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Peter Hudson – interview transcript

Interviewer: Sue Barbour

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Singer and comedian. Agents; auditions; The Bill Shepherd Singers; Concert Artists Association; Tommy Cooper; digs; Equity; Cyril Fletcher; Frank Loesser; London Management; The Most Happy Fella; The Music Man; opera; Michael Parkinson; Pontin Circuit; television; touring; Max Wall; C. Daniel Warren; Mike and Bernie Winters.

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SB: This is Sue Barbour from the University of Sheffield, interviewing Peter Hudson, an all round entertainer. Hi Peter.

PH: Hello Sue, Hello.

SB: First of all let me ask you how you started your career in show-business?

PH: Well, I suppose the best way of putting it is that I actually did an audition for a Harold Fielding production of Cinderella - I had been training as a singer and I got in, to begin with, as a singer in The Bill Shepherd Singers at the London Coliseum, in Cinderella, and that's how I started.

SB: And what date was that? What sort of year?

PH: It was in November... 1958. And, in fact it's next month I shall be celebrating - for want of a better word - 50 years in show business.

SB: Oh, that's incredible!

PH: Yes.

SB: So you were a singer in that production...

PH: Yes, yes.

SB: And what did you do when that finished?

PH: Well, when that finished, funnily enough, somebody was asked to do an audition for Cyril Fletcher, but they couldn't make it because - well, I remember his name, John Clifford - he had a sore throat, so he said, 'You go'... and I went along and auditioned at the end of it they said, 'We think you're absolutely ideal for the show, Mr. Clifford', and I said, 'No, I'm Peter Hudson', 'Oh, really? Oh, well, Mum and I...' - he always called Betty Estelle, his wife, Mum - 'would like you to appear at Sandown Pavilion in 1959 Summer Season'. And that's how I started, as a Utility Man - I was not just a singer in the show but I had to do all the straight bits... I didn't do any comedy that year.

SB: Oh, and was it a production show?

PH: It was a big, a Concert Party. We did four programmes in two weeks, so if anybody had the stamina they could go to the theatre four times in two weeks while they were on holiday - because you did have two weeks holiday in those days - and see the show. I mean, the price of tickets for that show was... I think 2/6 was the top price.

SB: [laughs]

PH: Real money... Yes, so that's how I started. But it was while I was with him that first season he discovered that I'd been in a Variety Show - once only, doing comedy - and it was a few weeks after the Summer Season finished I went to East Grinstead and spent the day with him telling jokes, just to him.

SB: Really?

PH: Yes, and he said 'I think you are very funny. I'm going to give you four Sunday Concerts... and I did... I did four Sundays and on one of them... I've got a photograph somewhere... the Top of the Bill was Petula Clark, and it was 6/6 the top price for that.

SB: Oh, goodness! And did you do all types of... did you do Summer Seasons and pantomimes and...

PH: Yes, from that moment on I did pantomime, Summer Season, pantomime and then I got into an American Folk Opera The Most Happy Fella and from there immediately - straight after we closed - I started rehearsing The Music Man at the Adelphi Theatre with Van Johnson... as a singer - I was just a singer there, I was in the Barbershop Quartet. They were known as 'The Square Pegs' at that time, yes, so I spent I suppose...

three... four years in the West End before going back with Cyril Fletcher in Concert Party and I did Concert Party with Cyril for about four or five years after that.

SB: Oh, right. And was it always in the same place?

PH: No, no... different places every year. Eastbourne, one summer... Sandown, Isle of Wight again, Hastings and Bournemouth... so, I got around. I must admit I was lucky, I learnt... my apprenticeship was doing Concert Party... learning the ropes... being able to sing in Shanas - Operettas written by Betty Estelle - and feeding Cyril, which was quite a chore at times – it was a bit difficult feeding him.

SB: Oh really?

PH: Yes, because he would wander off sometimes and I would have to bring him back...

SB: Oh, would he?

PH: ... as the Straight Man. But it was good ground schooling for me.

SB: Mm... and what about accommodation? Where did you stay during those days?

PH: Well, in the early days, I mean, I just went into digs, but once I'd got my second summer season with Cyril, I got a flat and then my wife and my first daughter would come down and stay for the length of the season, in a flat. I mean, we invariably, from that moment on, all my life I would always get a bed-sit or a flat, rather than go into digs.

SB: Yes. So... in the early days you did go into digs... were there any peculiar landladies or anything?

PH: No... only one I think... there was one actually at [pause] I'm trying to think where it was... at Bristol... it - the actual house - was called "Prompt Corner".

SB: Oh, really!

PH: "Prompt Corner", yes, "Prompt Corner" and her wall, in the dining room, where we used to all eat when we were there, the Variety Acts or whatever, was absolutely covered with everybody you would care to mention who had stayed there... big names... as well, Jimmy Jewel, Ben Warris, Arth... what's his name, English?

SB: Oh, Arthur English, yes.

PH: Arthur English, Arthur English amongst others... Jimmy Wheeler, all stayed at these digs... Prompt Corner. She was a very quaint lady. Her husband was a drummer on a ship.

SB: Oh really?

PH: So... and every time...when we came back from the show at night... we'd have a full scale dinner... a big meal lined up. She'd cook. She'd give us something light before we went to the theatre but when we came back you'd get a big, full blown meal. I mean, to eat a full scale meal at half past eleven at night took a bit of doing.

SB: Yes.

PH: But when you are young your metabolism worked better.

SB: Oh Gosh! And what about transport? How did you get from place to place?

PH: Well, funnily enough... I didn't drive... I was a late starter because I auditioned for the Pontin Circuit in 1968 and at the end of it they said, 'Yes, you've got the job. You'll do twelve camps a week.' And I said, 'Oh, where are they?' and when they told me where they all were I said, 'Well, how am I going to get there by train?' 'Train? You're going to have to drive!' So, I took 24 lessons with the BSM [British School of Motoring] passed first time and got a second hand Morris 1100 and drove that for the first year.

SB: Oh, really! So for the early part of your career you always travelled by train?

PH: Always, by train. Yes, always by train.

SB: Did you? Mmm.

PH: Yes, I was a late starter. It was 1968 when I learned to drive and I only had that car for that first summer and then I got a new car, a brand new car which I drove out of Daggenham Motor Factors, because Ford's were very big there then. A Corsair 2000E, which somebody had won by designing something for the Cortina and I had it for £1000 brand new.

SB: Gosh!

PH: That was good, wasn't it?

SB: Certainly was. So you did sort of all different kinds of entertainment. Where did you enjoy working the most? What kind of...

PH: Anywhere!

SB: [laughs]

PH: Anywhere where there was a theatre, I enjoyed it. I mean, when I did the Pontin's Circuit... I did it ... and I was very good. I mean, David Lever was the Entertainments Manager for Fred Pontin and he did all the bookings but I must admit that I'm a theatre man, born and bred really... I mean, I love the theatre. I did Cabaret for many many years, all over the land, especially in the winter, but no... I... give me a theatre, it's the best.

SB: And I believe you did some television warm-up spots, tell me about them...

PH: Yes, that came a lot later actually. I mean, I actually did television: Seaside Special, Big Top Variety Show... all those things, but then I was called out on one night when Felix Bowness...

SB: Oh, yes!

PH: Who should have been doing a warm-up... he did many... he was the King of Warm-ups... couldn't do it and it was for Michael Parkinson. And I went and did that and as a result I spent five years doing Michael Parkinson... he liked what I did. I was right for his audience.

SB: Mm, That's wonderful. Yes. You said earlier, about... you used to finish, when you did an act in Variety and everything, you used to finish on a song?

PH: Oh, yes.

SB: What kind of songs did you used to do?

PH: Well, this is it. Being trained as an opera singer, I finished on "Nessun Dorma". And there's just one funny story which will I'm sure amuse you, really. I was with Tommy Cooper at the Princess Theatre, Torquay and I finished my act after fifteen minutes on "Nessun Dorma" and this particular night after the show we're in the Torbay Hotel having a drink and a women came in and said, 'Tommy, I thought it was wonderful

tonight, I thoroughly enjoyed your show' and she looked at me and she said, 'What's your name? I said, 'Peter Hudson'. She said, 'Tell me, was that you singing at the end of your act? Was that you singing at the end of your act? And before I could answer, Tommy Cooper said, 'No, he was miming to Mario Lanza!' and she turned to her husband and said, 'I told you, didn't I, I told you!' [SB laughs] and of course, I had to keep it up, I said, 'Well, we've all got to make a living' and she said, 'You should be reported to the Trade's Description Act, that is terrible! I said it was Mario Lanza, didn't I?, it was Mario Lanza singing, not him!' That's terrible'. [SB laughs]

PH: And then another night another woman was coming to see the show and she said, 'and what do you do?' and before I could answer again, Tommy said, 'He's my doctor!' - because I was always in a blazer and flannels with a briefcase with my sandwiches in and scripts - and he says, 'He's my doctor' and she says, 'Oh, I see, and where do you practice?' and he says, 'He doesn't practice... he's perfect!'. [SB laughs] She says, 'Just a minute, I mean, you must have somewhere?' I said, 'No, I just look after Tommy'. 'You mean you have no other patients?' I said, 'No, he pays me enough money, I go wherever he goes... I'm with him!' 'Well, that is terrible, I think that is absolutely disgraceful... you only have Tommy Cooper as your patient?' 'Yes, well I'm sorry but that's the way it is'. She walked away and about five minutes later she came back and said 'I've got this problem with my back...' [SB laughs] 'You'll have to see your own GP about that; I can't deal with a patient off hand'.

SB: So, you enjoyed working with Tommy Cooper did you?

PH: I was with that man from 1970 until when he died in 1984. I did fourteen years with him. Not on television, I didn't do any television work, but whenever a job came in where he was going, he would always ring Billy Marsh - well, Miff Ferry would. Miff Ferry would ring Billy Marsh and say, 'Where's Peter?' and they'd say, 'He's going to Bournemouth or wherever it was with Mike and Bernie' and he'd say, 'No, Tommy wants him'. So I'd have to cancel that and go with Tommy. Yes. [pause] I taught Tommy to play chess.

SB: Oh, did you?

PH: Yes, in the dressing room he was and we'd be playing chess and he got very lonely in his dressing room and one night he said to me, 'Would you teach me?' Well, it was the worst thing I could have ever done, because from that moment on I never left the theatre until about three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning playing chess with him. He loved the game, he... 'til eventually, when we were at Coventry doing a Christmas show, he beat me and he went all round the theatre telling everybody, knocked on every door, 'I've just beat Peter, I've just beaten Peter at chess!'. He was like a little boy. He was a lovely man.

SB: So, you told me earlier that you worked with Mike and Bernie Winters?

PH: Yes, I did, yes.

SB: Would you like to say about when you actually were part of the act?

PH: Well, yes. It was... I'm trying to think when... it must have been 1980 or yes about 1978 or 1980 or 1979... well I'm not 100% sure, but when their father died, Mike and Bernie parted. Now, Bernie wanted to carry on. He was not very good on his own, he didn't like to be on his own and he asked me to go with him and so in the end I did. I did a year with him. In fact, Joe Collins, was it... their agent...?

SB: Erm...

PH: His manager, drew up a contract for me to go... to star with him. He said, 'You'll be wonderful, Peter, in the show, just you and me... better than, I mean, it's wonderful', he said - this is a joke against myself when I think about it! He said, 'it will be Winters and Hudson'. I said, 'No, Hudson and Winters!' so he realised I was joking and I said, 'No, I couldn't come with you Bernie I couldn't, I'm sorry. I've always been an act on my own. I'm very grateful you're asking me, but I wouldn't do it full time with you, I just couldn't' and he turned to me and said, 'Why?'. I said, 'Well, you...' What was it I said...? I'll lose my... I'm trying to think of the word now. My...

SB: Identity?

PH: Yes. Identity. Yes, that was the word. 'I don't want to lose my own identity'. He said, 'What do you mean? Nobody knows you now!' [SB laughs] But I did do a year with him. Yes, took over and did everything Mike had done with him for 25 years before.

SB: And in the... you said you started in the fifties?

PH: Yes.

SB: Was that when you did the Cyril Fletcher stuff?

PH: Yes.

SB: What did you do between the Cyril Fletcher stuff and then... like Mike and Bernie Winters?

PH: Well, I suppose it was... from finishing a Summer Season with Cyril Fletcher, which must have been 1967. Yes, it was, '67. I was then discovered by Pontin's.

SB: Oh, so that was when that came.

PH: That's when that came in, and I did the Pontin's circuit. I did it for that first year and then the second year London Management had in the mean time come down to see me at Swanage - Michael Grade and Billy Marsh - and they signed me up but I told them I'd got a verbal agreement with Fred Pontin to do that season, which surprised Billy and he said, 'Well, I don't hear of many people who will stick to a verbal agreement. We want you. We don't want you to do silly holiday camps. We want you to come into number one theatres'... and I said, 'Well, no, I can't' and he said, 'How much are they paying you?' and I said, '£175 per week' and he said 'Oh, we can't match that!' so, I was allowed to do that year. In fact, I'll tell you a strange thing. I phoned... Because I was not sure what to do, I phoned Tommy Trinder and I said, 'What shall I do? Shall I go with the Delfont's or shall I do the Pontin's Summer Season and he said, 'Do yourself a favour, take the money. If they want you they'll have you next year'. And that's how that happened.

SB: Well, that's a good piece of advice really, isn't it?

PH: Well, it was really because, I mean, when I think, I did twenty one weeks at £175 per week when petrol was 3/6 per gallon so I was well in and I rented a house that year which my wife and daughter came down and the house only cost me £8 per week, just to have the house.

SB: That was good.

PH: So I was really doing very well, and then when I went with the Delfont's for the first ten weeks I didn't earn - didn't do any work at all, and that's when I went to the office and said, 'Well, look, what are you going to get me? Christmas is coming.' and he said, 'Let me worry about that' and I said, 'Well, when you're having your Christmas dinner I'm sure you'll say, 'I'm worried about Peter Hudson, I haven't got him any work!'. [both laugh]

SB: [laugh] Oh dear. So, before you signed up with them, who did you work for? Any ag... anybody who offered you work?

PH: Yes, anybody who offered me work. I had a manager at that point, called John Brown, who was a coach owner. He owned a fleet of coaches, 36 coaches, he was a very, very straight-forward man, and he would get me jobs anywhere. He was a bit of a rough diamond, a hard man, but he did well for me. I mean, he was the one that got me the Pontin's circuit in a way and you know, so...

SB: Oh really...

PH: Yes, oh yes. I had no agent. All the agents I was working for who were doing my Masonics were all - there was about a dozen of them. In those days you could look in

the CAA book and you could see all the agents in there: Alfred Swain, Stanley Kilburn, all there.

SB: Mmm. So just for everybody's information the CAA was originally the Concert Arti...

PH: Concert Artists Association.

SB: And now it's the Club for Acts and Actors. [both laugh]

PH: Yes, that's right. It is. That only happened last year didn't it?

SB: Yes.

PH: Yes, I've been a member of the Concert Artists Association from that day to this.

SB: Have you?

PH: Yes. It was Cyril Fletcher who said to me, 'On a Monday night, put your dinner suit on and go to the Concert Artists Association and just mix and say you've just done a job somewhere – put yourself about, even if you haven't - you know, so that agents could see you there. Everybody who joined the Concert Artist's Association, as it was then, had to do an introductory performance on a Monday night.

SB: Oh yes.

PH: They all had to do that. I don't think they ever failed anybody and they all became members and I'm still a member to this day.

SB: Mmm. I'm a member too.

PH: Oh that's nice.

SB: Yes.

PH: Well, we'll meet at the club one day. [both laugh]

SB: [laughs] So, when you were growing up did you ever think you were going to be in show business?

PH: I must admit, the first job I ever got where I was paid was one night an Aunty Dollie and an Uncle Cyril came over to Mum and Dad's house and Uncle Cyril was having a bad time with his wife, Aunty Dollie. She used to nag him a lot and this particular night he held my hand out and he put a half a crown in it and folded it up and said, 'Make your Aunty laugh' and that was my first paid job when I think about it.

SB: Really?

PH: Yes, I was only about 8 or 9 years old, but I just put different clothes on and walked around the house doing funny walks and things like that. But I think it was when I was in the RAF in 1951-1953 that I was really bitten by the show business bug because I used to entertain all the boys in the billet, I used to do... make up my own scripts and on one occasion, I was doing one of the C.O. - doing an impression of him, he was a bit not far off Captain Mainwaring type. They were all laughing and rolling about and suddenly they stopped laughing and I turned round and, of course, the C.O. was there. I was on a fizzer right away. He said, 'Take that man's name, Warrant Officer'. And I went outside he said, 'You're wasting your time in the RAF Hudson'. I said, 'Yes, sir'. 'I'm going to get you an audition with the BBC', and he did. He wrote to the BBC and said, 'We have a very talented young man here who should have a chance to do an audition'. At White Lady's Road, in Bristol because I was at RAF Filton, not far out of Bristol, I went there and I auditioned. I got the job. Now, this is a strange thing, I finished on a song but when Duncan Wood came out of the recording part he said to me, 'You're very funny but don't sing, you can't!' and I thought I could, I thought I had a good v... but obviously I hadn't, I didn't know what I was doing with it and he got me my first broadcast Variety Cavalcade and in the show, topping the bill was Semprini, but on the bill was a very young comedian just making a name for himself, Tony Hancock and compering the show was Benny Hill.

SB: Good gracious.

PH:... and the Luton Girls Choir... they were on it. That was in 1952 and as a result of that one, I went back to what I was... I don't know if I mentioned it, I was a printer and I'd been at the stationary office, Harrow for eight years as a printer and then I went to - because I was told I couldn't sing - I took singing lessons from a coach who I am indebted to this day, Burton Harper, who was principal bass baritone for the Carl Rosa Opera Company and he said to me - he used to call me Lanza because I did sound very like Mario Lanza.

SB: Really?

PH: Yes, very much so. I used to have all his records. I suppose in some ways I cheated, miming him, mimicking him. No... then I learned properly and I took to Italian like a duck to water, it was very easy singing in Italian - might be because I'm fourth generation... my Great, Great Great Grandfather was married to a full blooded Italian.

SB: Oh.

PH: So that's how I got to singing in opera, yes.

SB: So you had the singing lessons and...

PH: Yes and that was it. I saw an advert in The Stage in 1958 and it said 'Singers required for The Harold Fielding Production...'

SB: Oh, so that was how you got that.

PH: Yes, that's how I started.

SB: And did you... what paper was it that the audition, was it like a show business type paper or...

PH: It was The Stage.

SB: Oh, it was The Stage.

PH: It said, 'Singers required'. I thought... I rang Burton Harper and said, 'What do you think', he said, 'I don't know if you're ready for it but go along, you never know'. Well, the strange thing is, it was at the Lyric Theatre, the first audition. I didn't go to the stage door - I was green. I knew nothing about theatre - I went in the front entrance and I went and sat in the stalls and there was nobody around.

SB: Oh really.

PH: ...and I thought 'there's nobody here yet' and eventually the lights went on at the front, the footlights and everything and a man walked out with a clipboard and said, 'Yes?' I said, 'I've come for an audition for Cinderella'. 'Oh, what's your name?'. I said, 'Peter Hudson'. 'Agent?' I said, 'No, I'm a printer'. 'Have you got an agent?' 'No'. 'Well, have you got a telephone number?' I said, 'Yes'. I gave him my telephone number and he said, 'Come here! All right Harry, open the door'... and the stage door was opened then and there was a queue half way down Shaftesbury Avenue! [SB laughs] All these people. I was the first to sing. And I've never forgot it... and I sang "Come Back to Sorrento" and as a result of that, every time I went for recalls - and I did five recalls - I was always the first to sing and everybody had to try and match me and I remember one of the chaps who went into that - Bill Shepherd Singers - an opera singer called John Clifford, who was at Covent Garden and he'd been there a long time, he said, 'When we heard this voice, singing in the lounge bar at the London Coliseum, we thought he must be about 6ft. 6ins and weigh about 17 stone and round the corner came this very thin,

weak looking chap with glasses on! [SB laughs] Beaming from ear to ear' and it just... that happened every time and I went...

If I may say - talking about singing - I once went to Drury Lane to audition for The Most Happy Fella and the man who was there to hold the auditions was Frank Loesser.

SB: Oh, gosh.

PH: And I sang "M'appari tutt' amor" and then he said, 'Can you' - I sang right the way through - and then he said, 'Do you know another one?' and I said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'Sing it!' and I sang "Strange Harmony of Contrasts" from Tosca and he came up onto the stage, opened my jacket and said, 'Well, where are the amplifiers?' [SB laughs] He said, 'Do you know "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"?' I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'I'm glad you said that, I wrote it!' So he said, 'Sing the first phrase'. So I did [sings] 'Somewhere over the rainbow'. Then he said, 'I want you to do that, then go up a key every time and he... I went all the way up til I cracked. He said, 'What did you have for breakfast this morning?' I said, 'Orange juice and a piece of toast'. 'What time did you go to bed last night?' I said, 'One o'clock'. 'What? That's a bit late going to bed isn't it', 'Well, I'm in Aladdin at the London Coliseum'. 'Oh, this is where this show is going in', I said, 'I know'. 'Oh, so you got up at what time?' I said, 'Half past seven'. 'Oh, that's OK then. You're here'. Again, I got about six recalls again before I got the part... again understudying the comedy lead who was responsible for "Standing on the Corner".

SB: Oh gosh!

PH: But he was a tubby fella, Jack du Long, he was a fat man, whereas I was thin but they had a costume for me [both laugh] I wouldn't be able to wear his.

SB: Oh. I wanted to ask you about... how did you... not cope with, but family life, I mean, did you... like you said your family went with you for the summers.

PH: Yes, every summer they came with me.

SB: And in-between times did you try to get home sort of every night or...?

PH: Yes, the first year that Melanie was born I commuted every night on a train - because I wasn't driving then - from Brighton back to London. I'd catch the last train at night back to London. It was a corridor train and we still had our make-up on and in those days it was the Leichner stick make-up.

SB: Oh yes.

PH: And George Raebitt, who was an ex-Covent Garden opera singer, bass singer. He and I used to get on the train and take our make-up off in the toilet and the last time we went back, the summer schedule had finished and it was winter time and when we got

on the train it wasn't a corridor train. It just was a single compartment and the other people in the carriage were all looking at us in make-up [both laugh] and then suddenly George stood up and said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, we are members of the theatre and we have just been performing at The Dome, Brighton and we are now going to remove our make-up' [both laugh] It was amazing. Funnily enough too, there was no reaction and I can remember being in *The Most Happy Fella*, being on the underground going to Trafalgar Square and at Piccadilly Circus or one of the other stops, on got these Roman Soldiers.

SB: Oh really?

PH: Roman Soldiers in full gear, Trojans all in the full gear, strap hanging, advertising a film that was about to be shown called *Ben Hur* and nobody... people would lower their paper and they go back to reading their paper. [both laugh] Didn't take any notice of them! And outside Charing Cross main line station there was a chariot there, with Roman soldiers, it was a wonderful promotion.

SB: Mmm.

PH: For the film. Excellent. Sorry, I went astray a bit then.

SB: No, it's interesting. Because it's funny to think, I mean, that in those days, you weren't the only person...a lot of people travelled by train, all the Variety shows.

PH: Yes.

PH: Yes. Well, there was an actor in *The Music Man* - C. Daniel Warren, wonderful old man - he was in his late seventies then and he played the Mayor in *The Music Man* and when we used to go walking down to the station, and when we got to Trafalgar Square Station he would get on a train that went to Queen's Park but we would get on the one that went to Stanmore and he would tell us a joke every night, but he did it so well, his timing was impeccable but what he would do right on the punch line, the doors would open, he would say the punch line, step into the train and leave us lying on the floor laughing on the platform, absolutely falling about! Until one night he said, 'Did you enjoy the joke I told you last night?' and we said, 'Yes'. He said, 'I'm glad you did, because I got on the wrong train. He got on the Stanmore train, which we should have got on, it had come in later and we had to wait two trains 'til ours came in again. He was a lovely man, C. Daniel Warren.

SB: So, you used to see a lot of people on the train from other shows?

PH: Yes. Oh, yes. We would sometimes wine and dine. In those days you could do it - it wasn't too expensive. You could go and have a meal in a restaurant after the show, I mean, well, it's unbelievable really, the camaraderie among artists of all the shows when

you get together. At the time of *The Most Happy Fella* we only lasted nine months at the London Coliseum and that was because at Her Majesty's was *West Side Story* and at the Drury Lane Theatre was *My Fair Lady*, so we had some very strong opposition.

SB: Mmm, yes.

PH: But, very strong. But it was the first show of its kind that was hardly any dialogue. It was all sung. I mean, years later Andrew Lloyd Webber comes along and it's gone that way. In fact, I often think, that if they put *The Most Happy Fella* on now it might be a success. They did try it. An amateur production has tried it once or twice but nobody liked it.

SB: Really?

PH: They didn't. They didn't think it was very [inaudible] again and that was the reason. I mean, on the opening night of *The Most Happy Fella*, everybody who was anybody was there, for that opening night and I can remember many people coming back stage and saying, 'Oh, you'll run for years. You'll run for years', but it was a Pro's show really, when you think about it.

SB: Yes, yes.

PH: Pro's liked it but the general public didn't and they were all Americans as well.

SB: So, did you...were you ever an Equity member or a VAF [Variety Artists Federation] member?

PH: Oh, yes. My very first job, at the London Coliseum, Nessie - a Scots lady - came in and said, 'Now, Peter. You've got to be a member of Equity'. I'm trying to think, I think it was about 4 guineas a year then or something like that.

SB: Yes.

PH: But, it wasn't long after that you couldn't get a job or even audition for a job, unless you were a member of Equity, but at that time, you just joined Equity once you got the show. I mean, I was green, I just didn't know what I was doing. In actual fact, I'm still a member of Equity. But, I mean, it's amazing. Fifty years...

SB: It is. It's a long time... and you've enjoyed most of it?

PH: Most of it... All of it!

SB: Did you find anything that was difficult about being in show business?

PH: No, not really. I've been very, very lucky. I've never met anybody that I didn't like. One or two, perhaps, that I might have crossed swords with for one reason or another, but in the main I think you meet some of the best people in, to me, in the business. I mean, when I think of David Hughes and Petula Clark, I mean, they were wonderful. Top of the Bill stars wherever they went and Van Johnson and of course all the big stars. Les Dawson. Before I went into that side I've been with Tommy Trinder, Max Wall, Arthur Askey... I might have repeated myself there?

SB: No. But you got on well with all of them?

PH: All of them. You know, Tommy Trinder would entertain one person, one person! I can remember coming in sometimes early for a show... we did The Ovaltine Show... we didn't get paid but we slept well! [both laugh] I can remember he'd be in the corner, prompt side, telling jokes to one man, the Stage Manager - just one man, he loved it! He was marvellous person, I loved him. Max Wall was a rather sad character really.

SB: Mmm.

PH: I remember I saw him not long before he died. He was about 76 then, it was in the BBC canteen and he was in costume. He was doing a cameo or something in a play for television and I said, 'How old are you now, Max?' and he said, '76'. I said, 'Oh, I see and have you ever been married?' He said, 'Yes, I was married for 26 years', he says, 'never mind' he says, 'I put it all down to experience!'. [both laugh] Because he was probably one of the first that ran off with another woman or so. It goes... with a beauty queen and they had a photograph of her in the National papers all those years ago when Worker's Playtime was being - and it was a photograph of her years before, she didn't look like that when he was with her - and the audience, Joe Public, cut him dead from that point and he went on Mid-day Music Hall and died a death and in the end, he went into the wilderness for quite a while.

SB: Mmm.

PH: But then he came back years later with a cult following.

SB: Definitely.

PH: But I can remember at the Palladium when I did the season with Ethel Merman, I mean, he would do his Professor Wallansky...

SB: Oh, yes.

PH: ... with the sticking the bottom out 'Where's the stool! Don't muck about we've got an audience here waiting' But, I mean, he was a sad character. In fact, in that season with Ethel Merman, we did poor, Max and me, but one night, the Saturday night, the Stage Manager, Tommy Hayes, came into the dressing room and pointed at his watch and said, 'You did a minute over your time tonight, Peter' and I said, 'I'm sorry, somebody laughed and it threw me!'[SB laughs] and he said, 'And you, Max, you did four minutes over your time'. He said, 'Can I tell you, for every minute you boys' - he called us boys - 'do over in your act, it comes off Ethel Merman's in the second act. She's down for the whole of the second half and this show must be down by ten to eleven' and Max Wall said, 'How long is she down for?' He said, '75 minutes'. He said, 'The poor old cow can only do an hour! [both laugh] We'd be sitting in his dressing room drinking Guinness out of a bottle, in between shows.

SB: Really?

PH: Yes.

SB: So that was twice nightly? Was it?

PH: Twice nightly, yes.

SB: Gosh!

PH: And with Tom Jones it was the same. Twice nightly, but I mean there was no finale, so once you'd done your act, and I was second act on, I could go home, or in my case I'd go and do a Masonic!

SB: Another show?

PH: Yes, another show!

SB: So, did you find in most shows, particularly Variety shows, that everyone got on well together?

PH: Yes.

SB: I mean...

PH: No, there was no animosity at all. Everybody was in it together. That is what I loved about working in a Variety Show which I missed later in life when it was just me.

Nobody else, just doing Cabaret or whatever. When you're with a bunch of people, in a show for... well, in those days you'd do about ten to sixteen weeks, it was wonderful and I mean, if you had a bad night, everybody had a bad night and we'd all console one another. You know.

SB: Yes.

PH: But I miss that, I still do actually. I still miss that sort of friendship you have with other people and I've got three or four very, very close friends to this day that were in Cinderella with me.

SB: Oh really?

PH: We meet up every year or so and have a reminisce and talk about the business and what's happened to it or what hasn't happened to it. Yes, I miss that.

SB: Yes. Well, thank you very much for talking to me.

PH: It's my pleasure.

SB: I've really enjoyed it.

PH: Thank you very much, Sue.

SB: Thank you.

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