

INTERVIEW WITH RON SMERCZAK

INTERVIEWER VANESSA COOKE

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Melville

RS: Is that just the Market ?

VC: Ja, that's just the Market.

VC: Ron, how did you come to South Africa and what was your theatrical background before that?

RS: On a plane

VC: (Laughs) Ja.

RS: Zoom!

VC: Why?

RS: Because I had a job um with Pieter Toerien at the Intimate Theatre. I was working on a Terence Rattigan play called IN PRAISE OF LOVE with um... the names are there, but they're also not um...

VC: Okay, don't worry.

RS: American guy – Canadian guy, hated to be called American. And, no sorry gone, but we'll come back...

VC: Okay, but I think we should...

(Tea arrives)

RS: Yes please. Thank you.

VC: And then why did you decide to stay?

RS: Çoz I met you.

VC: (Laughs)

RS: Ja um...

VC: Do you need sugar Ron?

RS: Yes, ja I do. Thank you. And another couple of these, thank you.

(Pause)

RS: Because um... I did, I met Janice Honeyman and Mannie Manim and Barney Simon and they'd seen the play- and they were doing a Shakespeare production of TWELFTH NIGHT and er... they asked me whether I'd like to play Malvolio and I said "Who the fuck is he?"

VC: (Laughs)

RS: And they said, " He's a funny guy and he's dressed, we're going to have him dressed in drag wear tights and that shite."

And um... "Yes please I'd love to do it."
And, "How much money do you want?"
I said, "R400 please. A week"
And Mannie looked at me and he said, "We're offering 60."

VC: (Laughs) You were lucky, we got 40.

RS: And...er...I said, "Well, I'm sorry but Mr. Pieter Toerien's paying me R400 and ...er... I thought that was the going rate here."
Yes fine. "No you can have R60."
And then I said, "Okay, I'll have R60 thank you."
And off we went to work and that was ...er... the start of it I s'pose.

VC: Ja, so Okay, the first play you did was TWELFTH NIGHT, that's right.

RS: Ja.

VC: And then tell me about, so then obviously you met Barney, and the Market was being built and everything, and you did FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES.

RS: That's correct. ??? FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES. For which we rehearsed in a cupboard. That's an interesting thing. We were locked in a cupboard, all four of us and Nigel Vermaas, who was playing the jailer...

VC: He was outside?

RS: He sat outside, yes. He sat outside the cupboard.

VC: Was the cupboard at the Market?

RS: Yeah the cupboard was at the Market. No that's not the next thing I did. The next thing I did was, I was the first performer ever, ever in the Market Theatre with Janet Suzman, Mike McCabe and Keith Blundell.

VC: That was just after that? '76 early, early.

RS: '76 though that was before Fortune.

VC: After?

RS: No it was , it was before Fortune.

VC: Okay so...

RS: It was... (Pause) That was in 1975. It was still being built and we were rehearsing upstairs in the old chicken area. Upstairs where the...

VC: Wardrobe is now.

RS: Where the wardrobe is, yeah, correct. And we did that in what is now, or was, the photograph gallery. What became the Photo Gallery— because there were two ways into it as Barney??? I

remember, we, you either had to climb upstairs on two ladders that we'd arranged, or there was , you could go up steps.

VC: On that...

RS: On that side. But we thought it would be novel to make people... Not many people did it.

VC: ???

RS: Go up the ladder. A couple did. I remember who climbed the ladder. Rodney Barnett climbed the ladder.

VC: Well, yes of course!

RS: He would coz he was there with his camera and he was down, taking photographs up. Whatever. And I think he managed to get a picture of somebody. His photographs really got the...

VC: They were beautiful.

RS: Mm.

VC: I'm going to see Patti (Barnett), find them. Okay so it was PLEASURE & REPENTENCE, was first and then FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES.

RS: FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES that's correct. I think...yes it was definitely, most definitely because FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES was in the Nunnery...um... but we rehearsed at the Market, that's right, while it was being built.

VC: And what did you think of Barney?

RS: I loved him...um... he was just great to work with...um... It was like, he reminded me of directors I had had at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art)and he was like...um... I don't know, he could drag out of me things that I knew I had, but nobody else knew I had. Ja, that's the best way to describe it. But how he did it I've not the foggiest fucking idea. Been asked that question hundreds of times. By Irene and other people. Somebody else is writing a book on Barney. Interviewed, can't remember who.

VC: Michael Gardiner?

RS: That's right. Yes,yes on particularly his friendship with...um...

VC: Bill Ainsley and Lionel (Abrahams).

RS: Lionel. No, and some , another artist whose paintings... I've still got...

VC: ???

RS: No.

VC: No?

RS: No, Leonard... Cohen. No Rubin...

VC: Okay.

RS: Harold Rubin. Yeah and I've got three of his works which are now worth, apparently, worth my pension.

VC: Quite a lot of money, hm?

RS: That Barney gave to me, strangely enough.

VC: Interesting.

RS: Yeah, I had a meeting with Barney...um... when he was living in, in... I think in fact that this was the first meeting I had with him, in his house.

VC: Parktown?

RS: No, it wasn't in Parktown. It was in Melville or Belleville.

VC: Bellevue?

RS: Bellevue.

VC: Muller Street.

RS: Could have been, yes.

VC: Oh, ja.

RS: And he had a young boy living with him.

VC: Charlie?

RS: No it wasn't Charlie. I think it was Kevin Smith.

VC: Yes.

RS: It was Kevin Smith.

VC: Right, ja.

RS: And he was then about 16 or 17. He was very, he was ...

VC: Young, young.

RS: Young...er...Barney invited me round. I think this is while, either I was still doing FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES, could have been, or just after. And he invited me round for tea in the morning, and I, I thought okay and I went and met him. And I think this prior to me meeting Janice Honeyman. I think Barney was the first person to contact me. I don't know how or why that happened but I was, coz I was living in Highpoint with my then wife...

VC: Right.

RS: Maggie.

VC: Right.

RS: I walked from Highpoint. I remember, to Bellevue, and I went there and there was this strange little place. It was all very odd to me. And then he said, "What have you got on your walls?"

VC: (Laughs)

RS: It was one of the first questions he asked me, "Where are you living?"

I said. "In Highpoint."

He said, "What's it like there?"

I said, "It's high up with a magnificent view but ...um...Maggie and I don't like it because of the noise at night time... um...but it's very convenient and there's the fast chicken Fontana's downstairs, but Maggie's a vegetarian. "

And then, then he said, "What have you got hanging on your walls?"

And I said, "Absolutely nothing."

He said, "Do you want some paintings?" and he lifted up the bed and he pulled out these four paintings...er...they were by a friend of his that he told me his name was Harold Rubin, who was now just being charged with blasphemy, or been charged with blasphemy and has left the country because he supports the ANC.

VC: He did a painting of Christ.

RS: Mm.

VC: And he was black.

RS: And I've since seen that from...er... another friend of Michael's that was interviewed...um...and, and, he said, "Do you want them?" And there was this, and it's on hardboard, and it's about as big as that window, fantas...and it's called, I call it Sophiatown.

I said, "What's the name of that one?"

I said, "I want that one."

And he said, "This one, a watercolour, is one of Harold's friends who had a brain disease." and it's a little child in the garden carrying like a daisy, very, very odd.

And then another one, which is again about the same size as that, but on canvas. The first one, Sophiatown, was on hardboard, of a woman, a woman's body coz there's tits there. Darkness and trees and things and this male face above and a hand coming out looking as though it's kind of excavating, got an excavator on the end of it.

VC: Wow.

RS: I call that one Nightmare.

VC: (Laughs)Yes I would too.

RS: That's ??? what I've named it. Coz I had to write all this down when I got them insured.

VC: Ah.

RS: And I had to write them down for, for Michael because he's got a friend called Willem who is an art dealer who is very interested.

VC: Okay.

RS: Whatever. Anyway that's, but that was my meeting with Barney. And. There was, and I've questioned ??? about this. There was another one underneath. I said, "That is an amazing painting. I'd like that."

"No, no you can't have that. I'm giving that one to an actress because it is a portrait of an actress." That, I swear to God, he said, "Aletta Bezuidenhout."

VC: Quite possible.

RS: I've questioned Aletta since then about it.

VC: She doesn't know about it?

RS: She said she was going, he was going to give it to her.

VC: And he didn't.

RS: Obviously he didn't. Aletta's never heard of it.

VC:???

RS: Never. She can't even remember sitting for Harold Rubin.

VC: It was probably when she was doing BEGEERTE. She probably forgot.

RS: But she must have been about 16 or 17 at the time of the painting, or maybe 18/19, I don't know. But it was stunning and I met Aletta, so I couldn't have, met her. I knew who she was. So I must have been rehearsing TWELFTH NIGHT.

VC:???

RS: So that meeting with Barney must have been during the rehearsal time or just prior to...

VC: We were doing LYSISTRATA when I met Aletta, which was before FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES. It was at the Old Arena.

RS: Right I remember that.

VC: You could have met her then?

RS: Yes, coz she was very attractive.

VC: Ja.

RS: I remember thinking that.

VC: Ja.

RS: God there's a nice screw...um...Ja so I met Aletta, that's why I knew...um...who was in the painting. But it was again that Rubin grotesque kind of style, but exquisite.

VC: I've never seen it.

RS: I'd, I'd love to know. In fact I've been meaning to...It's been on my list of things, bucket list of things to do is to find Kevin Smith coz he would probably know.

VC: He might. He might not. But he might. Okay.

RS: Coz he was there in the interview. He kept walking in and out and around with, he was making pots of tea, you know.

VC: That sounds about right. Okay, so then...

RS: Ah.

VC: Let's move on. PLEASURE & REPENTENCE. That was fundraising.

RS: That was fundraising with Janet Suzman, Mike McCabe and Keith Blundell upstairs while it was still being built and, the theatre, Main Theatre opened in September. I remember that.

VC: October.

RS: September, October. We were rehearsing MARAT/ SADE right.

VC: Yes.

RS: Um...so that must have been, I'm guessing in about May, June of that year.

VC: It must have been '75 because '76 in June we opened THE SEAGULL.

RS: Oh right yes course you opened SEAGULL Upstairs. Yes so it was in '75 then.

VC: Ja.

RS: Right.

VC: In the book it says '76 so...

RS: ???and '75.

VC: I'll change that.

RS: JA '75, it was in '75 and FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES I think was in '76.

VC: And then MARAT /SADE, as we all know it was a big production.

RS: Correct.

VC: Do you remember anything about it?

RS: No, I remember my part...um...Jacques and I was in a straightjacket for three and a half hours ...um...and Barney I think during rehearsals wouldn't let me, during rehearsals I had to have it on all the time, I remember. He just kept me in that fucking straightjacket didn't he?

VC: I didn't move at all. I was a catatonic.

RS: Oh yes, that's right. You just sat there like this little mouse, like a mouse.

VC: Yes and then Bess Finney hit me on the head with her horns that she found outside the abattoir.

RS: Yes, yes, yes yes...Yeah you didn't move, or hardly or do anything, I remember Danny, Danny at the opening, that opening swinging down on...into the audience.

VC: A chain.

RS: On a chain. Yes that was...and I remember careering across the stage, strapped to this bench in my straightjacket. Those are the things, the vision, the picture that I've got from then, yeah.

VC: Then according to my list we then did MOTHER COURAGE. Do you remember that?

RS: I remember MOTHER COURAGE. It was with Yvonne Bryceland. I had to sing.

VC: We all had to sing. I didn't have to sing.

RS: And Barney sent me to, to...ooh God, beautiful lady.

VC: I know exactly who you mean.

RS: Big fat lady who lived on Jan Smuts Avenue.

VC: Irene, Irene Frangs.

RS: Yes and I said I'd killed three singing teachers at RADA.

VC: (Laughs)

RS: And she said, "Well you can kill one in South Africa now" Anyway she eventually got me to ...What was it called? Like I had to do in MY FAIR LADY ...um...speak sing, what's it called?

VC: What Rex Harrison...

RS: Yeah, that type of thing. The Soldier's Song ??? And I eventually cracked it. Yeah because Barney had made me sing in – that's right. He'd sent me before to Irene Frangs.

VC: For?

RS: For singing in FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES.

VC: Did you sing in that?

RS: Yes, I played Queenie, "A good man is hard to find. I always find the other kind."

VC: (Laughs)

RS: Yeah, that's right and he made me speak...learn to sing that coz I had to do this performance of A Good Man is Hard to Find.. Yeah. Right.

VC: Then LONG DAY'S JOURNEY. (INTO NIGHT)

RS: Yes that was with Joe Stewardson. What I remember about that was poor old Joe was, kind of, on the wagon, off the wagon. He was going through a really, really rough time and I became very close to Danny, I think, during that. Danny and I's friendship.

VC: You were brothers, right?

RS: Yeah, and by that time I'd moved into the house, that Aletta moved in, Aletta was in, you were in...no.

VC: No I was ...

RS: You were...

VC: I was...

RS: Just down the road with Frank (Neuhoff). Right...um...so. Now what was the name of the other girl? Sue...

VC: ???

RS: Sue.

VC: Sue Kiel.

RS: And Leonie.

VC: Sue Kiel, now Sue Kiel and Leonie...(Hofmeyr)

RS: Was with Danny wasn't she?

VC: At that time, ja.

RS: At that time.

VC: Ja.

RS: Ja and then there was Janice living with Robin. (Hornibrook)

VC: Yes.

RS: Could have been Robin .

VC: Up the road.

RS: No she was in the whole complex.

VC: Then they must have moved after that.

RS: Right. Anyway...

VC: ???

RS: Right okay, yeah.

VC:???

RS: And that was LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT. Yes, yeah.

VC: Then we have EAST.

RS: Right, that was another Barney adventure wasn't it. With the ...and what I remember about that was that Barney said, "Obviously you can do a Cockney accent." I said, "Yeah."

Right and...um... that was Davie Eppel, and Peter Piccolo. But a period I do remember which um... has nothing to do with performances is building the dressing rooms of the...

VC: Upstairs.

RS: Upstairs Theatre.

VC: With Pic.

RS: With Peter Piccolo with, you were there, we were all there.

VC: Minky Schlesinger.

RS: Minky Schlesinger was there.

VC: John Nankin was there.

RS: Yes and Lindsay Reardon was there um... and we were climbing up, and I was hammering nails and I put all the lighting, that was when I first started my electrical work in South Africa. I did all the lighting in the dressing rooms upstairs um... for the opening production.

VC: Yeah.

RS: Um...yeah that was, that was during that period. Sorry where did we get to?

VC: To EAST.

RS: EAST. Right. Then Barney said, "Do you want to do a show but there's no money. At all."

By that time I'd got used to the R60 a week. Um... and I said, "Yeah Okay."

And he said, "We're going to do it late at night. It's Steven Berkoff."

And I said, "I'd love to do a Steven Berkoff." Coz I'd just worked just worked with him in England at RADA three years previously.

And he said, "We're doing EAST."

And we did it and I think we performed it , about five performances at midnight in the ...

VC: In the Lager.

RS: In the Laager, what is now the Laager which was Frank Marks um...

VC: Dave Marks.

RS: Ja. Dave Marks' Jazz um... where Juluka was playing . Where what's his name...um... what is his name?

VC: Malombo, oh Johnny Clegg.

RS: That's the first time I saw Johnny Clegg perform. I think Johnny Clegg did a performance and we did EAST after it, or whatever? Yeah oh yeah with Davie Eppel as well. He was there, yeah right.

VC: And Pic played the mother. Who played... Yeah.

RS: Yes. Lesley, Lesley (Nott) was in it.

VC: Yeah I think Pic played the mom.

RS: Yes Pete played the mom. Davie Eppel played the father . Marcel(van Heerden), me and Lesley Nott was the girl, the kind of ...um.. the slag.

VC: Ja.

RS: The girl. The juve lead or juve female lead.

VC: (Laughs) Okay now. CINCINATTI this was the first time really, of the improvising I think you were involved in.

RS: Yes, in creating a Barney improvised play, yes. But in the Brecht and in FORTUNE & MEN'S EYES and in EAST. Barney, when he worked with me alone, or me and Marcel, or whatever, particularly in EAST, with Marcel. Because Marcel was really struggling with the Cockney accent, him being an Afrikaner. And we used to improvise EAST scenes where Marcel would speak Afrikaans and I'd speak Cockney English to him. You know what I mean. And we did improvisation sessions to get back to the script. But this was the first time I'd been involved with Barney in creating a play from scratch. Yeah.

VC: And how was that?

RS: I enjoyed it immensely, yeah, because again, because of the relationship Marcel and I had developed during doing EAST. That helped in what Marcel and I created in our scene of the English person meeting the young Afrikaner boy on the railway station. Yeah...So that's Barney being clever.

VC: So that was a good experience?

RS: Yes, oh yeah, definitely...um...

VC: Um... INTERNATIONAL STUD?

RS: Again that was a late night wasn't it?

VC: Ja, Dawie Malan directed it.

RS: Yes with Danny.

VC: Ja.

RS: I rem...I can't really remember much about it. It was like another of the... Why did that happen? Have you got the year?

VC: Yes '79. Was the same year as CINCINATTI.

RS: 19... ah yeah...mm (Pause) I think that year, after Cincin, coz I left CINCINATTI didn't I?

VC: Yes.

RS: I left because...

VC: I don't know what for.

RS: Of television work. The Diggers - thirteen part bloody episode.

VC: Oh my goodness.

RS: Right, that's why I left ...um...coz I was fed up with R60 a week.

VC: Was it The Villagers?

RS: No, no it was Gray Hofmeyr's second TV series. He did The Villagers, then he did Diggers which is set in Pilgrim's Rest and I got??? The young lead with Michelle. (Maxwell)

VC: I was wondering why you left.

RS: That was '79 that's right, and Michelle and I started shagging and Maggie fucked off with Peter Storey and yes, yes '79. Yes right we're into my "fucking" years.

VC: Okay, you weren't the only one I suppose.

RS: Drinking years.

VC: So you don't remember much. Do you remember much about Dawie?

RS: I remember him being very sweet. And he was crippled, yes?

VC: Yes.

RS: Yeah...um...

VC: He directed Pieter Dirk Uys always.

RS: That's right coz that, by that time Pieter Dirk Uys was into the Laager. And yes that's right...um... I remember Danny sitting at a mirror, doing make up and I...

VC: He made up on stage.

RS: Yes that's right. That's right and I was like his live-in boyfriend.

VC: The butch one, ja.

RS: Butch-er of the two. Yeah, no I've not got many memories of that. Again I think it was only performed late at night. Yeah, like after hours theatre because of some political reason.

VC: I think it would have been banned otherwise.

RS: Yeah.

VC: Ja. DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG.

RS: That was Leonard Schach wasn't it?

VC: I think so or Roy Sar...No Roy Sargent did the BEDROOM...

RS: DAY IN THE DEATH OF ...

VC: Ja it was Leonard Schach. I think.

RS: I only had a small part in that, if I remember correctly. All I remember about it is...um...and some actress from England or America.

VC: I don't remember much about...

RS: And Brian Murray, wasn't Brian Murray in it?

VC: Wasn't that... That was SHADOWLAND wasn't it?

RS: Yes he was in SHADOWLAND but I think he was...

VC: Was he also in...

RS: You'd have to check up on that.

VC: Ja, I don't remember that play very well.

RS: And THE DEATH OF JOE EGG is a four hander or a five hander and I had literally two scenes in it, where I came on as a friend. It's about a child that's got some disease and the parents want to put him to sleep, or whether that – and the main actress and the main leading 40 year old role, I think were both brought in by Leonard.

VC: Okay, okay.

RS: And...um...I sup...I think Lesley Nott was in that.

VC: I'll check it out.

RS: No that's the only memories I've got.

VC: Then we did MERCHANT OF VENICE in the Main Theatre.

RS: That was a Janice Honeyman. That was for schools during the day, and I played Shylock and I really enjoyed that. I was, I think that was my first – what year was that?

VC: '80, 1980.

RS: Ja, during, this period. I was being employed either by the Market or by PACT(Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal). I was like going from one to the other, and I was getting a decent salary.

VC: (Laughs)

RS: From both, because I, Mannie was, you know, I was playing Claudius in HAMLET here for R2500 a week, and I demanded that Mannie give me R2500 ??? so yeah.

VC: So you were lucky huh.

RS: Yeah.

VC: (Laughs)

RS: Yes I was because of the simple reason that he wanted me and that's what the other people were paying, so I didn't see why he shouldn't pay.

VC: Exactly- you were right.

RS: Mmm right.

VC: JUMPERS with Malcolm.

RS: Um...JUMPERS from (sic) Malcolm. I had a very, very small part again. I can't remember it. Nicolas Ell...oh Malcolm.

VC: Purkey.

RS: But Nicolas Ellenbogen played the lead.

VC: Yes.

RS: And Michelle Maxwell played the lead and I was still involved with Michelle then. I think. That's all I remember about...about... I don't remember the production at all.

VC: Okay- SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO. That was...

RS:???

VC: With me and Richard Cox.

RS: I remember that – that was very strange, that was.

VC: (Laughs) David Mamet.

RS: We had great fun with that as I ...

VC: It was a late night as well.

RS: Yes, yes it was ...um... we rehearsed in what was the Photo Gallery. Wasn't the theatre being changed or something at that time.

VC: The Lager might have been. I don't know.

RS: Upstairs I mean.

VC: Maybe.

RS: I've just got the memory of Coxie, coz Coxie and I were great friends then and we met at strange hours- like can you rehearse at 9.30 at night, and can you rehearse at 10 o' clock tomorrow – but I've got to go coz I had Voice Overs and Coxie was filming and...

VC: Yeah.

RS: and poor old you, you were the only one that was sitting...

VC:... around.

RS: Around yes because by that time you were permanently in the Market, weren't you?

VC: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

VC: I was ASMinG.

RS: But I remember it being a beautiful play and having great fun with it.

VC: Then BRECHT ON BRECHT. As far as I can remember we were doing another Barney improvisation and it went wrong. And then suddenly we had to do something because there was a slot.

RS: That's right...um...

VC: And we had to do BRECHT ON BRECHT.

RS: That's right and that was with??? I remember carrying all the boards around. Boards and things I can't remember much about it, or why it happened.

VC: It happened because we were going to do another CINCINATTI.

RS: CINCINATTI yes. Then he did, then he did later. He did OUTERS or...

VC: Yes after that but...

RS: Yeah.

VC: But BRECHT ON BRECHT didn't work out .

RS: Which –did Yvonne Bryceland come back again for that.

VC: For OUTERS?

RS: No for BRECHT ON BRECHT.

VC: No it was all of us. It was Lesley and me and Nomsa Nene and Peter Sephuma, and you.

RS: I can't remember that.

VC: It was hectic because I think we had two weeks to rehearse it. (VC laughs)

RS: No I can't.

VC: Mannie was saying we've got to...

RS: Have a show.

VC: And Barney was saying, "It's not working."It was one of their big fights, I think.

RS: Ja all I remember about that was the cardboard boards with the – this is the date and so and so. The Brechtian signs.

VC: Yes.

RS: We did a lot of board carrying.

VC: (Laughs)

RS: But I can't remember what I did eventually.

VC: GLASS MENAGERIE

RS: Oh yes with Lesley, Upstairs.

VC: Lucille.

RS: Lucille Gillwald.

VC: Can you tell me something about her.

RS: I enjoyed working with her . Remember she was very – I know a lot of people didn't like her and I couldn't understand why coz I got on with her. Lesley was, Lesley had a rough time with her. Yeah Lesley had a really rough time, coz she kept on picking on Lesley and her accent and all of this and, and whatever. But I remember it being a really – a lovely experience (Pause) What the end production - was it a Schools Set work as well.

VC: It might have been.

RS: It might have been.

VC: Might have been.

RS: And we, we got good houses and I think it ran for its standard 4 weeks or 5 weeks or whatever. And Lesley I think gave a magnificent performance.

VC: But she had to work with Lucille I remember. Now there's something here that I don't know. It's called AT THE GATE and I think it may have been done in the Rehearsal Room.

(Pause)

Do you remember anything about it?

RS: It doesn't ring any bells for me at all – AT THE GATE.

VC: THE GATE. It may have been a one-off or something. But don't worry about it for now. Coz the next one is BEECHAM.

RS: Leonard Schach, Michael Atkinson ...um... and I played the narrator or every other part in it apart from Beecham.

VC: (Laughs) Was that a good...

RS: Yes because by that time I'd done. I'd done the CRUCIBLE with Leonard Schach. I'd done HAMLET with Leonard Schach, so myself and Leonard got on very well. It was my first experience with Michael...um... which I found very, very strange coz he remembered me from working with Prospect Theatre in England before I even came here.

VC: Okay.

Pause

RS: But it was very successful as I remember. It went very well, and I think we went down to Cape Town??. It was a joint Baxter, Leonard Schach, Market Theatre production.

VC: Could have been ja.

RS: I think it could have, coz that was Slemon's(John) time.

VC: Ja.

RS: Ja I think Slemon and, and Mannie and Leonard were in it together and we did go to Cape Town and I think Durban with it. Yeah, but enjoyable, I mean, I enjoyed it, yeah.

VC: And then CATASTROPHE. Remember you did...

RS: (Intake of breath)

VC: The second production.

RS: CATASTROPHE?

VC: With William Kentridge.

RS: Kentridge, yes that was with you again.

VC: Ja. Originally it was Charles Comyn and me and Sipiwe Khumalo and then we did it with you and I think, Kurt.

RS: Kurt Egelhof?

VC: I think. And we did it at Wits.

Pause

VC: With ONE FOR THE ROAD. It was...

RS: Yeah?

VC: It was a double bill.

RS: I remember that.

Pause

RS: And I remember you being there and I'm working. I found it very difficult to communicate with William Kentridge, I remember that. Because he was... was that a smirk or was that a cynical...

VC: (whispers) I want to laugh.

RS: Oh alright um... I'd seen his artwork and I really- he was – I loved coz he'd had a couple of things in the gallery there and that was one of the reasons why I said yes – and that I'd work with you, coz I know you.

Pause

RS: But as, as an actor's director I couldn't really communicate. That's about the only thing I remember. And I can't remember... Yeah I think we did it late at night. I think it was only about 4 performances.

VC: It was at Wits. ONE FOR THE ROAD was first with Danny and John Kani and then we did CATASTROPHE as a second..it was only a few performances.

RS: Performances yes it was literally 2 or 3 performances for a special weekend.

VC: Yes.

RS: Yes, yeah but that's all I remember about that.

VC: Then there was the famous PACK OF LIES.

RS: Ah yes that was again a Leonard Schach production as I remember correctly. Michael Brunner was in that. Erica Rogers was in that...um...

VC: And it wasn't a great success as I remember.

RS: I think it ran its 4 week – but it's – that's the play about the spies. They made a film of it. That's right, the film...

VC: Anyway ja.

RS: It was work, I remember that and I remember, and I think again that we went to the Baxter. I think it was a joint Baxter, Leonard Schach, Mannie Manim...er... production.

VC: Okay- DIARY OF A MADMAN? There's a period from '85 to '89 where you must have been doing other stuff?

RS: That was filming oh yeah

VC: ??

RS: I will...six hundred films.

VC: Six hundred films.

RS: Er... I will check on that, coz '80,'83 through to '89 I was filming every other day ...um...

VC: Now DIARY OF A MADMAN was that with Karoly?

RS: That was with Karoly. And that was a Karoly Pinter/ Ron Smerczak Production and we went into some agreement with Mannie over the cost of the theatre and the gate...um... and of course I ...

VC: You probably did what was called a Purkey, a Purkey Proposal.

RS:I, I've no idea. I know we'd done DIARY OF A MADMAN, Karoly and I, at Windybrow, and it had been a huge success. It ran for something like 10 or 12 weeks, for, but it was only a 60 theatre, 60 or 70 seater little theatre. And then CAPAB asked me to take it down there and it ran for 10, 12 weeks again down there, and then Mannie, we approached Mannie, or Mannie approached us, and he said, "You can have the theatre for 4 weeks or something, at such and such a price...um... and it didn't work as well. We didn't do well?? Audience wise. But I'd won, by that time I'd already won the award for it. Yes, yeah I won the award for when I did it at Windybrow. So yes that was Karoly and myself. And that's it.

VC: SHADOWLANDS?

RS: Mm I enjoyed that immensely...um...that was Janice Honeyman, yes?

VC: Yes.

RS: With Brian Murray? No?

VC: Still okay?

RS: Brian Murray and again they brought the actress in the leading role.

VC: Yes I can't think of her name.

RS: And I played the misogynist professor or lecturer or whatever I was ...um... And that was a very successful production at the Box Office as well, yeah.

VC: And then the last one I've got up to '95 is SCENES FROM AN EXECUTION in 1994.

RS: SCENES FROM AN EXECUTION?

VC: There were two versions, one with...

RS: I can't remember that at all.

VC: Graham...Graham...

RS: Hopkins.

VC: And then Michael Richards took over – it was with Aletta, directed by Clare Stopford.

RS: Um... I've remembered and then one that I've done.

VC: Okay.

RS: With Clare Stopford ...um... with Grethe Fox ...um...um... Ibsen. Downstairs we...

VC: DOLL'S HOUSE, but I think that must have been after '95.

RS: Oh.

VC: Yeah?

RS: No it can't be...?

VC: I'll check it out.

RS: DOLL'S HOUSE yes DOLL'S HOUSE is another one that I've done with Clare Stopford directing, coz that was the first time I worked with Clare...um...and Grethe Fox. Yeah.

VC: So SCENES FROM AN EXECUTION I don't remember if you were in the first production or the second one, coz it started in the Lager then it went to the Main.

RS: What's it about? I can't remember.

VC: Very complicated costume drama.

RS: I'll stick in my computer. Find out whether I can find...

VC:???

RS: But I have no memories of that at all. I know the title but I can't remember any incident that triggers off...

Pause

RS: SCENES FROM AN EXECUTION no, sorry.

VC: Now my last question to you. What did the Market mean to you in those days, besides earning no money!

RS: Um...

Pause

RS: It meant working with a group of actors who – a lot of them were quite close personal friends at the time – in a family community. And developing and expanding myself as an actor, and seeing the growth of people that I worked with. That's what I really enjoyed, and that's what I saw. It was a family community that was growing and it didn't seem to be growing to the detriment of anybody

involved. Everyone, in other words, every little particle of it was growing in different directions and it, it was a lovely environment in which to work. Yeah.

VC: Thanks you very much. Anything else that you can think of?

RS: Um...um... no not really. Um... Yeah I think that's, that's...There are little stupid things. Like in those early days of, of working on a play there, like say, one of those late night ones like EAST or SEXUAL PERVERSITY or whatever. I used to get kind of – Barney or Mannie kind of used to say to me – the lights in the dressing room – can you fix those?

VC: (Laughs)

RS: And ...um... if the roof, the , the mantle up there, “Yeah I’ll see what I can do. Yeah, yeah I’ll fix it.”I remember incidents like that happening.

VC: Yeah.

RS: Not frequently but they did happen.

VC: You were the one.

RS: I was the one that had crawl under and find the cable and connect it up. And then I remember the installation of the lighting board in the Main Market Theatre. That must have been in '76.

VC: Yeah.

RS: When, when your late Frank, we were quite, very, very close drinking buddies in those days. Um...um... I can't remember his name. We had a bowling team and Mannie was in the bowling team, Frank was in it, I was in it, and the guy that installed the first lighting system ever into the Market Theatre. Jewish family, lived near the airport. Now he's a person to look up.

VC: Not Robbie Hahn, no?

RS: No, no.

VC: I'll ask Mannie.

RS: Ask Mannie. Yeah, Mannie's bowling era. We used to bowl at that High...

VC: Highpoint?

RS: Is it Highpoint. No, not – the circular one.

VC: Ponte.

RS: Ponte that's...

VC: I was part of the team, sort of.

RS: ???I can't remember now. I've not got memories of you there.

VC: Bowling. Probably coz I didn't do it very well.

RS: Um... I remember Frank bowled.

VC: Yeah Frank and I got quite good at it. And Mannie was quite good at it. That lasted about a year, a year and a half. I think Beverley Melnick also came.

RS: Beverley! Beverley! I remember Beverley yes.

VC: Yeah.

RS: Where's she now? In America?

VC: Yes she's been there for years.

RS: ???

VC: Bowling.

RS: Yes the ?? early days.

VC: Okay Ron.

RS: And er... other things, just personal er...things. In those early days at theMarket in 1975 or '76...I didn't drive then.

VC: Ha that's right.

RS: So either I got a lift with Danny or with Marcel on the back of his motorbike or I used to walk from Yeoville to the Market, to work every evening and if Danny gave me a lift home at night or sometimes I walked home.

VC: You and Bruce Koch. He also used to walk.

RS:??? But that only, I think I started driving in '77 or '78. I got my license. But in those '75 and '76 definitely it was walking coz I used to walk from Yeoville, down to SABC in town and to the Market.Yeah that's about it.

VC: Thanks Ron. Thanks so much.

RS: Right.

VC: Thank you.

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