

INTERVIEW WITH LYNNE MARAIS

MONUMENT THEATRE

GRAHAMSTOWN

6TH JULY 2014

12 NOON

INTERVIEWER VANESSA COOKE

LM: Excellent, and I can just talk from here.

VC: So Lynne how did you come to be in theatre?

LM: Well I, at one stage of my life, wanted to be a dancer but I got too big. In those days you had to be that height (indicates tall) and you had to be, well just the size of my one leg!

(They laugh)

LM: So that was put on hold and then I thought, well, then I must become an actress which then I duly went to Varsity, to UCT (University of Cape Town) and then from there to CAPAB (Cape Performing Arts Board), up to PACOFS (Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State), to PACT (Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal) and by the time I got to PACT, two years there, I knew I wasn't going to be – Vanessa Cooke.

(They laugh)

LM: I used to say Vanessa Redgrave, but I thought it was nicer to say Vanessa Cooke! And so then I went into Stage Management, from Stage Management to Company management and then into Administration. So that's sort of taking me – Oh then I did have a break in between, when I joined Showtime International, Hazel Feldman.

VC: That's right.

LM: When I actually left, I'd forgotten about that, when I left, when I stopped stage management...um... I went and, and joined Hazel and I said to her, "Look I can't do anything." And I went to Damelin (College), those one hour lessons to touch type, and I still touch type now, very useful. And she said, "No fine." And I learned a tremendous amount with Hazel and Glenda Simon.

VC: Those two people,ja.

LM: They did the publicity for the Market you know. They did a lot of shows – what was it- Sun City, and all those big shows that came into town.

VC: They did enormous...

LM: So I had a lot of experience on the commercial side of theatre as opposed to the performing arts. And that's how I got involved in, in doing Box Office at the Market. I mean obviously I knew Mannie and I knew Barney. I'd worked with Mannie while I was at PACT...um... it was great. I think they paid me, I think it was R5 or R10 a night.

VC: Gabriel (Royeppen) remembers getting R2.50 at Reception coz he shared with somebody else

LM: I think it was R5 when I was just the box office person, and then when I did, I did sometimes when there was nobody in charge, you know, kind of like Front of House, when I did the whole cadoots (sic) then I got R10. And that was just great for me you know. Things were difficult. I wasn't earning huge amounts of money so it helped me get by, and I mean, we had wonderful times. I'll never forget we had the little club, the drinking club. Used to have, each week we'd have a turn. Somebody, we had Pieter Dirk Uys, or me or whoever to buy those demijohns of ...um...Tassenburg.

In those days Tassenburg wasn't a regular brand as such. It was made from the leftover... and you could sometimes get the most gorgeous Tassies. And we all used to enter the little office afterwards and have a little dop and so on, and chat and...because there wasn't a bar in those days.

VC: There wasn't right at the beginning. There was Eugene's Crush Bar after a while, do you remember.

LM: Oh that's right, yes, yes and then when the...um...um... music started...

VC: The Market Café.

LM: yes the Market Café. That's when that sort of side of things came, came to life but ...um... I mean I remember us all going and under... I remember I chopped the old linoleum off the floor of the Gallery upstairs single-handed.

VC: Ja we were scraping the windows.

LM: And you were scraping the windows and then Graham's (Rook) mother Lilian Rook knew somebody who did...er... marble. He came in and did the fish slabs and did those and I remember her coming in and she was sanding the banisters and people...

VC: Beautiful banisters.

LM: And people came in ...er... from all over just to give of their time and their energies and their talents to...

VC: Arthur Molepo, Arthur Molepo said that he was quite good at screwing, screwed in all the chairs.

LM: More than likely and, and Benjy Francis was scraping doors and doing those kinds of things you know. Everybody did something somewhere. And there were these two girls. They were sisters, just forgot their names now. They weren't theatre people but they were followers of the theatre. They always used to come to the theatre.

VC: Gosh I don't even remember them.

LM: Um... and I just can't think of... and they were regular people that came and, and assisted.

VC: Volunteered.

LM: Volunteered. So I do hope that the next naming of a theatre will have Mannie Manim's name on it.

VC: Hm.

LM: Just dropping that in!

VC: Yes no comment.

LM: No comments, but er... I think that Mannie did a, an enormous amount.

VC: I think that Mannie did, in his heart, hope that that would be his theatre, in his heart.

LM: Ja.

VC: But also it's – ja well we'll talk afterwards.

LM: Yes well I just want you to know coz I think that he did an enormous amount. I mean so did Barney in terms of – another side. But if you haven't got the...um... infrastructure, the management, the organising, you know, all the groundwork, you know, Barney couldn't have continued floating on

the top. I mean I'll never forget Mannie saying to me one day, "There's a cricket in the theatre. Go and find it."

VC: He hated crickets.

LM: Well I mean it was awful. They made... came up in the most terrible part of a show. Then you'll get this cricket going off.

VC: In THE SEAGULL!

LM: Yes!

VC: Ja.

LM: I mean you couldn't stop the train from going round the corner but – and I said to him, "I don't..." He said, "I don't want to know. Just find it."

(They laugh)

LM: As only Mannie can. Oh my. No but he was great. But you know things that I remember...um... because when we first started it (the box office) was as you came in the door, immediately on your right in the cold and the wind and the blast.

VC: Freezing!

LM: Freezing cold, that was where the Box Office was. And then there was the fear of, that anybody could come and attack me there and nobody would know coz they wouldn't see.

VC: ???

LM: Then that's when they opened up where the fish slab was and the Men's Toilet was immediately behind and they kind of blocked it in.

VC: That's right. And then eventually Alan (Joseph) also had an office at the back.

LM: Oh really, that, that could have been.

VC: So now it's almost moved back to there.

LM: Yes but our, it was, it was there and we started with THE ISLAND when that's when I moved there with this new space.

VC: Ah, right.

LM: And you know there you were scared because you've got your cash box, all this open space, but I mean I could see everybody and is was, greet everybody and there was place to put all the comp (complimentary) tickets that I could give out when people came and the Press tickets and all that sort of thing.

VC: Sort of right in the centre of everything.

LM: And you know people came on that opening night to buy tickets. It wasn't all that booked out but they just arrived. You know I couldn't fit the money into the box so I just getting, moving it, I just dropped it at my feet.

VC: Safest place.

LM: Safest place because it's just down, where nobody could get at it. Yes fine thanks- and the change, yes, yes.

VC: Mannie would have had a fit.

LM: And everybody in a, and I was there and I heard this thing Kluk, kluk, kluk and I looked and there was the old watchman. I knew him, always used to wave to him, big chap and he came in and he said he wants a ticket for THE ISLAND.

VC: Ag.

LM: So I said, "Okay." I said, "It's just started but," I said, "I'll just sneak you in quickly at the back." And he just took his pocket and he opened it and he took – and that was the money that he had, and he just emptied it onto the fish stand – the slab.

VC: Wanted to pay.

LM: So I halved it and I took half. I put that on one side. I locked my door, ran out, got him and I said, "You've just got to stand at the back now, standing room only." And he was beside himself. He was beside himself. So now, I thought, now I've got to tell Mannie. Now I've...

VC: Given a half price ticket.

LM: I think it was about a quarter price. But I couldn't turn him away and I wasn't in the financial position to say, "No well I'll pay for the seat." Um... so I wrote a long note to Mannie and I said that I think that you've got to start thinking of, of sometimes people that, that can't afford it, and if they come we must make a plan. Must be on a Tuesday night or some..., something like that. And then they, eventually they did do...

VC: They did do...

LM: They did ja.

VC: They introduced that.

LM: And that came from the watchman because it just, that was it. You could see it on his face.

VC: Wore a black uniform.

LM: Yes big, dik – very sort of...

VC: Fierce.

LM: But I mean, I, I – if I'd been a thief I'd be frightened of him, but he was a gentle soul, he was this gentle soul. And when we used to go to have supper sometimes at the hotel...

VC: Diggers.

LM: At the Digger's Inn, yes. You always used to see him standing over there and he would always wave. Ja, ja so you always felt safe because he was there. You could go to the Diggers Inn and come back again.

(She laughs)

VC: How long did you work, do you remember how long you were there?

LM: Shew, probably about two years. I don't actually remember all that.

VC: And afterwards did, you went back to PACT.

LM: Yes, yes, yes.

VC: But in a different position.

LM: Then I went to, as Company Manager. That was when the State Theatre, the State Theatre was opening, so it was, and I looked after the um... English Company which was based in Johannesburg. We were based out at um... Rosebank Arena...um...

VC: Oh yes.

LM: And ...um... I worked from there and I also then looked after the Alex (Alexander Theatre) ...um...Theatre and that's when we were told, Michael Lovegrove told the English Company it must just get on and do something while they were getting going with the, the opening of the State Theatre etc. and it was Jimmy (James) White and Nigel Vermaas, Pamela Gien, um... Michael McCabe, handful and...

VC: With nothing to do.

LM: No, and we got together THE STATE THEATRE OVERFLOW SHOW.

VC: Oh yes, I remember.

LM: Which was going to run for like two or three weeks- it was sort of, and we had a, a, in the Arena we decided we were going to do...um... tables and chairs and people could bring their own wine. In those days you had those Computicket adverts in the newspapers that ran a line – and then Nigel would write, and we'd have something written different – I mean it really turned people – that's what got people to come – bring your own wine, you know and all funny things that only Nigel could, you know...

VC: Write...

LM: Could think of. McCabe and all of them – Peter Terry.

VC: Hoo.

LM: It was quite, quite something and er... it was a huge hit that show. I mean it was an absolute sell out. We ran for weeks.

VC: And then I think FANGS probably came out of that eventually coz that was also at the Rosebank Arena.

LM: Yes I can't remember whether FANGS had been already or...

VC: Ja.

LM: I can't remember the kind of, the sequence of that.

VC: And Graham?

LM: And then it went, nothing happened there for quite a long time...er... it sort of until I took over and I, I started a young company and that's when we started with TOM JONES.

VC: Yes, yes.

LM:And Janice (Honeyman) and all of those kind of – and got going. Then we had to move out of there and then Windybrow happened. Ja so... Those were the days. But that, that only happened when I went, became Head of the Drama Department in Pretoria.

VC: Would you say Mannie brought you to the Market – or did you come of??? your own...

LM: No, no I came of my own... but...um... because I knew Mannie ...um... I think I offered, or said, or,

but I was working for Hazel and Glenda, and because they were doing all the publicity for the Market. So it, and you know it was there from working with the press and everything like that it made it so much easier for me in the Box Office, knowing the press.

VC: So you were working in the day and in the night.

LM: Yes, yes.

VC: And Graham?

(Lynne indicates she doesn't want to talk about him)

VC: Okay that's fair enough.

LM: Ja he ...um... I don't know. He went overseas and to my knowledge... I haven't seen him for years.

VC: He was at the Market for a bit.

LM: Um...

VC: No, he wasn't.

LM: I think it was two years.

VC: Patrick Miller and...

LM: That's right, ja.

VC: Michael Maxwell...

LM: Yes.

VC: And me.

LM: Yes, yes.

VC: ASM (Assistant Stage Manager)always.

LM: Ja.

VC: We used to build the sets in what became Gramadoelas.

LM: Correct, ja.

VC: In the middle of the night. Always seemed to be in the middle of the night,I don't know why.

LM: I suppose everybody was working.

VC: And...

LM: Need a little break, have to get on and do it. Whew, no it was...

CP(Carol Preston): Were you there when the ox got free.

LM: The ox.

CP: From the abattoir.

LM: No.

VC: It was before it opened. That was a huge thing. All of us were there. This ox got free from the abattoir. You know they used to bring them on the trains.

LM: Yes.

VC: And he tried to run away.

LM: Ah.

VC: It was awful. He was huge and everyone was shouting, "Yo run away, run!" and I mean we were in the middle of town.

LM: Ah, how awful. Oh. And did you just happen to see it.

VC: Well, it went on for a while. So by the time they were chasing it we were all at the, in the Wardrobe.

LM: Oh.

VC: They were rehearsing FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES.

LM: Oh.

VC: They were supposed to open the Upstairs.

LM: Oh.

VC: THE SEAGULL eventually opened it. We did that at the Nunnery.

LM: Okay.

VC: There was some dispute.

LM: Of course it did. It was THE SEAGULL that opened... And it was MADAME DE SADE that opened the downstairs theatre.

VC: MARAT/ SADE.

LM: MARAT/ SADE yes, ja.

VC: Do you have any other little memories ?

LM: Hmm. Memories, no, it's peculiar how somebody will say something then it triggers off or, something that you remember.

VC: You know what Patrick Miller did? All the photos of the Company before the Market, and early pictures of the Market...

LM: Mm.

VC: Shows before Ruphin (Coudyzer) even came. He made a collage for the Diggers Inn.

LM: Oh really.

VC: All those photographs. He stuck them all up in the bar at the Diggers Inn.

LM: Photographs he'd taken.

VC: No that David Goldblatt and Georgina Karvallas, all those people had taken of the shows, because Ruphin only came in from '78 from the Star. So we lost all the pictures, unless people had their own. Cut them up.

LM: Thought he was being terribly artistic.

(They laugh)

VC: Patrick yes.

LM: Do you know whatever happened to him?

VC: Funnily enough I saw him at the Country Club (Johannesburg), Joburg Country Club with a whole family. I don't who they were. But I just couldn't say hello, just couldn't. And I think he saw us coz Robert Whitehead was with us – everybody knows him.

LM: Sure.

VC: But he also didn't come across. We just left it.

LM: Mm.

VC: He broke all the telephones at the Market. Patrick. Slamming them down.

LM: Really.

VC: He had a very bad temper, Patrick.

LM: Now did he, he, was in charge. Did he run it for a while. What was he?

VC: He did. It was Michael and then Alan came, and somehow there were three of them. I think he was the Production Manager.

LM: I think he was Production Manager.

VC: And then Alan kind of took over, and eventually...

LM: And booted old Patrick out.

VC: I think he did eventually.

LM: I'm sure he would have. Oy yoi yoi. And did Barney not have photographs.

VC: No they were all at the Market. He went...

LM: And cut them up.

VC: For his favourite place.

LM: It's like our stuff (Referring to the Monument) People didn't keep it or if they did they might have kept put it in the Archives here and it got burned.

VC: Of course they did. Ah!

LM: So there's very little of those early years.

VC: Same as the Market – very little. I'm asking individual people now if they've got stuff. There's nothing in the Market Archives of the MARAT/ SADE.

LM: Can you not advertise?

VC: Eventually we will, but I don't want a flood just yet, coz it might be, we might have to assess. There is some stuff at NELM (National English Literary Museum). We going to go to them.

LM: With Barney's things.

VC: Ja.

LM: Ja.

VC: Barney's things but it was so messed up. Some went to Wits, some went to here. We never thought about it properly.

LM: No one doesn't at the time...um...you know we were all just people who arrived, in many ways.

VC: To make a theatre.

LM: Exactly...um... and you know there wasn't place. You've also got to have place to put things.

VC: Ja.

LM: And...um... put things that are going to be safe where they are.. You're not going to have everybody rushing in.

VC: There was no room at the Market really.

LM: Putting things out and looking, Oh.

VC: But it was fun.

LM: Oh it was marvellous, and have you got programmes and things Vanessa.

VC: Some, some. Not for every play though. Not by any means.

LM: Well...

VC: Hundreds and hundreds of plays that we did as well.

LM: I would advertise as soon as I could, if I were you, because before people move or, or move on or whatever, throw things out and there you might just find...

VC: People are also funny about their things. Paul (Slabolepszy) has got a huge amount of stuff.

LM: Paul?

VC: Slab, but he can't even go through it.

LM: Bokkie!

VC: And his wife wants him to give all the stuff to Wits coz it's a whole room full of stuff and he can't let go.

(Pause)

LM: Won't he let you go and just look at some... you should digitise it.

VC: Yes we can. Wits can do that, but it's to get him to...

LM: Let you in.

VC: Do that...

LM: Ahhh.

VC: Sweet.

LM: Ja it's his blue blanket. And it's strange how you never know how. I would imagine that if you're a writer, that you might want to just refer to something and then, and then...

VC: That's what he says, "I've got to, you know, I'm writing a book about Billy (Flynn) so I might need... He's already written it really but he can't, in case.

LM: Shew, and Vanessa how, who's actually working on it? Are you working on it at Wits?

VC: With Carol, but we've got very limited funding, so we're doing what we can, and then seeing what comes, whether someone comes...

LM: So what are you, just notating what you've got.

VC: That's done. Collating new stuff and adding to the files as well. And then there's these oral interviews which they're very keen on.

LM: Mm.

VC: Been talking to Mannie, got halfway through but he hadn't even got to the Market yet.

LM: Ah bless him.

VC: But it's lovely stories.

LM: Yes I'm sure.

VC: I'm going to talk to Lindsay(Reardon) coz there's very little on Reza (de Wet).

LM: Oh, right.

VC: I don't know, we'll see.

LM: Ja and Janice.

VC: Yes, what did she say – her garage...

CP: She's got a garage full of...

VC: She doesn't think we'll be able to get in.

LM: Well that doesn't surprize me.

(Pause)

LM: Coz I mean she's also a hoarder!

VC: A hoarder! Terrible, but like a mess.

LM: Oh total, totally all over the place.

(Pause)

VC: But Linnie that was lovely, hey.

LM: Oh, good.

VC: I always pictured you at the Box Office.

LM: (Laughs) Ah those were the days.

VC: Then that Geoff (Baskind) took all that money from THE ISLAND and SIZWE (BANZI IS DEAD) doing so well. I think he got the notion there.

LM: No, he was a horse...

VC: Mm.

LM: A horse man.

VC: Gambler, ja.

LM: Gambler. You know it's a disease. You lose and then you think no, I'll just borrow.

VC: Take that from the Market, then I'll put it back.

LM: Ja and he committed suicide. It was too, too... his young son. And we'd been at the boy's Barmitzvah, literally a couple of months before that. It was just, just a ...

VC: You remember when we found out, when he went on leave. Mannie made him go on leave.

LM: Well, what was her name, she worked um...um... Jasmine.

VC: Jasmine?

LM: No, no it wasn't it was Lorraine (Greenberg). Lorraine saw a cheque...

VC: But he was away?

LM: And something didn't ring true and she said to Mannie, "Something's not right here." And then she contacted their bank and well they suddenly...

VC: You see he always went and got the post. So we never knew. And then he was away, and Lorraine went and got the post or something.

LM: You know who never recovered was Cyril (Fisher) because he worked for Cyril and, and...

VC: Cyril recommended him.

LM: Ja, and I think that really broke Cyril's heart.

VC: He was such a sweet man.

LM: Generous, most loving man.

VC: I don't think he believed anyone could do that. And he was an accountant!

LM: Well you know that we couldn't even believe that about Geoff, who was so kind . He was just a very nice person.

VC: And he was looking after things.

LM: Ja, oh...

VC: We had no idea.

(Pause)

LM: Too dreadful.

(Pause)

LM: Well I mean it was – and then I worked a lot with, I'm just trying to think – I think he's dead now, the man who put a lot of money into the Market...

VC: Murray (McClean).

LM: Murray – his son, when I was Company Manager at re...out in Rosebank. He had a call but they couldn't take, something the matter with his feet.

VC: I think he was quite chubby as well.

LM: Yes but I mean in the army you could soon lose that. It was, he had a medical problem with his feet. They let him go but they had to know where he was, he had to report for duty on certain days and things like that, and that's when he came and, and, and he worked with me. And he was marvellous. He didn't try to get out of the army. They wouldn't take him, as such, so he had to put his uniform on every now and then. He'd go off and then he'd come in and – Oh my. (She laughs) His father had moved to England when that happened.

VC: But he still saved us.

LM: Yes and his wife was very sympathetic and came back...

VC: I don't remember her name. But he did wonderful things like he'd get mailing lists from like Anglo. I think from Mary Slack even at that stage, and then we would send out the letters – fold and put, I think we used to call it. And Pater Piccolo was being so efficient, very, very stoned, that when he finished a page he crumpled it up, threw it in the corner, in these little balls. Mrs. McClean had to iron them. There were no computers in those days – so she was ironing.

(Pause)

LM: Gawd, jeeppers, I saw, I was looking at a picture of Peter Piccolo just the other day in WAITING FOR GODOT when it was done here – ag years ago...um...tell you who was directing now...Gosh.

VC: Donald Howarth.

LM: That's right ja.

VC: He was so gorgeous, Peter Piccolo. He went quickly.

LM: Did he – is he?

VC: He died ja. He was very sick.

LM: Oh no.

VC: Last year.

LM: Oh my.

VC: Very, very quick, like Richard(Haines).

LM: Ja well it's a blessing for people not to suffer. Awful, awful, shew. And Benjy Francis is somebody else I'm sure you...

VC: I've tried to find his phone number. But I will.

LM: Is he still not with...

VC: They've pulled down the Potato Sheds.

LM: Oh.

VC: There's a huge, you'd faint, you would not believe it. There's going to be a shopping mall there. Oh it's just hideous. And they took his thing away from him.

LM: Jeeppers.

VC: So I'm just not sure how to get hold of him but I will.

LM: Ja I'm sure you'll find somebody that ...er...will know.

VC: He's still around, somewhere.

LM: Yes because the last time I was up in Johannesburg I know that I went to the Market for something and saw that he was still operating there, ja.

(Pause)

VC: He used to love a silver suit.

LM: (laughs) And who' re... Dave...

VC: Dave Marks. We have to go and see Dave. I mean, he's got all the stuff on the Market Café. He's in Durban.

LM: Mm.

VC: He's got everything.

LM: Oh that's marvellous if he has.

VC: He can digitise that, ja.

LM: Ja, but he also too may want to...

VC: He may want to give his papers I don't know.

LM: I mean what do you do with it.

VC: What's Fran (Marks) going to do with it.

LM: You know the older you get, it's, I'm afraid you've got to realise, you've got to start getting rid of stuff coz otherwise somebody else is going to have to do all of that cleaning up after you've...

VC: Save them...

LM: Bitten the bullet. (She laughs)

VC: But we will go and see him.

LM: And Pieter Dirk Uys is a good person to talk to. Because of him...

VC: He's very important.

LM: He did so many things.

VC: They still haven't changed the name yet.

LM: Of the Laager.

VC: I think they're too scared of him!

(Pause)

LM: it's a nice name that I like...

VC: It is a nice name.

LM: The Laager.

(Pause)

LM: Oh my, when I think of all these people – the early days.

VC: Ja.

(Pause)

LM: Well, Danny Keogh.

VC: Yes.

LM: Where's Danny. Is he in Cape Town.

VC: Cape Town ja.

LM: Hm.

VC: Clare's(Stopford) is in Cape Town, must see...

LM: Clare's here. She's got a group of students.

VC: Ah, good. She's still here.

LM: I'm , I'm just trying to think of whether it was yesterday that I saw her, or the day before, or – I mean I just...

VC: Bumped into her.

LM: Bumped into her in the lift here, yes.

VC: I'll phone her, see where she is.

LM: Yes.

VC: Coz we've got to go down to Cape Town.

LM: Right.

VC: Pieter, we've got to go to Darling. We have to, when he's there of course.

LM: But he's also in Joeys a lot.

VC: But all his stuff is down there.

LM: Ja.

(Pause)

LM: She's also got a lot of stuff but it's...

VC: Who Clare?

LM: Pieter,ja

VC: Evita.

(They laugh)

LM: Oh dear.

VC: But he's a Fellow of Wits so I don't know if he's going to give all his papers to Wits or what. We have to talk to him about it. He should really but I don't know.

LM: He must either give it to Wits or NELM. They must go to a place where they...

VC: Safe.

LM: Ja.

VC: Safe as they can be.

LM: Ja, well I think people are beginning to digitise stuff.

VC: Wits is big on that now.

LM: Ja and they just put it into one of these air bubbles or whatever they call it.

VC: Keep it forever.

LM: Something in the sky.

CP: Cloud.

LM: I knew it was something up there.

(They laugh)

LM: Ja, gosh.

VC: But thanks that's lovely.

LM: That's a pleasure. I'm sorry my memory is not as...

VC: Certain things I can remember perfectly.

Collection Number: AG3406

Collection Name: Market Theatre Oral History Project, 2014-2015

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand

Location: Johannesburg

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