

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Ursula Jeffries – interview transcript

Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey

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Theatregoer, on theatre in the 1960s, Waiting for Godot, audience response to Beckett's plays, the end of censorship and radio drama.

EJ: Could you give me a general overview of your background and experience of theatre?

UJ: Firstly, I was born in 1945 so, obviously, I didn't attend early in your archive but my family were extremely keen theatregoers and amateur playwrights, and the reason and why my sister and I saw so much theatre was because my father was the Arts Editor of an evening newspaper in London and got sent free tickets for everything. So sometimes they would go and sometimes we would go. And they were also very keen that we got a very broad education and we lived within easy access to London, so we saw a great deal. We saw a huge amount of Shakespeare and we also saw a lot of musicals and other pieces, as they came through. We both continued our interest in drama, but nothing could be as intense as that because it'd cost too much! I did some amateur drama myself which was enjoyable but now I'm apt to see it more at a distance.

EJ: Can you any remember any particular productions that you saw? Do any stick in your mind that developed your interest in theatre?

UJ: Yes, there were a number of issues really because of the way the theatre was in those days, because post-war, things were changing very fast. So on the one hand you've got the Rep at the Old Vic which was seasonal Shakespeare, and which was often incredibly good. But... it wasn't exactly samey, they had the most wonderful actors and so forth... but that was something we went to which was kind of a 'regular' visit. So we can remember some of the outstanding productions, which we didn't realise until we were older, what we'd seen, but nonetheless that was part of our lives. And meanwhile we went to some other things... I've made a note of what I actually saw in the 60s and it goes from the Mermaid Theatre, Burton and Taylor in Oxford doing Faustus, Expresso Bongo which was a satirical musical which I gather has a sort of following now, which I can remember very clearly, West Side Story, The Sound of Music, Shaw, and the thing was that what I realised was that there were a lot of good classical actors who acted in musicals at the time, so there is a lot of crossover. So the first time I saw Paul Scofield was in Expresso Bongo. And the first time I saw Peter O'Toole was in a terrible thing Oh, My Papa!. He was in his 20s and he was playing someone who was in his 40s, and it was punished by the critics and it disappeared without trace, though there was a song that came from it. So I think it was a very odd time, there was a lot of change and it wasn't as divided now that cinema and television are so strong. Then it was radio and theatre and some film. But it seemed to interconnect.

EJ: It's interesting that in one of the interviewees said that they went to the theatre because they just did. Whereas today people go and say something like 'I'd like to go and see Lear because I like Lear". Do you think there is a collective drive to go to the theatre simply as entertainment

UJ: Yes, I think because also it was a nice night out, you... well you didn't wear a tiara, but you dressed up. You wore your best clothes to go to the theatre. It was a treat. So... I was lucky because we went for a lot treats. It always felt quite 'posh' to be going out to the theatre. We're always, though we were small, we were always made to look very tidy. So it felt quite grand. Then, of course, the theatre became more revolutionary, but even when people were breaking down the barriers, the atmosphere was still the same. So when you went to Royal Court where I saw Finney doing Luther, you still had this feeling of 'wow', you know, we're out for the night, we've got our best coats on. And then you go and there is this rising play. Presumably the same sort of feeling, because the Mermaid...that was a very interesting project... John Neville did Alfie there, it was the first production of Alfie which knocked everybody's socks off, I didn't see it because I was too young, it wasn't quite suitable. But there was still that feeling of it being you did for entertainment because you didn't have so much entertainment, something you did as a treat and going up to London, from the suburbs, was very much - oh yes, that's great, we're going up to Town! Life's changed totally.

EJ: So did you combine this with a meal, was it a social occasion?

UJ: Sometimes we did, because my father belonged to the Arts Theatre Club and on very special occasions we might have a meal there. Once or twice we ate at the Festival Hall before we went to see a ballet for example. But that was actually more than most people could afford. We were middle-class but we couldn't afford to go out to eat very much, it wasn't the sort of thing you did. Didn't drink much. Post-war Britain stayed very post-war for a very long time! You actually had a quick, cheap tea at home and then dived for the train! Wearing your best frock! [laughs]

EJ: One of the questions I wanted to ask, you meant this 'change' in theatre at this time. How did you feel, how did this change manifest itself?

UJ: It was really extraordinary because everybody... well, I don't really want to say everybody because my family was quite ordinary... I think I mentioned in my original email, that the radio had a real influence. So, for example, you might read about Roots and Wesker and then you'd hear it on the radio and it would be quite soon. You wouldn't be waiting years for it to be come a classic. So I remember listening to Pinter's The Caretaker on the radio, and we thought 'this is wonderful' - it's actually very radio-friendly. I remember my mother laughing for weeks about some of the lines in it, because it is very funny, very powerful, very good actors so you kind of got a flavour of the change. Of course, my sister and I both went to the same university, we both read English, so we were very aware of what was happening.

But it was... the early 60s... you couldn't quite see... although the Angry Young Men were prancing around being vocal, and my father was thrilled, because he'd always absolutely despised the plays of Terence Rattigan, the name Terence Rattigan would get him cross. Nobody quite knew which way it was going to go. There was a lot experiment going on, some of which was brilliant, some of which was ludicrous, as always happens, but I don't think everybody quite knew... they felt there world was open for experiment. When Bernard Miles set up the Mermaid, it was very much a 'new time' for theatre, to do new things in. My father wrote as an amateur writer, nearly got a play on at the Mermaid and it just never quite happened. But it was the sort of era where you could send a script somewhere. I think he wrote it for George Baker, who I

think is still alive, and George Baker was interested. But like many projects, it went. But you felt you could do that.

EJ: Yes, there was that potential.

UJ: Yes, it wasn't so much to do with money, I think. Productions were often quite underfunded in terms of costumes and things, like at the Old Vic. When you saw Julius Caesar, you recognised the costumes coming round again! That's how it felt.

EJ: Sort of recycled?

UJ: A genuine 'Rep' feeling!

EJ: And that pervaded the Old Vic at the time?

UJ: Yes, but I mean it was amazing and they had some of the best possible actors. And sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't work so well. But we saw the John Neville Hamlet, and Judi Dench made her first appearance as Ophelia. Of course, you don't know, when you're seeing these things, that you're seeing something... I mean later on I saw Zoe Wanamaker, in her first performance at the Roundhouse with Nicol Williamson as Hamlet, and you compare the two productions, you never know which one's going to matter in the end.

EJ: So nothing about Judi Dench really struck you at the time?

UJ: Not particularly, I mean we thought she was... we liked the production. Because she was allowed to be... she was very touching actually. But it is actually quite a small part. You didn't actually think 'oh, there's a star of the future!'. And of course your critical faculties were always there... we went to see The Royal Hunt of the Sun. Which was supposed to be a big, wonderful thing. I thought it was the most ludicrous thing I'd ever seen! And as far I'm concerned Robert Stephens was drunk as an owl! I was about 19 and I thought, what is this, this is rubbish, but everyone else was saying 'oh, this is wonderful!'. So you're always coming from your own point of view, your own feeling of what is good.

EJ: Were there any performances that really stood out at the time?

UJ: I think with the Shakespeare, it's interesting, because they were very keen to make Shakespeare a kind of living, breathing text. It wasn't done in a distant classical way. So we remember a Much Ado production with Keith Michell and Barbara Jefford, which was just wonderful. It's like if you've seen too many: we saw several Twelfth Nights. Sometimes you can't remember which one it was. And there was an actor called Max Adrian who was Feste and he was just... I mean everybody was crying, you can't bring it back in your own mind, but you just know you've seen an absolutely great performance. That happens not because someone says 'oh look, there's Olivier!' because sometimes that gets in the way. I was taken to see Ralph Richardson in You Never Can Tell, which I like, and he was wonderful, but the whole audience was going 'ooh, isn't his timing wonderful! Ooh isn't he funny!' so you got blocked by the fact that it was him there. He was wonderful, yes. I'm trying to think what was a complete knockout.

We sort of drew up these lines, my sister was a huge Olivier fan, she saw a lot of Olivier, she saw The Entertainer. But I saw him in Othello at one stage. Now the film of that stage production isn't terribly highly-regarded. But his performance was absolutely stunning. It was amazing. You know, he had this thing...he wasn't a method actor but he made a big effort...and the business of being white and not black. And although he probably wouldn't be the same now, the thing is at that time there weren't terrible many Afro-Caribbean people in London. Now we all have friends we work with, neighbours and so on. His attempt probably does look artificial but it was a real attempt to walk in a

particular way, to talk in a particular way. And it was interesting because a woman behind us in the audience kept saying 'I do think his make-up terrible!' Her reason for this was the palms of his hands weren't black as well. My mother was sort of thinking, you know, he has looked at somebody black and thought, yes, the palms of their hands are lighter. And this terribly complicated make-up, every night. And OK it wasn't perfect, but it wasn't wrong in that way. It just wouldn't happen now. So, sometimes when you see a film of something you thought was wonderful you feel very let down, because it doesn't have the same atmosphere.

EJ: It's a different context, presumably, and something is taken away -

UJ: Yes, you don't get that edge, the intensity. So when you say things 'oh, yes, that was wonderful!' people say 'well, I've seen that' and you say 'well, actually haven't!'.

EJ: Can you remember the audience reaction generally at the time, for Othello ?

UJ: Yes, it was very favourable. But then people were still...people were a lot more respectful to the stars. They may have gone home and criticised it. But, the theatre was a very 'civilised' place. People sat very quietly. They didn't shuffle around, it was part of this sort of British way of life. You knew where you were going and what you were doing, it was terribly exclusive in a way. Because I'm sure some people turned up from another culture and thought it was all very odd. But it was respectful and much less hubbub than you get nowadays.

EJ: One of the things, I was going to ask, you mentioned *The Caretake*, you have the realism, the 'kitchen sink' and you also have elements of the absurd, so you have echoes of *Look Back in Anger* and then perhaps *Waiting of Godot*. I mean we've talked a little bit about the 'kitchen sink' and the *Angry Young Men*, but do you remember the birth of absurd theatre?

UJ: Well, yes, there are two reasons for that. I don't know what the date was but my parents went to see *Rhinoceros* and were outraged!

EJ: Really?

UJ: Yes. They couldn't see the point. Let's put it that way. They just thought it was really rather silly when it came down to it. Which may not have been right. But *Waiting for Godot* was on the radio as well. That was the first time I heard the text. And that worked incredibly well. Because surreal things are wonderful on the radio. I still have the mental pictures I've formed listening to that. Although I've seen it several times. I was a relatively imaginative child, it has to be said, and I was very used to listening to drama on the radio. They had a lot of *Revenge Tragedies*, and all sorts of things. So you really had to work at it. Because *Revenge Tragedy*, when you're 16, is quite difficult to listen to. But we used to go and look them up, because the actors obviously enjoyed it tremendously, so my sister and I used to jumping at each other 'there's a world of fate comes tumbling on!', which is from one of them - really rather good isn't it? [laughs] So these plays came over with this real intensity, you know, probably 90% of the population might have thought 'oh, God, there they are at it again' but it sort of seeped into our consciousness, but I think *Waiting for Godot* always worked for people in a way a lot of other *Theatre of the Absurd* doesn't. For some reason it has a key. People get very upset watching it, I've seen people crying quite dreadfully at it. It hits a nerve...whereas something like *Happy Days*, people think 'Oh, for goodness sake!' - common sense pitches in.

EJ: So you think *Waiting for Godot* touches something deeper?

UJ: I don't why, but I know a lot of people who liked *Godot*, but I was quite surprised that they'd been impressed by it. Because they'd be rationalist and so on. And obviously

nowadays there's a lot more variation in acting styles. Which is very interesting. I think there wasn't quite that feeling then, I mean now we've got *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, now that was wonderful, a particular acting style about it, but you didn't actually get that feeling, you didn't feel there were companies doing a star role, they sort of talk the text and the author, and I think texts were more important than actors.

EJ: The text itself is more important -

UJ: Yes, now I think that actors think they are important than the text.

EJ: It's interesting, though, because you do hear of the hero worship of Gielgud and Richardson.

UJ: Oh yes, the actor-manager type. Oh yes, there were these icons. But they moved around a lot, like my sister telling me about Olivier in *The Entertainer* and my mother saw it as well and she said it was the most extraordinary performance because she'd seen him mostly in Shakespeare, and she'd seen him in films, he was the great screen idol at one point. But she said it was the most heart-rending, incredible, emotion into a particular type, because it is about the failure of the Music Hall, the dying of the Music Hall. Very sad. Not a dry eye. I mean, basically, a really good actor will transcend 'the idol' bit. You do forget in the end. If you've got somebody really good. And if you can't forget, then actually I don't think they're very good as an actor. They might be a wonderful performer but it was like the Burton and Taylor *Dr Faustus* at Oxford which was hilarious because it was Burton, Burton, Burton, you couldn't really forget. It didn't matter whether it he was a good actor or not, you're never going to forget he was there, so the play got lost.

EJ: So did you enjoy that particular production, or did it fail?

UJ: Well, I had a lot of friends in it. I had a friend who was helping with the lighting, it was a very 'in' thing, in Oxford. So you forget, there was a dinner that they had and I went to that and Taylor and Burton, and it was a very 'in crowd' thing to do, you're not particularly worried whether it works or not theatrically, are you?

EJ: How did people generally respond at the time?

UJ: Well, there was a lot of sort of sniggering from the press about it. But at the same time, there was a sort of sneaking admiration, I think. That Burton always said he'd do this, and he came and did it. And he didn't stint, he did the job properly. And she had just to float in as the ghost of Helen of Troy looking absolutely luscious, with such a low cut costume, most of my friends were up in the theatre rig! Trying to fix the curtain or the sets! Their minds weren't on the text either. But it was a mixed reaction. He then did a film of it, and they all went, all the people who'd been in it went to Rome. Now that, I think, was over the top - and it all got a bit over in-crowdy. I think they must have had the most brilliant time, who could deny? But I said to my friend: 'it must have been wonderful to have been it'. And he said 'oh, you could have been in it! We had lots of parts for whores!' [laughs]

EJ: That's a pretty extraordinary thing to say!

UJ: Well, it's am-dram, it's not real theatre, it's Burton and Taylor and a lot of people. Some of whom made good careers later.

[interview pauses]

UJ: We saw Frankie Howerd in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was fantastic! That was at the Old Vic and Tony Stephens was in *She Stoops to Conquer*, and there was a great movement for popular characters to go into the theatre. Of course, now it sort of works slightly the other way, because film actors are opting to go on the London stage. But it's

quite strange, when I look back. I suppose we didn't quite see it clearly, you think 'oh, here comes Frankie Howerd', but in fact he was a brilliant Bottom in *Msnd*, he was totally hilarious and added a lot to it. I suppose because I was young enough, this was mostly before I went to university, I just took it as it was. I didn't come with any particularly preconceived ideas. I was quite well-educated, but I didn't despise musicals. I don't have those kind of drawn-up mindsets you get as you get older, you know, how did I come to go to see all these terrible musicals! There were sort of reasons why we did - usually because we knew somebody vaguely and then you look back and think, well, yes, I saw Herbert Lom in *The King and I*, he took over from Yul Brynner. Lot of these were sort of second or third casts that I saw. And in *My Fair Lady* with Jeremy Brett, who's now dead, as Freddy - he was a sort of screen idol looking person. You realised, you were sort of seeing all these people...you just didn't know, as I say, being younger, you take it at face value. You think you either enjoy the show or you don't. Which is the point, isn't it! [Laughs.]

EJ: Well, that's it, the enjoyment of the play. You mentioned the press, did you read the theatre critics at all?

UJ: Yes, yes. We did. Because being a journalist my father had five newspapers delivered every day! We can make anything from newspapers! On the whole we read them. You wouldn't have time, now. Obviously if you'd been to a show, or you were going to the show, you would read the critics. Of course, Tynan appeared. Tynan's vies were quite controversial. But I think he had quite an influence. But he didn't necessarily express how people were generally feeling, I don't think. I haven't been back and looked at the text, I have to say. I realised, if I want to get my memories together, it's like a whole year's work, at the very least! We did read them, I think there's always a fascination in reading criticisms. Having read that book, Diana Rigg, *No Turn Unstoned*, it's hilarious, and it is such a shame where looking up on the internet where it says this was panned, this was pulled, nobody loved it.

Lots of things that had a life, had legs - a show weren't killed by critics in the Broadway sense, but it could sap the life of a show. Because you always need publicity. If something kills the publicity for some reason, then you've had it. You've had it. People then, it's horrible to talk about it as though the dinosaurs were trudging the earth, but television was very simple and confined, and you didn't have the internet or those different forms of communications, so press coverage was it. Occasionally you'd get a critical discussion on the radio or on the television, but basically it was the press that led it. When my father was older, he became a PR man, and because he knew the press, he knew the press he knew how to place things. Even he couldn't achieve some things, he hired the Mermaid Theatre for a charity show. Got everybody on board, everybody on side, and then by sheer bad luck, JFK was shot.

EJ: That might have upstaged things slightly.

UJ: And of course it got no coverage, none whatsoever, it was limited. There were quite of newspapers, periodicals, but it was the printed word, and if you didn't get that impact then, it died quite quickly. Whereas I think now, things have an odd afterlife, don't they. I was amazed looking up on the internet, I looked up *Expresso Bongo* and found that there's a film of it, that there are people who argue about the content of the film, because they cut some of the songs out, huge biographies of the people who wrote it and how it's considered very satirical, very important at the time. I just went to see it, it was very enjoyable, we had the LP of the music. But this incredible sort of afterlife.

EJ: And cult following?

UJ: Yes, which didn't happen then. Shows might pop up locally, a few amateurs might put on a show, if they could get a script and so forth. But you just didn't get these sort of obsessive followers of a particular show. Well, if you did, they were very much in the stamp-collector mould, you know, with their books, like the Trekkies doing their Star Trek stuff. It's so different.

EJ: It's interesting, because you mentioned Pinter before, and the fact that *The Birthday Party* was a complete flop. I wonder if today that rather than one critic, Harold Hobson, saving the play, he might have gathered a cult following, a kind of niche market.

UJ: It's very difficult to know. What year was *The Birthday Party*?

EJ: 1958

UJ: Because by the time I was at university that was known as a really interesting text, we used to do a lot of play readings... I don't suppose they do now. I remember doing *The Birthday Party*. Huge fun, and we loved it, and we had know had idea, well nobody has any idea what is about, even our scholarly minds couldn't get round it [laughs]. It's almost impossible

People like it because they think it's scandalous and because they've seen a film about his life, but he was just amazing. And the impact that he had, and again, on the radio was the first time I saw it. *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, you know. But again, it's going to take a very long time to decide how much of that is worthy. The greats... when I was in my teens, Shaw was still regarded with this huge reverence. They were always putting on Shaw, *Man and Superman*, I saw Alan Badell in that which was fantastic, and *You Never Can Tell* with Ralph Richardson and all sorts of other productions which I can't remember so clearly. But basically you were talking the classics. And now you might get a sort of oddity from Shaw.

The most reason thing I saw, still years ago... I can't remember... it's from the short, very odd plays that people revive in a small theatre setting. And before that, the last think I saw was *The Showing up of Blanco Posnet* which no-ones going to watch again. But he was regarded with such reverence. He was the great dramatist. I think people like my father would be astonished to know that Shaw is hardly read or seen. It's not on the syllabus. He will... no doubt in a couple of hundred years, somebody will discover one of the plays and think 'hang on, this is fascinating'. People always worry about very new, unrecognisable things. Painting and so on. It seemed to me quite interesting in that painting revolutionised itself earlier than the theatre did. So between the two world wars you've got the Surrealist movement and everybody was making collages and wonky pots and stopped, but the theatre was much more... it was much more difficult to be revolutionary because even if you were working with cheap materials, it's much more expensive. You've got people together, they've got to be of a like mind, you've got to have a like mind, you've got to get an audience, or they're off, aren't they? It's your market in the end.

An artist might never find a market in his lifetime but he might still be able to go on creating his individual pieces, you might be able write plays but you might not be able to get them on. It takes a long time for people to have courage, really. It's alright in the university setting - you can do anything. But taking it more broadly and for the general population who don't go to see everything and so on...it's very hard for it to move on. And some of the experiments have been very boring to watch! [laughs] Probably just after the era you're looking at, but *I Jumpers* when it opened with Diana Rigg and Michael Hordern, and that was a very innovative production and that worked absolutely. Knocked your socks off. And it was quite odd. But the oddness was very acceptable, it

was a very good production. So you know, sometimes, it just depends who's there, who's got the vision, really.

EJ: I'd also like to ask you about the issue of censorship in the Sixties. What was the effect, what did you witness when censorship ended?

UJ: Well, there was an awful lot of press coverage on this, of course, people had been quite cross about the Lord Chamberlain's position for a long time, but it was part of life. Looking at these [opens album of theatre programmes] these are one or two things I've seen. These might pre-war, I haven't dated them all. They don't have the date on. They are frightfully interesting, because this is a war time one, you can see the quality of the paper. This is 1951.

EJ: This is a flyer for Man and Superman at the New Theatre.

UJ: The actual programme. That was still quite a hard time. It's quite interesting to see that most theatres were disinfected with Jeyes Fluid. 'Ladies are earnestly requested to remove hats.' Here we are, the mention of the Lord Chamberlain, in the context of the Health and Safety regulations. They are very interesting. I've got a whole box, they're very dusty.

EJ: But did you think things changed in terms of the plays that you were seeing?

UJ: I think we knew that things would change. I mean, what year was it, 1968? You see, by 1968 an awful lot had changed anyway. Because the Sixties... and people were actually ignoring the laws. The Happenings were extremely unlicensed, I have to say, because there was a lot of sort of stuff, a lot of things weren't acceptable at all but in a free spirit kind of sense, so never really got the near the Lord Chamberlain. It wasn't exactly a dead issue by then but it was being kind of worn out in usage, because were finding ways round it. Of course, immediately start to happen, there are two things I recall: Hair, I couldn't get to Hair, you could not get a ticket for Hair, which I always regret, just from the point of view that it would have been nice to have seen it.

Because I was just working in London then, that was my first year working in London. Then all sorts of things happened, like my flatmate went to an Andy Warhol film at a club somewhere off Tottenham Court Road, and she was a very nice ordinary girl. And the place was raided by the police for indecency and they were all slammed in cells. I could look it up, but it was a film, Flesh, or something and it was deemed to have been more than it should it have been, and that wasn't before the licensing was taken off, it was just after. But there was a still a sense that public decency had to maintained. So Hair, obviously set out to shock, that was almost sort of accepted, it was almost funny in a way.

EJ: There was Oh! Calcutta!

UJ: Yes, Oh! Calcutta! I didn't see it either. But everybody laughed about it a lot. Because it wasn't actually overtly sexual, really. Not in the terms that modern cinema is. It would seem terribly tame now. It was simply 'Oh, we're going to take our clothes off in public' and to be honest I don't think anybody thought that times would changed in the way they have. You've got cinema and stuff becoming freer, but I think, the people who said 'this is going to end in wickedness and indecency', in fact, in their own terms they were completely right! Because if they were alive today and were seeing what we're seeing - they'd have strokes! They really would. Nobody could actually quite envisage what was to happen. So basically, I think the consensus among intellectuals was that these old censorship laws were completely past their sell-by. Times need to change, we can all move on, it wasn't the war any more. Let's all forget about that and all be happy.

Because it was actually a very optimistic time. The 60s were incredible. Imbued with a crazy optimism. We actually did believe that things got better every year. Because they had. If you were born in 1945, by the time you got to 1965 everything had got better every year. So that was our mindset, so it would go on. Of course, it hasn't. But we were all very optimistic and we all danced around in Hyde Park, breathing in other people's substances, it was enough to send you quite off your rocker. This sounds terribly ancient of me but... it wasn't sort of evil. It was kind of a bit sleazy, a bit naughty, films like Blow-Up. But it wasn't threatening, I think that's the word I'm looking for.

EJ: Whereas, today it has perhaps changed.

UJ: There is a lot of aggression today. It didn't feel like that then.

EJ: Perhaps it was a reflection of the world then.

UJ: It was possible at that time to think 'oh yes, this is great, let's all throw off our clothes and run through the meadows without frightening the horses!' The horses are indeed frightened... on a regular basis. So we didn't actually spot what was going to happen. And all the people who were making sermons about it and how the world descend into wickedness, probably could...perhaps they did know what we do if left to our own devices.

EJ: I suppose too, that people today say it's going to get worse, it probably is!

UJ: Yes, you can never see it coming, you can't see what's next. People say 'how did it get to this point? It can't get any worse' but it does. You can't see ahead in that way. But being a young person, living in London, living an independent life, it took off, it was brilliant. Anything could happen, and sort of did. But it was in a way, fragmentation started, because obviously the rather the settled status of the theatre, the Establishment Theatre started to disintegrate a bit. Because it wasn't cool any more. So if you were really into drama and theatre, you wouldn't want to know, would you? You were off experimenting, improvising in all directions, techniques completely changed. So now, you know, everybody improvised, sent themselves slightly crazy, thinking thoughts about their part, sort of watered-down 'Method' going on everywhere. So the times totally changed. Of course things like this, The Sound of Music, still exist because there are a group of people who still want that.

EJ: There will always be an audience, I think.

UJ: And a lot of money goes in that direction, but it's the other theatre that suffered more. New plays. It's very difficult to get a new play on. Somebody told me yesterday that they'd just been to the National in the Cottesloe by an actor who is also a writer and has been on television and has become famous, he's quite colourful. She said it was an incredibly piece, but wondered if he hadn't acted in Casualty, would he have come round to get his piece on at the Cottesloe? Not that I've actually tried to do that myself, but I know that people struggle dreadfully.

But you did feel at the time, in the 60s, this was this general feeling that we could all do it, we could all act, we could all sing, we could all dance, we could all write everything! I'm talking about a university set, if you like. But we felt very freed up to do what we wanted to do. Friends wrote pieces, and we acted in them in small theatres. It was probably terrible. I hope people still do that.

EJ: I think they do, but I do think, from what you're saying, there has been a shift, it has become harder for the individual to actually get recognised. I think it perhaps it is, unless, as you say, they have a television connection. I was going to ask you about the difference between radio and television. You said you used to listen to a play on the

radio and then go and see it. Were you every disappointed? Did something work on radio and didn't work on stage or vice versa?

UJ: I think... things have stayed in my head. I mean *Waiting for Godot*... I didn't see anything very soon after I'd heard it. I might have gone and read it, which of course then just backs up your own mental image. *Roots* I saw probably about five years after I'd heard it. I found that disappointing when I went to see it. I think there's just the intimacy of radio drama, it's a very odd thing. I don't know how much they do now, because I don't really listen to radio much now.

EJ: It's not really very good. There's the *Afternoon Play* on Radio 4.

UJ: I tried to listen to one or two, but I wasn't very happy with them. I suppose in the past because you listened to it a lot and you had thrillers and things on the radio as well. It was very much part of what you did, or what we did. And you go on doing other things while it was on. So there must have been a lot of bad stuff that you forget. As well as good stuff. On the whole, I suppose you did get a very personal picture. My *Fair Lady*, for example, a very unusual thing. I forget now all the background to it. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing because Shaw said he didn't want musicals made out of his plays. And then it was done in the States and someone lent my father a tape of the music before it was on in London. He came clanking home with this massive tape recorder! Played it to us and it was interesting because he was listening to it, thinking, because he knew the play and I was listening to it just as music and not really knowing, I was quite baffled by it really. Because I'd not been to many musicals. Then eventually, of course, seeing it on stage it had all sort of coagulated in my mind. But he was very excited because he thought that this was innovative at the time. It was a breakthrough because the words of the songs were very much based on the script. Rather than a musical like *Oklahoma!*. It kind of stands alone in a slightly odd place in the history of musical.

EJ: Because of the integration of the text?

UJ: And because I think they were quite careful not to ruin it. Because at the time Shaw was such an icon.

EJ: No, you don't cross Shaw!

UJ: No, you didn't. Nor his adherents. So it's a good question, but I can't make a direct comparison. I think the only one that I saw, as I said, quite soon afterwards was *Waiting for Godot*. But *Waiting for Godot* is such a spare sort of thing. And you're not going to have a set, are you? You are going to have a cyclorama and a tree, and three people. I found it very moving, again, people always do, I don't know why.

EJ: It's so well written.

UJ: Yes, it's lovely. I think they did a lot of historical plays, they did a lot of Shaw on the radio as well.