing, because she was 52 at the time I think... was a bit old for the... but she had this wonderful sort of girlish thing that she once said she never found it difficult to play Shakespeare's girls, because if you think of them as girls not women. I mean, they are girls. And she never found it difficult. And she had a sort of...

in a way a sort of nothing face - you could write anything on it. And she really was totally convincing. I remember standing at the back watching because I was understudying something, I can't remember what. And a young American standing at the back, said, 'What's the matter with Dame Peggy?'. I said, 'What do you mean?'. He said, 'Why isn't she playing?' I said, 'She is, that's her.' And he just couldn't believe it you know.

MCW: Good heavens!

MR: She was a lovely woman, I adored Peggy, she was really nice. And a wonderful actress.

MCW: Was she an education to watch in herself or...?

MR: I don't know, because I think like a lot of, what you might call true actors, she didn't analyse what she was doing. You know, she just did it. Somewhere in the core there is the thing that tells you how to do it. But I don't think she would go in for analysis or teaching, or you know just think it.

MCW: In that way not... and that leads in almost to the way different directors thought of how you know, one creates character. The more or less Joan Littlewood and...what's his name...? The Theatre Workshop idea of how you...

MR: Yes, well it depends on the play I think, very much. I mean some plays it's hopeless to approach from that point of view. Some plays you just have to say the words and see what happens. And other plays you need a lot of background, or a lot of research, or a lot of emotional research or whatever. But it really does depend on the play. Some plays are absolutely wrecked by going into them in that manner.

MCW: Would it have been possible do you think to do Marat/Sade without the grounding and...?

MR: It would have been possible I suppose. But the grounding was useful. I mean because otherwise it might have been too generalised. I mean the fact that we did all choose a particular kind of complaint, and then looked at it and how that would affect how you did other things. I mean, not my part so much, but there was a man who sort of compulsively passed a bit of string between his fingers. And... but then he had not to be distracting at certain moments, so you'd organise that he either turned his back for this moment and went on doing it, you know without it being obtrusive. So you had to work out if your particular complaint would fit with the play in any particular point, or if you could drop it for a minute, or do something else, or hide, or whatever. And I think if we hadn't examined our madnesses, it would have come out too generalised. It would have 'oh I'm potty' you know. Sorry! I mustn't thump the table! But I mean, acting... Ian used to say, 'Acting's like sex. You talk about it and analyse it, you can't do it.'
[Laughs]

MCW: Which is a very good note on which to say thank you very much for coming to be interviewed. I'm sure we'll think of loads of things afterwards which we should have either asked or said, but thank you very much for coming.