

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

Daphne Oxenford – interview transcript

Interviewer: Ewan Jeffrey and Kate Harris. Also Katherine Miller and Liana Koehler (page 5 onwards).

2 December 2005

Actress. Audiences; auditions; digs; ENSA; Family Reunion; Joyce Grenfell; Listen With Mother; Manchester Library Theatre; matinees; musicals; repertory; revue; H.M. Tennent; theatre in the Round; touring (UK, Germany); Waiting for Godot; Nellie Wallace.

EJ: Can you give me a general overview of your background in theatre, how you first started to go to the theatre, work in the theatre, if that's okay?

DO: So, 1945 I think I was on tour in Germany with the revue. We toured around England and then ENSA took us, sent us to Germany and I was understudying a woman who was 50 years older than I was. And I didn't look like her, her name was Nellie Wallace and she was a great music hall star - filthy. When we went to Germany it was quite interesting because she didn't go down as well as she thought because she thought she could be as dirty as she liked, and the men didn't like her. The sergeants told us, 'oh no, they don't like that sort of stuff coming from a lady' - she wasn't really a lady. Then it was '46, I was on tour again in one or two things, and then I was so lucky - talk about being in the right place at the right time - somebody with whom I had trained before the war and with whom I'd just been on a tour rang me up one day and said, help, I've been summoned to an audition. H.M. Tennent who ruled the West End at that time used to have mass interviews with their casting director, Daphne Rye, terrifying woman, and he said, I'm so frightened, come with me, hold my hand. I was out of work so I went up too, I'm not sure it was The Gielgud, probably The Queen's Theatre where they had an office right at the top, and I was standing at the side of the stage and a young man with a clipboard came up and said, can I have your name, and I said, no no no, I'm not here for an interview, I've just come to be with a friend. And he said, well, you're here now, you might as well see Miss Rye, who I knew of very well and she said, what have you been doing, and I said well I've just been on tour with Sunny Hail, and she said, 'oh, we're putting on a revue with Joyce Grenfell, Max Adrian and Elizabeth Welsh, are you interested?' And it sort of flashed across my mind, 'what a stupid question, of course I'm interested!'. So I went and had an audition and I did a piece that I'd written for a little revue that a whole gang of us got up, young people who were doing other war work but we worked on Sundays in a little theatre in Notting Hill Gate - well, it wasn't a theatre, it was a room, not as big as this room, I may say. And I did a schoolgirl sketch and I wasn't aware that people sitting in the audience watching the audition... I wasn't aware that Miss Grenfell rather rose to her height and she sent someone to ask where I had got that material. I said I wrote it for this little revue. So then I had to go for a music audition, somehow I was in, and that was 1947. We ran for

a year at The Globe, now The Gielgud, and then five weeks later we started rehearsing for another revue, which was lovely, and then I got married and went to live near Manchester.

EJ: Did you stop acting then?

DO: Oh no, because I was doing then Listen With Mother, are you sitting comfortably, so I was able to come down to London, do that for a day - two days - and then go home for three weeks, which was marvellous, and I just went on doing radio in the north and working at - have you ever been to Manchester?

KH: I live in Manchester.

DO: Ah, the Library Theatre.

KH: Yes, I have been to the Library Theatre.

DO: So I worked there from time to time.

KH: Did you work for the company within the Library Theatre or was it before it was The Library Theatre company?

DO: It was the Library Theatre Company. It was fairly new then because it's just had its 50th birthday, last year I think. And I didn't do any other theatre, it was difficult with children, but I just went on doing radio and then television.

KH: Did you find your background in theatre helped you when you were working in television?

DO: Oh, I think it must have done. I never thought about it but I think it must have done, learning and how to walk across a studio without flopping over. Yes. Ask me more questions.

EJ: I'm interested, you were working for Joyce Grenfell, what was that like, how was she as a person?

DO: I think she was the goodest person I've ever known. She knew her own worth, she was very funny, very kind and I understudied her as well - I seem to have a knack of understudying people - and in the next revue I understudied Diana Churchill, who lived here latterly, and there is a beautiful photograph I had of her which is out there somewhere [gestures to other room], and of Elizabeth Welch as well, who lived here.

Coloured, half Scottish, half American black. Beautiful voice and she died here aged 99. She was fun to be on tour with as well.

EJ: Who organised the tours you did in Germany ?

DO: It was a strange time. The one place that they absolutely hated us was Düsseldorf. All around the other places we were welcomed but in Düsseldorf you could feel the animosity - well, you do wonder, you know, having been conquered. And my husband-to-be was in Düsseldorf and he had a box, frightfully grand, but he only seemed to go to the opera and I think he went to the ballet, but he didn't come to see us because he thought a revue starring Nellie Wallace would be far too common, so we never met in Düsseldorf. But touring, I suppose immediately post-war in England wasn't a load of laughs because you would pick digs out of a list, you never knew what you were going to find. Places like Bradford and the loo was at the end of the garden. In one place my bedroom had no lampshade, no bedside lights or anything like that and lino on the floor so you would read yourself almost to sleep and then have to get out on this icy, icy floor. Hull where I went once, when I had to give my name into the stage door the day after I arrived. The stage doorman said, ee, you can't stay there, love, oh no, oh she was found fighting with her neighbour in the street, no, you'll have to move. So I had to move. I did an Alan Plater play in Hull , that was extraordinary. I arrived - this must have been about 1960, I suppose, and I rang my husband and said I'd arrived safely, he's very nice, the landlord, he's just going to bring me some coffee and I went back to the room and I thought, there is something funny about this room, I wonder what it is, and then I thought, where is the window, and I drew curtains back, looked in cupboards, there was no window in the room. So I said to Terry the next morning, do you think it would be possible to have a room with a window because I get migraine and I'm very bad if I don't sleep with a window. And he said, that's the thing, you see, it faces front, traffic, I said, I'll buy ear plugs, which actually I've still got, but an actor said he would change with me, he didn't mind having no window and then with a sort of revue called 1066 And All That we went to Folkestone, I remember, and the girl I was sharing with and I stayed in a sort of private hotel, a lot of elderly residents and they asked us what we were doing and we said we were at the theatre, at The Lees Pavilion, oh yes, they liked The Lees Pavilion. I said, well, we have a matinee on Wednesday, will you be coming? Oh yes, we always got to the matinee, so we said it's a funny revue called 1066 And All That. Oh, we don't go for the play, dear, we go for the tea. Because you had matinee tea.

EJ: So this was sort of secondary to the thing?

DO: Oh, absolutely secondary, yes.

EJ: It must have been difficult for the actors to act.

DO: There was a very, very good sketch in the first Joyce Grenfell revue I was in called Matinee and its theme was 'if the actors behaved as the audience did', and it was a sort of pseudo-Shakespearean play and in full flow the waitress came on and said, 'excuse

me, would you pass this tray along', and they were all fiddling in their doublet and [hose], you know, for the right change - it was terribly funny, it doesn't sound it now.

EJ: It does, it sounds almost post-modern.

DO: Yes.

KH: When you went to work in Manchester, did you find it quite different compared to working in London ?

DO: No.

KH: Were similar kinds of plays being put on?

DO: I think working in theatre wherever you are, I can't think - oh, Relatively Speaking, we did an Ayckbourn, Spring And Port Wine... can't remember the others. Oh, Happiest Days Of Your Life - I of course played the Joyce Grenfell part. Oh no, it was fun, it was great fun. Then did one other at The Forum, ever been to The Forum?

KH: I know it.

DO: [All Golden Pond], and that was nice. But no, that's the extent of my theatre after...

KH: Absolutely fascinating. Did you find you were attracted to particular roles, did you find yourself being cast in particular roles or was it a wide variety?

DO: Oh, a wide variety. At the beginning - well, the first two or three years of Listen With Mother, I was actively sent scripts about working with children or mumsy things, but no, I'm very, very lucky because I've done so much and so many different sorts of parts. I have been incredibly lucky, and then when I went into television, of course, it was the same thing.

EJ: It's amazing you went for that audition then, you weren't actually going to audition. Strange, isn't it?

DO: I know, was that not luck, wonderful luck. I don't know what I would have done, I'd have been just an ordinary, run of the mill, supporting actress. Still going to Great Marlborough Street for my dole every week. Great Marlborough Street was very good, because all the theatrical people used to go there and you used to hear about auditions and I remember standing in the queue one day and a little girl came up saying, Windmill

Theatre, 2.30, bring your pointes - you know, it was a dance audition. There is a great camaraderie in the theatre, and people think it's bitchy and back-biting, but it isn't. I think as a profession we're very nice, we're very caring, very generous.

KH: Do you think the profession changed a lot in the post-war years?

DO: No, I don't think so. Well, I don't find it so. No. And living here, you know, you hear all sorts of stories and then somebody caps it with another one, and that sparks off somebody saying, 'I remember when...'. It's good, it's a good profession to be in, really is, and if you've been in it from the age of 13 you're kind of used to it.

EJ: Incredibly hard work though.

DO: No, I've been incredibly lucky, touch wood

KM: So what can you tell us about your experience of theatre just after the war?

DO: Oh, after the war.

KM: Yes.

DO: Well the very very end of the war, I went to Germany, with, have you heard of ENSA?

KM: Yes

DO: Every Night Something Awful, they dubbed it, [laughter] which was a bit unfair really [laughter]. Yes, I was in review at that time and we toured to Germany and we were quite welcomed except in one particular place where the Germans obviously didn't like us at all.

KM: Oh was that because of the...

DO: Well I think we'd beaten them you see [laughter] and then we came back and I was fairly out of work and I used to go and collect my dole money and then I went in to another review, we went round and that was difficult because just after the war, it was difficult to find accommodation and you'd, you know, choose from the digs list where you thought would be alright and I remember one place where I turned up and the woman said "no room at all", so I said "but I wrote you" "yes I didn't write back 'cos I was full" [in harsh voice], so then, you know, one had to walk the streets again and, then somebody said "I'll get you a job", which he didn't, and I was in a review, again,

with somebody I'd actually trained with and he rang me up one day and said "come with me, help. I'm going to an open audition for H.M. Tennent", who then ruled the West End in London and he said "I'm terrified, come with me" so I said I've got nothing else to do, so I went with him and the casting director of Tennent's was a very feared lady, she wielded so much power in the West End...

LK: Do you remember what her name was?

DO: Yes, Daphne Rye. Well known. And I was standing in the wings, and the young man with a clipboard came up and said "your name?" and I said "no no no, I'm not here for an audition, or an interview, I've just come with a friend". "Oh" he said "well, you're here now, you might as well go see Miss. Rye". So I went to see Miss. Rye, who I had met just once before, and she said "what have you been doing" and I said "I've been in review". "Oh" she said, we're putting on our first review with Joyce Grenfell, Max Adrian and Elizabeth Welsh, would you be interested?" But I thought "what a stupid question! Of course I'm interested!" [laughter]. You know, you think of these clever things afterwards don't you. So I had an audition, and then I had a singing audition, and I was in, to my amazement. That lasted two years, 1947 to 1949. And then, 1951 I married and was whisked off to Manchester and I was doing at the time, a radio programme called Listen with Mother..."Are you sitting comfortably, then I'll begin", that was a sort of, well know catchphrase. So I continued doing that and I also did parts at the Library Theatre in Manchester.

KM: Was it very different to London?

DO: No.

LK: Do you remember which shows you did in Manchester?

DO: The Library Theatre had been going, it's a Civic Theatre, and it's been going just fifty years now, and I did (pause) Spring and Port Wine, The Happiest Days of your Life. Have you ever seen that?

LK: No, not yet

DO: On Golden Pond. Did you see that?

LK: No, but I've heard of it

DO: You have

LK: Yes

DO: It was a lovely film with Katherine Hepburn, Henry Fonda. (pause) So I sort of kept my hand in there, but did a lot of television in London as well. But I haven't done theatre almost since On Golden Pond. Oh yes I have, of course I have [laughs] ridiculous. Have you heard of The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester?

KM: I think so, yes.

DO: It's very close to Sheffield!

KM: Yes, we should really go!

DO: You ought to go

KM: Yes we will do

DO: Theatre in the round

KM: Oh is it?

LK: Oh

KM: I think I've been to one in the round in London.

DO: You've only been to one

KM: Yes it was good.

DO: And you, have you been?

LK: No, but our teacher was talking about it

DO: It's very difficult.

KM: Is it?

DO: Because, as one's talking like to you two, you've got to remember the people over your shoulder. And the people sort of, you know, obliquely, each side.

KM: Wow, how did you manage?

DO: (pause) It depended of course on your director (pause) but we did Family Reunion, a T.S.Eliot. Have you read that one?

LK: No not yet.

[laughter]

DO: That's a very static piece. Because it's a family piece and the matriarch sits in her chair and her two sisters, the aunts, sit in their chairs. The two uncles do move about quite a lot. And Edward Fox, was in it. And we had queues round the block of The Royal Exchange to get in.

LK: How long did that run for?

DO: Well that ran for the usual three weeks, in Manchester. And then we came to London, to the roundhouse, which I believe has just re-opened, hasn't it?

LK: Yes I think so, our teacher was talking about it.

DO: Yes. And then we transferred again to the Vaudeville Theatre in London, and that lasted from March to November, long time to be away from home and I said I'd never do another one like that. But you know, things are offered, and you hate to turn them down, but the last play I did in London was called Shades, written by, well you must of seen Keira Knightley, written by her mother, Sharma McDonald. And that was with Pauline Collins and James Cosmo and a little boy. And that was at the, oh we toured, oh the Albery Theatre, in London.

KM: Can you remember what year that was or roundabout?

DO: It must have been, oh dear I get so confused, in the early 1990s I think.

KM: Yes, that's quite recent.

DO: Yes, but I wouldn't do theatre anymore. Far too aged.

KM: Can we just go back to Manchester. How were the audiences there? Did they receive your plays well?

DO: The audiences? Oh, marvellous. Oh yes.

LK: Were there any difference between the Manchester audiences and the London audiences at the time?

DO: (pause) I think the Manchester audiences are probably warmer. And because the Royal Exchange, although it looks big and it's in the round, nobody is more than, I think something like 30 feet away, from the stage. Because there are two balconies and then the ground floor.

LK: Which way did you prefer to perform? In the round or...?

DO: In proscenium. Really. You know where you are there. You know where the audience is there, in front of you [laughs]

LK: How many shows did you do in the round? Just the one or several?

DO: No I did (pause) A Bernard Shaw play, A Doctor's Dilemma and I played the servant of the main doctor. And I had the most awful padding, which I had to put on for the costume. And it was in the summer so it got very hot. And when the dresser took it off me and hung it up to air, you know it looked so obscene. Horrible! [laughter]. But the nice thing about that was you know, I'm still in touch with two of the doctors and the main doctor I saw last week at Richmond theatre, he's touring. So it's lovely.

KM: It sounded very busy. Did you get to see much theatre after the war?

DO: Well it is busy, but no it's a wonderful life really. Do you want to act at all?

KM: Oh I can't! [laughter]

DO: How do you know?

KM: It would be really good, but I don't think I've got the talent.

DO: It's very precarious. You know, I've just been [touching wood!] very lucky. And I still do television. And it's lovely being here, you know, because you go out and you

come back and you don't have to think what's in the fridge, or your washing or anything like that. [laughs]

LK: That reminds me, you said that it was hard to find work as an actor after the war. Was it really difficult to find jobs after the war as an actor?

DO: (pause) I don't know about other people, I can only speak for me. Yes, well I'd had no experience start after my training, because the war came, so yes it was. It was difficult for me. Because you know, I'm trained as a straight actress, but then got hauled into review, which I loved.

LK: How did you get involved in review?

DO: Well by going to this interview with Daphne Rye who said we're putting on a review. And then I was lucky enough to get into it, with Joyce Grenfell.

KM: My mum loves her [laughter]

DO: Well there you are. No she became a great friend. She was lovely.

KM: Did you get to see any major plays, like Look Back in Anger or Waiting for Godot or anything like that?

DO: Oh yes.

KM: What did you think of them?

DO: Well by that time, I was living in Manchester, so I didn't see the London productions, but I saw the ones at the Royal Exchange. Look Back in Anger had Micheal Sheen, (pause) Waiting for Godot I saw twice, Richard Wilson, who's, what was he? Grumpy old man.

KM: What's it called. Oh I know who you mean though.

DO: Yes they're probably names that wouldn't mean much to you, you know.

KM: Did you enjoy them?

DO: The second time I saw Waiting for Godot, yes. But it is such a strange play. It really is.

LK: Was there a long time difference, between the play opening in Manchester, from when they had opened in London?

DO: I don't know.

LK: Did people in Manchester have any expectations from what people in London had said about the productions?

DO: I think they didn't know what to expect. (pause) Well with Richard Wilson in it, I think they thought he'd be just like his television personality, and he was up to a point, he was very good. But it's such a small cast isn't it. Do you know it well?

LK: Well we read both of those plays for class.

KM: It would be good to see it performed I think.

LK: And do you go to the theatre in Sheffield?

KM: I have been to the Sheffield productions. I really need to. We keep meaning to organise going.

DO: Oh really.

KM: I know we really should go.

DO: Do you not like going to the theatre?

KM: Oh no, I do, I love going.

DO: Because The Crucible is a lovely theatre.

KM and LK: Yes.

LK: So did you have to opportunity to see a lot of shows while you were still involved as an actor?

DO: Well yes. Whatever we wanted to go and see you can go and see. Like we went to Richmond like I said last week. And we go to Windsor. And, no we don't miss out if you want to. But sometimes, you know, people can't be bothered.

LK: Were there any productions in the time after to war that you saw and wished you could have been a part of?

DO: Starred? Me? No. [laughter] (pause) I think my name is quite well known, probably through Listen With Mother to a certain generation and the next. And through television. But I do a bit of television. I've done a couple of Heartbeats. Played a woman of a hundred, well she thought she was a hundred, but it turned out she was only ninety-nine.

KM: Easy mistake!

DO: And I hadn't had my birthday party yet. Heartbeat. Midsomer Murders, I did one of those a couple of months ago.

KM: (pause) Just going back to after the war, did you see any of the Pinter plays like The Birthday Party?

DO: I saw the Birthday Party. Hated The Homecoming.

KM: Really, why did you hate it?

DO: I just hated the violence.

LK: Oh right.

DO: I just didn't like that one bit.

LK: Do you remember how people received The Birthday Party? Did they understand what it was supposed to be about? It's a confusing play!

DO: Do you understand?

LK: It's confusing! So how did people receive it? Do you remember?

DO: (pause) I don't know. [laughs] I know (pause) I don't really understand Pinter. I know he's meant to be brilliant. Well I think he probably is, well he must be, but it's not for me. Is he for you?

KM: I'm not sure, I didn't understand it either.

DO: I mean with a lot of the plays, it doesn't really matter if you don't understand if you enjoy the performance and the use of language, but if you read *Waiting for Godot*, it seems so repetitious doesn't it, but when you see it in performance, it sort of makes sense.

LK: Well you said you liked it more the second time you saw it?

DO: I think by the third time, yes.

LK: So what did you think of it after the very first time you saw it?

DO: I didn't know what it was about at all.

LK: Did everybody stay in the theatre?

DO: I don't know.

LK: Because we were learning how after the first performance, most people left because they didn't understand.

DO: Well I think that's right! I think that's absolutely right. Yes. (pause) Oh I did see it in London. I was saying I didn't. I did. Yes with Peter Ball. And that was the first time and I thought what is this all about.

LK: Was that during its very first run?

DO: It must have been, yes. Must have been. No. Do you do Christopher Fry at all?

LK: No.

KM: I think I've heard of him.

DO: You don't know *The Lady's Not for Burning*?

KM: No I've heard of that though.

LK: No we haven't read any of those.

DO: There is lovely language in that.

LK: Did you have a favourite playwright from that period?

DO: No no. (pause) Do you do Shakespeare?

KM: I have done Shakespeare yes.

DO: You have.

KM: Yes.

LK: Not for this course though. This course is focussing on the twenty years or so after the war.

DO: Twenty years? What's that, that's Forties to Sixties.

LK: Yes, we're focussing on the period during censorship with the Lord Chamberlain.

DO: So really I've not contributed very much

KM and LK: Oh yes, you have!

KM: Honestly.

LK: This is really good. [laughter]

LK: Do you remember anything about censorship, in the papers, or how it affected anybody that you knew?

DO: I think (pause) I don't know. Look Back in Anger was an early non-censorship one wasn't it.

LK: 1956?

DO: I can't remember when the Lord Chamberlain finished.

LK: 1968 was the very last year.

DO: 68 was it really? (pause) I think some of the censorship was idiotic. But I mean anything goes nowadays. So, if you think about censorship, you think it's stupid and why cross out that word and substitute another one? That sort of thing or that situation. But on the other hand, I think a lot of the plays now leave nothing to the imagination. And I think that's a pity. Because, well going back to Listen with Mother, that taught children to think for themselves. To imagine for themselves. And there was the famous quote of the little boy who said "I like stories on the wireless because the pictures are better". [laughs] Pictures in his own head. And I think rather like nudity, they say leave something to the imagination. And that's far more titillating, shocking, than if somebody strips right off.

KM: So would you say theatre after the war was more inventive than it is now?

DO: Yes, I would. (pause) Yes just after the war, certainly. And there was a generation of wonderful directors coming up, splendid actors. Yes I think more inventive.

LK: Do you remember anything about censorship, in the papers, or how it affected anybody that you knew in the theatre world?

DO: I think... I don't know. Look Back In Anger was an early non-censorship one, wasn't it?

LK: 1956?

DO: I can't remember when the Lord Chamberlain finished.

LK: 1968 was the very last year.

KM: 1968.

DO: 1968, was it really? I think some of the censorship was idiotic. But I mean, anything goes nowadays. So, if you think about censorship, you think it's stupid, and why? Cross out that word and substitute another one. That sort of thing or that situation. But on the other hand, I think a lot of the plays now leave nothing to the imagination. And I think that's a pity because, well, going back to 'Listen With Mother', that taught children to think for themselves. To imagine for themselves. And there was the famous quote of the little boy, who said, 'I like stories on the wireless because the pictures are better.' He made pictures in his own head. And I think, rather like nudity, they say, 'leave something to the imagination.' And that's far more titillating and shocking than if somebody strips right off.

KM: So would you say theatre after the war was more inventive than it is now?

DO: Yes, I would. Yes, just after the war, certainly. And there was a generation of wonderful directors coming up, splendid actors. Yes, I think more inventive.

LK: So do you think that the period after the war, theatre was a big way for people to comment on what they saw happening in the world?

DO: Yes, yes I do.

KM: Do you think people picked that up, in the audience, if someone was making a political comment?

DO: Oh, audiences are so varied. You can't lump them all together. There are bound to be people who've never been to a theatre before, or seen certain plays of that kind, and who would be totally bewildered by the whole thing. And then another lot will have read the play, or read the notices, and perhaps be more receptive to what's going on.

KM: Did you pick up any particular messages in any of the plays that you saw? Did it change your view?

DO: I can't be doing with plays that have a message, quite honestly! No, no.

(laughter)

LK: Did you often read the newspaper reviews before you went and saw a show? The newspaper reviews, like what a critic would say about a show?

DO: Usually. But then again, critics are so divided. You know, you read one paper, the play is brilliant, you read another paper, it's rubbish.

LK: Do you think that when you read them it affected the way you saw the play, when you went?

DO: No, I don't think so. I mean, we want to see very much, *You Never Can Tell*, Bernard Shaw. I saw that after the war, starring, I can't quite remember who. But I'd like to see it again. Principally, because Edward Fox is in it, and I'd like to see him again. I think a lot depends on the author of a play, if you want to see it.

KM: So you didn't let the critics influence you? Your decision to go or not?

DO: No, I don't think so. No. My husband went very much by the critics. Kenneth Tynan, who was just coming up in the fifties, sixties, seventies? He set a great store by what Tynan wrote. And Harold Hobson. And you get to know a certain critic's favourites and non-favourites, and you think, well, he didn't like that, so I might not like it either. On the other hand, we know he doesn't always like that, so you do make up your mind. But I think to be ruled by the critics, not a good idea.

LK: What do you think was the hardest part about being involved in theatre at this time?

DO: The hardest part? Looking for work!

(laughter)

LK: Was it difficult to always have to prepare with costumes and rehearsal? What was hard about being involved on the stage?

DO: When you get a job- when you get a job, you think how lucky, when am I going to get the next one? It's as precarious as that. When this finishes, gosh I have to go and look for another job. But while it's happening- you don't nowadays have to supply your own costumes like you used to have to in rep. You were doing one play, twice nightly, and, run a week, and then another play. Supply your own costumes, rehearse all day for the next play, and then dress rehearsal over the weekend, and then you open a new play on Monday.

LK: So did you have to carry around everything by yourself?

DO: Well, if you're in rep, you're in a town at a specified theatre for however long. But I never did that. Unlike so many of them here who started off in rep, I was so lucky because I was doing more work, and then I got into review, so I never sort of served my apprenticeship in rep. And there aren't any now, which is such a pity. Because in the late forties and fifties, young people just went into rep. You write all the letters to all the places you knew had a rep, and go and do whatever play was thrown at you. So in a way, I'm sorry that I didn't. On the other hand, I was very lucky.

LK: Did you see a lot of rep when it was popular?

DO: No. I saw a little, at the very end, in Manchester when I first went to live there. There was still one rep where Wendy Hiller started. Have you heard of her?

LK, KM: No.

DO: You haven't heard of many people, have you? (laughter) Who have you heard of? Of the contemporaries?

LK: The contemporaries? Well, our class is focusing more on the earlier period. We read some Ionesco, *The Lesson*.

KM: And Brecht.

LK: Who else have we done?

KM: We've just been looking at Joe Orton. *Loot*, *What the Butler Saw*. Weird comedies.

LK: We started out the course with Terrence Rattigan, who wrote *Separate Tables*.

KM: Oh, yes.

DO: But you really ought to go to the *Crucible*. Because isn't there a second theatre in Sheffield?

KM: Yes, the Lyceum.

DO: Because my elder daughter is a casting director. She was at the Royal Exchange casting for twenty years. She's just back there helping out. She had to go around

Bolton, Sheffield, Stoke, all of the theatres in that area. And, several times, we went to Sheffield, to the Crucible, with her. That was very interesting.

LK: Did you ever get involved in any aspects of theatre besides acting?

DO: No. I'm not clever enough to be a director, and I can't draw, so I couldn't be a designer. No, just acting is enough for me.

LK: How many shows do you think you were in altogether after the war?

DO: How many shows? I really don't know.

(laughter)

KM: What was your favourite performance that you ever did? Can you remember?

DO: In the theatre? Oh, dear. I don't think I have a favourite. I suppose in *The Happiest Days of Your Life*. In which I played the part played by Joyce Grenfell in the film. *Ms. Gossage*. I liked *On Golden Pond*. But just to be in the theatre. That was pretty well enough for me.

LK: Did you prefer smaller audiences or larger audiences?

DO: The former, I think. Yes. There's something about live performance which you can't compare with doing television. You don't get the comeback with television. Which really one does need, as an actress.

KM: Did anything ever really go wrong, in any performance you did or you saw?

DO: When I was at the Royal Exchange in *Doctor's Dilemma*, a shower of sweeties came down from the balcony, just as I was going on, which wasn't very polite!

(laughter)

KM: Oh dear! Was it on purpose?

DO: It just came down, absolutely in front of me! So you know, you just have to (brushing aside motion), get rid of them, or I would have slipped.

LK: Were audiences in general pretty respectful about staying quiet?

DO: Audiences, do you mean? Yes. Yes, unless it's terrible. (laughter) In which they express their opinion, as they say.

KM: Can you think of a specific time when the audience were particularly angry about a performance?

DO: No. If something like that happens, something stupid, you laugh about it. I mean, in rep, before the war, one hears awful stories. I was at a memorial service two weeks ago, of a lovely actor, very old, ninety-four, who lived here, his name was [Geoffrey Tune], he was a great, almost a matinee idol, he was so good-looking, six-foot-something, about six-foot-four, I suppose, very handsome. And one actress who made a speech at his memorial, said that one time she was acting with Geoffrey, and he came on with a white china doorknob in his hand. Because he pulled the door and it came with him. I think that sort of thing was happening in rep all the time. But probably not in the forties, I mean, people would have to make an entrance through the fireplace if the door had stuck. There are various books you should get to read. Famous theatrical disasters.

LK: Do you think it was difficult for rep actors to make the transition into different kinds of plays when rep started fading?

DO: Well, no, because they were so experienced. I mean, sometimes, there were two plays a week. Twice nightly. So when they came out of rep, they were equipped to do anything, really.

LK: Do you think they preferred staying in rep, or moving on to different kinds of shows?

DO: No, I think rep must have been such hard work. But I think it's a great pity that there aren't more reps today. I remember once at the Library Theatre, talking to some students from Manchester School of Theatre, and I said to one student, 'What are you going to do?' Oh he said 'I've been so lucky, I'm going in to The Merchant of Venice, a musical, and we're going straight into town.' And I thought 'You poor beast, what you're going to miss.' It never did, it never happened.

KM: Did you go to any musicals after the war?

DO: Oh, yes!

KM: How did they compare to more serious theatre?

DO: Well the first night of Oklahoma!, I remember, was absolutely wonderful. You could, in those days, you could pay sixpence and buy a stool which you would put down in a queue and that would be your stool, to get into the theatre later on. Yes, that was sixpence. Six old pennies, I mean. And we'd heard about this wonderful American show. And that was I think 1947. And it had been a terrible winter. I remember climbing agents' stairs. And there was one, a girl was wearing mittens, and there was a candle, and she was trying to warm her hands at the candle at the table, because there was no heating. It was snow, and, it was hideous. And then came Oklahoma!, and the curtain went up on that brilliant scene, with Curly singing 'Oh what a beautiful morning' offstage, and you thought, 'it is going to be all right after all. The sun is going to shine, sometime. Things can only get better,' and they did.

KM: So it gave you hope.

DO: Annie Get Your Gun, Kiss Me Kate. They were all big American shows, most of which had been revived. Have you seen any?

KM: I've seen some musicals, like Andrew Lloyd Webber ones mainly, I have to be honest. I'm a disgrace!

(laughter)

LK: Do you think a lot of people went to see those musicals to make themselves feel better about life in general? Was it a good way of picking themselves up?

DO: I think in the early fifties, these big American shows were novelties. They were quite different from what we call musical comedies, which were great fun, but, besides the American ones, they were a bit genteel let's say. And the American shows were big, and loud, Call Me Madam, you know, Ethel Merman.

KM: No.

DO: Who do I know that you might have heard of? Howard Keel, who's just died?

LK: I don't think so.

DO: (sighs) It's very difficult! (laughter) No, the American musicals were wonderful. You haven't seen any revivals?

KM: I've seen Chicago the film. I'd love to see it actually, though. I can't think.

DO: Have you?

LK: I used to watch a lot of musicals that were the film version, when I was younger. But not a lot in the theatre itself, not too many. Only some newer ones, probably. Like I saw Les Miserables half a year ago. Stuff like that. Did you prefer going to see the musicals or going to see the more serious productions?

DO: I'd go to see anything, pretty well. Even Pinter! But it's difficult to talk about the twenty years after the war, without referring to the actors of which you really don't know!

KM: We'll look them up as soon as we get back!

DO: So you ought to mug up and come back! (laughter) You going back to Sheffield now?

LK: Yes, we're just here for the day.

KM: Very nice. Much sunnier.

DO: It's very nice here. And we've all got the same sort of background, which is so good. And people come to visit, and you know them, or know of them. I mean somebody came today, who's a regular on Heartbeat. And suddenly there he was, which was lovely. I don't think I have any more!

KM: You've done plenty, honestly, thank you.