

INTERVIEW WITH VANESSA COOKE

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GALA OFFICES

CP: So Vanessa can you tell us about your, how you ended up in theatre.

VC: OK, well my father was in the theatre. I'll just talk a little about him. His name was Roy Cooke, and he was born in Birmingham and, of 11 children, working class family and when he was 16 he had to leave school, but someone had seen that he could draw so he went to arts school, and then he got a job at the Alexander Theatre in Birmingham and after the war he got a contract with African Consolidated Theatres, in Johannesburg. They had just built, after the war, His Majesty's, the Empire, The Colosseum, all these huge theatres in town and they wanted my Dad, under contract, to do the pantomime and all the big shows, the sets of those. So him and my Mom emigrated from England and I was born in Johannesburg In 1948. And, kind of grew up in the theatre because, obviously he didn't earn very much money. My mother, after I'd started school used to go out to work, and I would go after school, play in the wardrobe, or the paint shop of whatever, at the Alex. My father ran the Alexander [theatre] for a number of years before PACT(Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal) took over. Um... He worked for the Johannesburg Repertory Players. So er..., it was ingrained in me, the theatre. I had terrible crushes on all the actors, when I was growing up, especially Michael McGovern, STOP THE WORLD I WANT TO GET OFF, plays like that. But I always wanted to be in the theatre. My first performance was when I was four at His Majesty's in MADAME BUTTERFLY. I was the little boy who had to be sung at, around, by the Italian opera singers. Um and then my mother didn't want me to go into the theatre. She said: "It's not a healthy environment and you can't make any money." So when I finished school I went to Wits to do art, history of art, and Fine Arts at first. There was no drama school at Wits in those days, anyway. But of course I joined the Varsity Players and we put on TWELFTH NIGHT directed by Richard Daneel and I kept it up. I had also been in a production of FANNY at the Alexander Theatre, which was awful. I got a very, very bad crit from Evelyn Levison, from the Sunday Express, who said I was as wooden as the hull of a ship. So I kind of gave up theatre, at that point. And I went to work at Gallery 101 in town and the Andrew Cuthbert, who had been, er with me in TWELFTH NIGHT when we were at University, said he was going to be working at a place called Dorkay House. They were doing a production [DEATH OF BESSIE SMITH] and they needed, there was a small part that was going. Would I like to audition for it. So I thought oh well. He said we'll work after work. It'll be in the evenings, the rehearsals. So I though okay. And in the meantime I was going to get married, as well. So I had a boyfriend who I'd met at Wits, Frank Neuhoff. Anyway he took me down there on his scooter, to Dorkay House, which was in Eloff Street, in the middle of town, in the rush hour, we went. And there I found a strange man, kind of balding, his hair in a comb over, with a beard, big black beard and glasses, sitting in this room and I auditioned. He made me do it again. There were only two lines that I had to say. And he said he'll let me know. And that was Barney Simon.

CP: Hmm.

VC: And er Dorkay House was very fascinating to me because there were lots of actors around, singing going on, music played upstairs. There was the African Music and Drama Association upstairs.

CP: How old were you at this time?

VC: I was twenty-two. I'd finished Varsity er, finished Varsity and given up theatre. So it was over for me. Er, so I was quite taken by this place. I'd never heard of it before and we rehearsed for six months because we only rehearsed once a week, and after work we had to leave by about seven, eight, because otherwise black actors would get arrested, if they were seen going, catching, there wasn't anything to catch really at that time of night. And then we performed in people's houses. We went to Durban and we performed there for Sats Cooper and Strini Moodley who were running political organizations. Benjy Francis we met there and we did it in tandem with a play called CAYENNE PEPPER which had two actors in, one of them Fats Dibek

co and we worked with Corney Mbaso and David Phetoe, who I had never met before and Andrew and a girl called Barbara Itzler. And that went on for a long time, and while we were doing that Barney started to write, with other writers, a musical called PHIRI which was based on Volpone's THE FOX, which we were doing for Phoenix Players which was at Dorkay House. And I was the ASM [Assistant Stage manager] for that. And I had to make the banners, and I had to drive people around and I had to go to the pass office, sort out people's passes.

CP: Now was that a full time position or...

VC: Well I didn't earn much money, hardly any money.

CP: But you were working during the...

VC: Ja, ja. I gave up the Art Gallery eventually and I also got married while we were rehearsing. So Barney brought everyone to the wedding, and they sang at the wedding. So that was fantastic, and I met Sophie Mgcina and I met Sam Williams. I met Mongane Wally Serote. I met many, many people. Musicians as well. Er, and then while we were doing that. I think it was the kind of the way Barney worked. He'd be starting, we started working on something called MISS SOUTH AFRICA SIXTH, which took about two years to, for him and I to write together. And I never thought it was going to be put on, or, I didn't know. Anyway we were busy with PHIRI. We were busy with Phoenix Players and then um I'm trying to remember what came next. [Pause] Okay, so yes so we were busy working on MISS SOUTH AFRICA SIXTH and the Old Arena in Doornfontein had opened, run by Mannie Manim and Ken Leach. They did a lot of work there, and Francois Swart was also involved there and Barney was busy talking to Mannie about starting a company. And then Mannie – one of the visits Mannie had to Barney, Barney – Mannie talked about how the Old Arena was going to be dark and there was nothing to put on because TEN BULLS had messed up, from Cape Town and Barney said: Well I can put on MISS SOUTH AFRICA SIXTH. In fact we can do two shows. We can do two monologues. And I'd like to work with Marius Weyers. So he did JOBURG SIS and I did MISS SOUTH AFRICA SIXTH. And that was kind of the start of me going to the Old Arena, and then we did LYSISTRATA, we did a children's' play. We did a lot of things at the Old Arena. And then when we were doing SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR., it was er, what was his name, Don Lamprecht and lots of the PACT actors and then Aletta [Bezuidenhout] was in that as well. We played the actors and we were rehearsing a play. So knowing Barney he said: "We mustn't pretend we're rehearsing a play, let's rehearse a show" and that became PEOPLE and that was really the first Company Production. It was a late night – you had your ticket, stay on to see the other

play. That was a workshop. That was the first real workshop play that I did. And that's how the Company sort of began.

CP: So it sort of morphed into something and then...

VC: It morphed into something. A lot of actors wanted to start something new. Barney definitely wanted to. And then the thing became to find a place to do it all in, because we had to move around.

CP: Ja.

VC: We were sometimes at the Blue Fox, sometimes at Orange Grove at the Village. And it wasn't satisfactory.

CP: You needed a home.

VC: We needed a home, so that took a longtime to get there, because we had to tender. There's a lot of description of that in Mannie's. So I won't repeat.

CP: Okay.

VC: You know, that whole process, what it meant. But all I know was that – at last – I was involved in theatre that wasn't to do with America...

CP: Mmm.

VC: ...or Britain. Coz I'd been brought up on British theatre, at the Alexander, the Brooke and all those places. And I knew very little about African work. So now it was all changing. As was the country, we were heading up to the Soweto riots, even though we didn't know it. There had been Sharpeville. So we, we became part of a kind of a change in attitude and um... what we wanted to talk about in our work as well.

CP: So it became something more than just fulfilling a need to be in theatre. It became a...

VC: Ja it was more.

CP: It was important that you had a voice n in the political arena.

VC: Ja, I mean that particularly happened after the Soweto riots.

CP: Ja.

VC: But I'd already started thinking about all that, when we were doing PHIRI.

CP: Ja for sure.

VC: And working with black actors, and understanding the difficulties they encountered. But that they desperately wanted to tell their stories. So it, it was a kind of opening up of my mind, from the traditional form of theatre as well. Because barney was very into the new wave of theatre that t was happening in the sixties in America and in England with Peter Brooke, and Joseph Chaikin, Living Theatre, the Black Box, the Open Space, all of that – Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre where if you didn't have money, didn't mean you couldn't put on a play.

CP: Ja.

VC: Which people in the townships had been doing for a long time.

CP: Ja, ja.

VC: Gibson Kente and many community groups. Um... and then slowly community groups started coming to the Market. People who worked with Gibson came, like the guys from WOZA ALBERT – Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa. They came. Er... Friday afternoons Mannie used to have auditions, open kind of auditions because people wanted to show their talent and everything and Mbongeni and Percy. They said while they were auditioning, and Mannie put in his interview they weren't very good but they had written something and they wanted... and then Mannie saw it and he said to them: "Who do you want to direct it?" And they said: "Barney." He said: "Very unlikely" but as we, as it turned out that happened and it changed the kind of parameters of style.

CP: Was that, was that SARAFINA?

VC: No, it was WOZA ALBERT.

CP: Oh that was the one.

VC: Ja that was before SARAFINA.

CP: I thought so.

VC: It was the idea that two people can play a number of characters.

CP: Yes.

VC: We had also been doing it in ARABIAN NIGHT but in that there were more actors so it was that thing of you can do a play with two actors that can tell a whole world of story. And it was obviously Barney loved that way of working, and that became very, very famous WOZA ALBERT. Um in the meantime, I haven't spoken about all the things before the Market, but that's okay. We did a lot of workshop stuff then the first production at the Market was Chekhov, and it was almost around the time of the Soweto riots. So it was strange but Barney was busy talking about change in the world of Russia, using it as a metaphor for – that things are not going to be the same.

CP: Which Chekhov was that?

VC: THE SEAGULL.

CP: Oh that one.

VC: So we did that and then I was also in MARAT/SADE in the Main Theatre which was a very important production because it defined the kind of revolutionary stance that we may be taking in theatre. Not in government or anything like that, but in telling stories about our world. And MARAT/SADE as you know is about the revolution really _ French revolution um... it was a huge production 35 people in, I don't think I'd ever been in such a big production. It was like – God – it was like being in a musical you know. We had singers and musicians – so that was, so that was great fun. For me the early days of the Market was exciting in terms of the fact that of meeting new people, working with – Janice had started directing, being in a Janice production. Later on being in a William Kentridge production. All the new,

kind of forces were starting to lift up at the Market. And people like Matsemela Manaka who was doing poetry, like long poems that were played. People were just doing all sorts, so many different things. And then we had the Market Café where we were hearing all the new music. I don't know what it must have, just been a coming together, at that time of, as an old hippie I would say kindred spirits and so much input going into, and then so much being able to come out and not being stopped from coming out.

CP: Mm.

VC: I think that was. Coz I think a lot of people get despondent these days ??? you've got a new script and you want to try it out. It's not easy.

CP: No-one's supported.

VC: Ja try it a little bit, no support. There's a lot of commercial stuff happening.

CP: Ja.

VC: A lot of corporate stuff happening. Ja, your peers saying – ja if you want to put it on, put it on, you know.

CP: Mm.

VC: And in those days everybody helped each other.

CP: Ja.

VC: To make something happen. Um... Like Andrew Buckland. He had a contract with PACT, but he'd started being a street clown. If you think of it now, everybody does it. But he was doing it on his own. And he was encouraged to try and develop it by Mannie, who said – look I'll give you a deal, the Purkey (Malcolm) deal 50/50. You pay 50% of the expenses. We'll pay the other and we'll take half/half. And that's how he developed his UGLY NOONOO and his physical kind of theatre.

CP: So was, the market Theatre provided a platform for people and a springboard for many, many careers.

VC: Many people I think, gosh, almost everyone went through the Market in some way or another. Either as a mentor, or as a director or as a new...

CP: Not easy to define.

VC: Not so easy, it was actually. So we had other influences like Troupe Theatre Company from Cape Town – it was Fiona Ramsay and Sean Taylor and Neill McCarthy, all new kind of sparks, came up and became part of it was well. Richard E Grant was part of that grouping before he went overseas.

CP: Mm.

VC: So you know there was a saying in the eighties "Let's meet at the Market."

CP: Mm.

VC: And that's really, I suppose, what it was about.

CP: Ja, ja.

VC: There was always someone to say "Yes".

CP: So it was for the people, by the people.

VC: Ja and the like....

CP: Real different.

VC: ...voices and a lot of like political not organizations, but er, what's the word, like the ECC, the End Conscription Campaign, would raise money by putting on shows, musicians would come and play and they played the flea market, they played the Yard of Ale. So everything was somehow connected up and with the art gallery and the photo gallery, to be telling the same sort of story, in a very, very different way. Um... I don't think everybody liked what the Market was doing ?? and it wasn't commercial. But because we had the Fleamarket and we were able to be self-sufficient. It was working. The Fleamarket income was put into plays and - coz the Fleamarket made a lot of money.

CP: Hah.

VC: So for a long, long time we were kind of self-sufficient. Obviously funding from overseas and stuff. Wow we never had to beg for money in that kind of way. It was only when our accountant, early on at theMarket, Geoff Baskind, he defrauded the market. And we were so naive we didn't know what he was up to. And shame, the poor man, over horses, ended up committing suicide.

CP: Gambling.

VC: Ja.

CP: Sad.

VC: And that's when we kind of ran out of money, at that point. That was pre the Fleamarket.

CP: So what, what year would that have been?

VC: About '78, '79 round there. And we'd just had a great success with THE ISLAND and SIZWE BANZI and Woody Allen's DON'T DRINK THE WATER. So there was money. But there wasn't. And then our old benefactor came and rescued us, so we could carry on, but then ...

CP: Was that?

VC: ... Murray Mclean, he'd originally been the driving force behind fundraising.

CP: That's all in...

VC: Ja so the Fleamarket was a great institution.

CP: Whose idea was that?

VC: That was Wolf Weinek's idea, mainly, and it was for money for the Photo Workshop and the Art Gallery. Until they had so much money that Mannie went and said "I'm sorry, you've got to give us some of the money." [laughs].

CP: Ja.

VC: Otherwise we won't be here anymore, and you'll all be all like rich.

CP: Hm.

VC: So those were the early, that was like the late seventies, early eighties, when the Market was really flourishing.

CP: Hm.

VC: And people did used to go down the Market for the day, on a Saturday, and then stay and see a show. Or go to Kippies. When Kippies opened Market Café before that. So it was an integrated arts centre without being created as such. Ja, I guess.

CP: Mm.

VC: So whatever you fancied, you could find. If you wanted to buy something....

CP: The place to be.

VC: ...nice clothes. Coz young designers would come with their stuff. So it was very, very, very exciting. We were not rich but um we...

CP: Vibrant, vibrant times.

VC: Ja and we had a mission of our own. In that we are not going to what other people wanted us to do. And Barney did his own thing, always. Him and Mannie used to fight about it, or not fight, or whatever. So, coz Barney kind of believed that people must see all sorts of different things. He didn't only do workshop theatre. So he would do LONG DAYS JOURNEY INTO NIGHT. He would do Chekhov. He never did Shakespeare himself. Janice loved doing Shakespeare. So we did a lot of Shakespeare. But in modern dress, or traditionally, however. And it was also a great training ground for technicians.

CP: Um.

VC: It was kind of a traditional. Always. Like Tony Groenewald, for instance, started off as an usher at the Market Theatre. And has ended up as a major technical force.

CP: Ja, ja.

VC: And he's not the only one. Then you'll get other people like Mark Banks, who started as an usher at the Market, and then met Robert Kirby, became his stage manager in his own right. Having learnt a lot, a lot of the skills from Robert Kirby. And then there were people like Pieter Dirk Uys who wanted to do his own work. Didn't want to be involved with the Arts Councils', or anything like that. So he was a big, big force, and he also tried his stuff out at the Market um..., and obviously the Space before.

CP: Ja.

VC: So ja.

CP: And, tell us about FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES.

VC: FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES, oh, FORTUEN AND MEN'S EYES, ja that was a gay play that Barney put on and it was meant to open the small theatre but something was awry, I can't remember what. Anyway they were rehearsing at the Market which was not yet open and they were going to perform at the Nunnery, at Wits at they were busy rehearsing where the laundry is now, and the wardrobe. Although I may be talking out of turn. Could have changed by now for all I know and they were busy converting it and as Ron [Smerczak] said – part of it was, they would be actually knocking down walls, but doing their hard labour in the jail. It was a play about prison and gay relationships in prison. And then we were also building the dressing rooms for the Upstairs Theatre across the other side and there was a big, one day there was a huge hullabaloo going on "Come, come," "What is it, what is it." "A bull has escaped," an ox, huge. So we all ran across as well. And we looked out of the big semicircular window and there was this huge ox, running with these people following with these pangas, and we all got terribly freaked out. And it was trying to escape, trying to get up the railway line, it tried, and it eventually just couldn't escape and I'll never forget, the like fear in its eyes and we, we, we were completely freaked out, all of us. Because the abattoir was behind and a lot, some people were already vegetarian, but others, like myself, became vegetarian for some time, because obviously, eventually the animal was caught despite, died.

CP: Terrible.

VC: And I mean there were many nights where, if the train arrived from the farms, they would leave the sheep in carriages. And we would smell this, they would urinate but it would have this different smell, because they knew they were going to die. It really put one off meat. I must say.

CP: Ja.

VC: So in the Main Theatre you'd have that, the smell, and then you'd have the train sounds which, if you were in a show you'd have to stop.

CP: Wait for the train.

VC: The train, wait for the trains to stop..um.

CP: And working with, er, um with Barney, he had a very innovative style of directing. A lot of people found it quite difficult it seemed.

VC: Barney wasn't easy because he never, firstly he never had a written methodology, never had a, where you could say – that's how Barney, can do this and that and you'll be okay. With each play it was different. So he would use whatever he found necessary to get you to the point at which he wanted you to be, which a lot of actors couldn't. Like Andrew Cuthbert, the guy who originally introduced me to Barney said "I can't work with you anymore, you trample on my soul."

CP: Hm. Wow.

VC: Which was, and I mean he asked ? some people, and I think if you were perhaps a little unstable – he could, he could upset you. But not always, you know, depending if you were doing a comedy, it would be great fun with Barney.

CP: Mm.

VC: But he was very demanding of a purity and a truth of expression. Let's put it that way, in your work. He, he couldn't, I was thinking the other day, when I was working with him on MISS SOUTH AFRICA SIXTH he just stopped one day and he said "Did you do elocution?" And I said "Ja I went to speech and drama classes." He said "I can't, I can't listen to you. You've got to stop doing that." I said "I don't know how to stop, I've been trained." He said "Well I can't, I can't hear this false notes anymore. You've got to talk like you, like you talked when you were little." Things like that.

CP: So that could unhinge someone.

VC: It could unhinge you, because how, how do you do that.

CP: It's like criticizing your core.

VC: Your self.

CP: Ja.

VC: Ja, so.. but I certainly learned not to take it personally and that, yes it was demanding, but you knew when you did it right, after a while. It was, it was a thing of no acting acting, I guess.

CP: Ja.

VC: But, on the other hand he demanded a lot of technique that you were supposed to know as an actor. He couldn't be teaching you that. So, but he was also, what was really nice about him was that he was very interested in young people and gave a lot of people chances. I mean, there was one stage when we had a theatre in the Rehearsal Room, which used to be an office, we had a theatre in the Warehouse, we had a they are I, that the Restaurant so we used up a lot of spaces and like – "If you can find a space, yes do it." So a lot of new work happened.

CP: Maybe that's...

VC: For no money.

CP: Maybe that's what inspired Janice at what was the Civic Theatre, opening up little theatre in the loading bay and ??

VC: Because people came to you all the time and they're just as excited as anyone else and they've got there new thing and "What do we do about this?" – turn them away. No.

CP: Put them in the bathroom.

VC: You can go in the bathroom, and you can be in the kitchen and then there was another group as well called Weekend Theatre – that was Irene Stephanou, Matthew Krouse and everyone. And they had a flat in Braamfontein, opposite the University. So you'd go and watch a play in their flat. So it became almost fashionable and then of course there was the Black Sun, Jamesons, things like mushroomed all over the place. But I think that, I may be – people might disagree with me but I think the Market was a good influence for that.

CP: Ja.

VC: And obviously the Market couldn't do every single thing that anyone wanted to do.

CP: Ja.

VC: Some people were resentful about that. But others went and did it at the Black Sun and then came back and did it at the Market. Kind of, so there – and then Barney had always worked in the rural areas um in Health Education.

CP: Mm

VC: I went with him to Nqutu in Kwazulu Natal. There was a mission hospital there, run by Dr Barker and his wife. Not Barker Haines!

CP: [laughs]

VC: And he was quite a famous doctor as well, and he believed in educating people to take responsibility for their health. So Barney went and worked with the nurses and this women or the mothers about making people drink milk and breastfeeding and – it's the same technique – the nurses would make up a song to a well known tune about drinking milk, coz the mothers used to come to the hospital for about two months before they gave birth and that was usually around September, coz the husbands had been home.

CP: Oh, of course.

VC: For Christmas. So there was a lot of time to sit and discuss things. So Barney used to encourage the nurses to spend that time talking about malnutrition, doing little plays about it.

CP: Ah.

VC: It was same sort of...

CP: It's like Industrial Theatre. I didn't realize it was using the same.

VC: And he did it in Winterveld. He did it in Transkei as well um and that was also encouraged like, when we opened the Lab, one of the, there were three main reasons for opening the Market Theatre Laboratory. The one was to have a space to create new work without pressure, because what we all suffered from, particularly Barney, was coz Mannie had to have shows.

CP: Oh of course ja.

VC: You can't spend six months workshopping. You've got to spend a month.

CP: And have a bum on a seat.

VC: Yes.

CP: And a ticket.

VC: Yes and the people must come, which Barney found very pressurizing, understandable, coz it was fine when it worked. But when it didn't work caused a lot of problems. She he wanted a space where, say,

you could do a project for two months, and at the end of it, if you didn't have anything, you didn't have anything. So it was permission to fail.

CP: Fantastic.

VC: And the Rockefeller Foundation had particularly liked that aspect, so they funded the opening of the Lab.

CP: And when, which year was that?

VC: October 1989.. so it was before 1990 but just. The other reason was that, from the time of WOZA ALBERT, and even earlier, community groups came to the Market with their work. Maishe um and for is to be now made into something that could go on a the Market, and Barney wanted a space too, where fieldworkers could have showcases come in, or go and see work, um wherever it was being made and with the groups. Because for, every time for a group to come into the Market is impossible. Some of the groups were 200 people, you know. So he started the Fieldwork programme. And the other one was, funnily enough, because of his New York connections, he loved the way actors went to class.

CP: Oh ja.

VC: Which doesn't happen here. So he wanted classes for professional actors, which didn't happen for very long. But by that time there were a lot of young people who'd joined, and said "Well now what happens?" We stopped the professional classes. That's how the school started. Barney always said "It's not a school it's for training, not a school." Okay. And then the other thing that was a worrying factor in those days, was Shakespeare was a set work for the Afrikaans and the African language speakers. So we did a school's version of – we started with ROMEO AND JULIET which we took all over the place, to schools, and I used to drive. It had six characters.

CP: And that came out of the Lab.

VC: Came out of the Lab and we toured for a long, long time. And then, when the set work changed we did JULIUS CAESAR and they, they said – you don't have to do Shakespeare anymore but by then the AIDS epidemic had become huge and we went for money for the show. Shakespeare in fact, to a drug company in and they said no they're not going to do that anymore but they want a play about TB and the fact that if you've got AIDS, or HIV the TB drug didn't work. They were the manufacturers of the drugs – Glaxo Allenby. So then Zakes Mda wrote a play about AIDS, about a young school girl who got AIDS from her teacher, from abuse, and about her friend, male friend, who stuck with her through the whole thing. And we toured that for...

CP: What was it called?

VC: ... a long time. BROKEN DREAMS. It also provided work for actors.

CP: Yes, ja.

VC: Incredible amount of work, and we toured far. Well, so that became a very, very big project and, I mean, eventually I suppose, funding did run out. But we did it for a number of years. About 10 years. And the Lab was kind of Barney's dream. Skills transfer.

CP: Mentorship.

VC: Mentorship, and freedom to create was basically...

CP: And when did you officially start heading up the Lab, from the beginning?

VC: From when Barney died. I was there from the beginning. Mark Fleishman was the first co-coordinator. Then Dan[Robbertse] took it for a little bit and then Robert Colman and the Tale Motsepe um Siphon(Mwale) was always in charge of the fieldwork.

CP: Okay.

I was like an auxiliary person, and then I drove, but then I became the Director after Barney died 1997/6.

CP: And you were there until...

VC: I was there until 2010 or whenever I left. Six years ago. 2008.

CP: SO you left a big legacy there.

VC: Ja I left a big legacy there, and I'm glad it's still going.

CP: Ja.

VC: Coz I was worried that it was going to close.

CP: And is it still providing the same platform as Barney had envisioned?

VC: Ja I'm not sure if it's as big but, you know, times change and the needs change so ja.

CP: Ja.

VC: They still have the ZWAKALA FESTIVAL. There's still a play that goes to the Market from the community. So ja there's a lot.

CP: Send a show down to Grahamstown.

VC: Students ja.

CP: Um.

VC: So ja. You know we don't do our travelling shows anymore. Which I think is sad. Coz I think that was almost an extension of Janice's Youth Company at the Market, you know.

CP: Ja.

V:C And ja, the actors had to work for the whole year. It's amazing.

CP: Ja wonderful.

VC: But that's also because of funding.

CP: Ja.

VC: That things have, coz our biggest funders were the Swedish, our Swedish partners.

CP: Mm.

VC: Funded the Lab for many years after '94. And understood what we were doing.

CP: Um so do you have anything else to, like to say about the shows you did, or the Lab? Any anecdotes?

VC: Um, it's difficult coz there's so much that happened.

CP: Ja.

VC: I can tell you a little story against Mannie if you like.

CP: [laughs]

VC: Mannie um had a very strong, still does have – it's no good to have a theatre dark. Whatever you can do, you have, to make sure that there are lights in, in the theater. Show's on and people can come. So I was doing the BELLE OF AMHERST which is about the poet, Emily Dickinson, an extremely delicate piece of work. One woman show, about her, with her poems in the show, but extremely genteel and delicate. And we had our first strikes at the Market Theatre, union strike.

CP: Uh huh!

VC: The workers went on strike and Mannie came to me and Bruce Koch, who was my stage manager – he said "Now you're going on with the show". We said "But I can't, I'll be a scab then, I can't do that to the workers." He said "You will go on with the show, and you're an actress, you don't belong to that union. You must go on with the show. And we did a matinee. And they were toyi toying outside. All our co-workers, and it was in the Upstairs Theatre and we had to do the show. I think there were five people theater. Dr Selma Brodie, who was a fantastic woman, was one of them. And they'd also said "Alright if you you've got to do it we'll sit with you and try to listen to you". And I strained myself so badly that I pulled a muscle in my neck which is very hard to do.

CP: Ja.

VC: So that was, we were not very happy with Mannie, coz also we wanted to be with the strikers.

CP: Of course ja, ja. Do you remember what they were striking about?

VC: Bonuses or wages ja, ja. Mannie didn't like the union very much [they laugh].

CP: Management.

VC: Old fashioned.

CP: And um what about the Market Theatre now? It obviously was a huge place, a home for you, spiritually and physically. How does it, what does it mean to you now?

VC: Ag you now I haven't done anything there for a quite a while now.

CP: Mm.

VC: Which I miss a lot and I don't know, maybe it's because of my age. There's not many parts for older people but um it's going where it's going, I think and I think that's the times and I think, you have to let go.

CP: Ja.

VC: You know. It's hard but you have to do it. And I've seen people who haven't let go of those things and it's not good. It's I won't give any examples now, but you know who I mean. And I think you have to let it go. The Market doesn't belong to anyone. You know, it's not like Pieter Toerien.

CP: And it also can't belong to a time.

VC: No.

CP: Stay in an old time ??

VC: Otherwise it will close, for sure. Or it will become something else. You know Pieter Toerien runs a commercial enterprise. It's his, he can decide what goes on. He makes the profits, he pays people. It's not like that at the Market.

CP: Ja, ja.

VC: You know, that whole actor/manger person...

CP: Mm.

VC: ...doesn't fit in.

CP: Ja.

VC: You know it never belonged to Barney, and when Barney died, we all thought it's gonna die now. But how can it be without Barney? And it is there of course. There's Lara Foot, there's all sorts of new people come – Yael Farber. Mncedisi Shabangu, James Ngcobo, there's lots of people who feel the same. I think the thing is if people feel the same as you do about theatre, whatever that means, that's what it is about. And it's about theatre. It's not about politics. Politics come into it of course [they laugh].

CP: Of course, can't not hey. Anything else you want to add?

VC: No I think I've been very lucky. I've certainly had more than my 15 minutes of fame, that Andy Warhol allows [Carol laughs]. And um I get very, very happy when I see one of the students fulfilling their promise. That gives me a lot of, what do you say in Yiddish nachis [Carol laughs] I knib some nachis there, as Barney would say.

CP: Ja okay.

VC: I think that's enough for now.

CP: Ja thank you very much.

VC: Pleasure.

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