

## **INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW BUCKLAND**

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2PM

RHODES UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEWER VANESSA COOKE

### **VC: Just as a background, how did you come to be interested in theatre?**

AB: It's a kind of an apocryphal story amongst my family because I, if I think back on it, I as a young boy, I was the youngest of seven children. Um... so I never once remember going out with my family to theatre at all. I don't think my, I never saw my father go out to the theatre at all. Um... We grew up in Zimbabwe, it was called Rhodesia then and um... they get television in the sixties, black and white TV so I was introduced to that at quite a young age, and that was really fascinating for me and I just used to watch that happily. But I'd never thought of it as a, as a way of being, you know. Um.. and then, having gone through school, I occasionally would audition for school plays but not get anything, um, and it was, it looked like fun, you know.

### **VC: Ja.**

AB: And I think it had an appeal for me but not enough that I would really chase it...um...

### **VC: So what were you planning to do?**

AB: I don't know. I had no idea at all. It was the cause of some internal stress as it is.

(They laugh)

AB: But by the time I left school ...um... seventy two or something, my last year at school, and at that time white males were being conscripted into the army. So to get out of that, the only way at the time, was to either leave the country or get student deferral, or whatever it's called. So I applied for that, and came to Rhodes because my brother was here, and my mother had been here in the 1920's or something, so the kind of tradition of it. And my father was an accountant so I thought Okay well let me, I've got to register for something so let me do Business Administration, Economics and Accounting. And of course after three months I just knew that that was just nowhere near, I could just not cope with that.. And so I changed courses. A lot of my friends, school friends who had come here were doing Physical Education, Sport and stuff, so I changed degrees to that and then in my second year, it was all going along, in a very similar way to my school life, you know. And my way of being accepted in the crowd, as it were, was I'd be the guy who, given a few beers I'd tell stories and make jokes, tell jokes, you know. "Give Andrew a beer and tell us the story about the monkey balls." or whatever.

### **VC: So you were popular.**

AB: So that was how I got...

### **VC: Ja.**

AB: You know, coz I was never, like, good enough sport wise, or cool enough you know. But that was how I felt myself to have some personal power. I suppose I mean I think about that in hindsight. At the time I was just...

### **VC: Doing it.**

AB: Desperately trying to be Okay, you know. Um... and then in my second year there was a notice

up for public auditions from the Drama Department and um ag it's funny, I met her today – and at the time I was going out with a very domineering... but she was very????

**VC: ???**

AB: Tempestuous girlfriend, and I just had to get out of this state, so I said, "I have to go to that." And so I went and it was a, it was a production of BUTLEY, the...

**VC: Oh ja.**

AB: Simon Gray and in the audition it was Roy Sargent – was head of the department, Jane Osborne, Beth Dickerson, Gary Gordon was the new movement lecturer.

**VC: He was already there?**

AB: It was his first year – just graduated. And in fact I read with him in the audition. I got a laugh from, from the bench.

**VC: (Laughs)**

AB: And I sat back and oh my goodness it felt good.

(They laugh)

AB: And suddenly it felt like, you know, in conversation with him, it felt like there actually is a way to make this what you do, ja.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: So within a week I'd changed courses again. My poor father, he had no idea, just forked out again and said, "Fine, carry on."

**VC: Andrew's having problems again.**

AB: Having another one (laughs) I was changing again. Now I'm doing student theatre. But shame they were just beautifully understanding. And then I changed courses.

**VC: And then you knew.**

AB: And then I knew, ja no. And as soon as I started to study, and started to do movement pracs (practicals) Gary, I can't tell you, just the quality of the teaching, from that time, right through. You know we're very close friends.

**VC: He must have, he must have been quite young.**

AB: He's only two years older than me. So...um... just an ability to use movement as a way of engaging people who'd done drama for years, or whatever, and I would come out of the gym in the mornings with the okes, you know, putting on ballet tights in the afternoon just including everybody??? And finding joy in movement, you know. It was just, it was so, so exciting. And all of the other aspects, the vocal training and the- bless him Roy, you know he became a kind of mentor, at the time, and he was an extraordinary teacher and leader of students. Very demanding and very good at saying, you know, or making clear to you...

**VC: Pushing...**

AB: "You've got ability, but your vocal work is appalling. You've got no technique, your breathing is..."

**VC: "You could fail."**

AB: "You could you know, so you've got to, you need, you've got to apply yourself." and Jane Osborne as well. So I had really good teachers and by the end of four years then I had a degree. By that time I'd met Janet (Buckland), we'd had kids. She was...

**VC: You were already married.**

AB: Ja, I met her in fact in my... had to repeat the first year, because the first year I'd done Drama, it was for non-degree purposes and she arrived and we were both doing it together. That's where we met. Um... but theatre was just, sort of, we were both doing it??? It was from then on. Um... and I'd done a bit of teaching while Janet finished her degree, and then we – I got a job at PACT( Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal)with Francois Swart.

**VC: So you got a contract.**

AB: Contract PACT Joburg.

**VC: This is like seventy seven or something?**

AB: No, must have been um... eighty, eighty one, eighty two

**VC: Okay.**

AB: Eighty three. Ja. So, ja I mean they used to come and audition here as you know. So they offered me a contract, so I said, "Look we're going to Joburg. I'm going to be an actor you know."

**VC: Live in Joburg.**

AB: Ja so we did. Rented a house and moved there and Janet got a job teaching for a whileThen she did some cabaret for a while, freelancing...um... and...

**VC: And you'd never been to the Market at this point.**

AB: I had been in to see some work but I hadn't ...um... you know, it hadn't been a sort of...

**VC: Major...**

AB: No...um... and then, after three years, as their Marius Weyers, in the last year, was the Artistic Director for a while.

**VC: Oh I never knew that.**

AB: And he encouraged, straight away he said – there was a small, young resident company. It was me...um... Kevin Smith, Christopher Wells...um... Martin le Maitre, ag. Whole lot of people round that kind of age group, you know. Um... and he encouraged creating original work. I wrote a play with Graham Weir. Started to produce that. So the idea of independent new work started to develop, already from here, from working with Gary. I'd had training in mime and I was one of the few people doing the white face guy and that was often how I could survive in Joburg coz you know...

**VC: I think I remember even seeing you.**

AB: Ja I did a couple of things, in fact at the Market. But I, I can't remember when, a bit later, a show with Tananas.

**VC: Yes, yes I remember that.**

AB: But before that at Wits – so I hadn't performed at the Market. Can't remember exactly when the first, my first performance was there.

**VC: I could tell you from my lists.**

AB: You can look it up on my CV or whatever. But it started to become clear by that time you know. It was a home for new work and I was aspiring to it, you know, and friends of mine. I'd seen the work that Barney had presented...um... and it was obviously, that was an aspiration of mine to connect with it because the heart...

**VC: ???**

AB: And to do work that had a home, that had an eye on the context of the country, what was going on. It was, I'd come out of PACT. It was ...

**VC: Another story.**

AB: White from top to bottom. It was manipulated by this administration and still, you know... I was very conscious of being employed by a parastatal institute. So I went to freelancing...um... It was Okay for a while. Um... I got some film work, some television work and so on, but I continued to try and make my own work. And I was also connecting with other people and working with the End Conscription Campaign.

**VC: Yes, yes.**

AB: Those were the days...???

**VC: ???**

AB: That was really nice, also, way of connecting, making new work that seemed relevant at the time, you know and that you felt like have gave some purpose to what you were doing...um...

**VC: NATIONAL MADNESS and all of those...**

AB: Yes, ja, ja...um...And I knew those, you know, I was friends, James(Whyle) was a student here, and a friend of mine, here as well so I was, sort of, um... connected with that crowd um... and then 1986 I played the Standard Bank Young Artist Festival here. But I was also doing one man shows a lot, and developing them um... story or whatever, to try and make it a financially feasible thing. In, I think it was '88 um.. I was cast in BLACK AND WHITE FOLLIES.

**VC: It was at the Warehouse.**

AB: That's right. And it was the opening production of the Warehouse, I think.

**VC: Yes it was.**

AB: And at the time...

**VC: In fact it was '86, I think, actually.**

AB: Oh was it?

**VC: Ja.**

AB: Oh, you're right. Yes, you're absolutely right.

**VC: I remember the Anglo Vaal Mall.**

AB: That's right.

**VC: 1986 written on the ground.**

AB: And I remember I'd come here, done Young Artist and went back there and got into BLACK AND WHITE FOLLIES and then, so I think that was possibly the first Market production that I'd done. Or

before that Lindsay(Reardon) and Reza (de Wet). I played in her show that he directed...um... Damn I can't remember what it was called.

**VC: Yes.**

AB: It was one of her earlier English plays.

**VC: LIGHT...**

AB: Yes LIGHT- IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. So I think that was my first production that I played there...um... but then BLACK AND WHITE FOLLIES is when I met Maciek (Schejbal) drummer.

**VC: I don't think I've ever been so drunk in my life at Maciek's...**

AB: Me too, me too!

**VC: At his flat.**

AB: Vodka.

**VC: Just bottles of it.**

AB: Oh my God.

**VC: I don't know how I got out the flat!**

AB: No, no people had to phone Janet and say, "Look just forget about Andrew, he's upside down in the toilet, and you'll see him tomorrow."(he laughs)

**VC: It was like mad.**

AB: It was crazy.

**VC: He was great.**

AB: Such a beautiful man. And he'd come to South Africa, classically trained percussionist, played with Padievsky Come to South Africa, met his radically racist Polish family here.

**VC: Yes.**

AB: Separated from them, actively working at Mega Music, learning jazz and he'd played in theatre and he was very keen to move into theatre as well. And we became close friends and started to make work together. I think in '87...um... we took a show that we made together called NO EASY WALK...

**VC: Yes.**

AB: Which was a- and that's one of the first independent shows that we presented at the Market. Mannie very kindly did a fifty/fifty deal with us. We went in, I think, what was the Laager then, and we had a short season and that was combining mime with his range of percussion instruments.

**VC: I remember.**

AB: And then we toured, but I'd been on tour for about three months. When I came back to town there was no work anywhere. And the...um...

**VC: And you had family and everything.**

AB: Ja Janet was teaching at the time, so the salary was minimal..um... and Mark Fleishman, after BLACK AND WHITS FOLLIES, or not, I think it was , he was doing a production, doing Brecht(Bertolt) or doing the...um...um...

**VC: Not CARNIVAL OF THE BEAR?**

AB: I think it might have been that. One of those, it wasn't the...

**VC: Ja he did a couple of, but I think it might have been that one, in the Warehouse.**

AB: Ja,ja.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: Ja and he organised a late night slot, afterwards and he said to me, "If you've got some material bring it." So I said, "Grab me a slot. I don't know what I'll do but I'll do something."

**VC: Just give it to me.**

AB: "I need something." And I made the first twenty minutes of the UGLY NOONOO um... and actively tried to think how do I ...

**VC: And it wasn't with Maciek.**

AB: No.

**VC: It was just you.**

AB: But it was absolutely tied into Maciek because we were on the road touring NO EASY WALK and he would get up at six in the morning and start practising his drums and I'd be lying in bed and he'd be takka, takka, takka for two hours through the high hats and then the base drums and I said, "Maciek what the..." and he said to me, "Oh you're an artist, you're an actor, you're a mime artist" And I said, "Ja." "So well when do you practise, when do you train?" I said, "No I trained. I've got a degree you know."

(They laugh)

AB: And he laughed at me, obviously, and said to me, "I have to practise eight hours a day otherwise..."

**VC: I have to practise.**

AB: "Otherwise how do I hope to compete in the profession." And I said, "Well, Okay I'll get up at seven." So on the road I started to get up with him, and if he had two hours on the high hat I'd spend two hours doing mime and movement and trying to do vocal work as well.

**VC: ???**

AB: So then we played together a little bit, just training, just training.

**VC: Amazing though.**

AB: Just incredible, for the first time, you know, you – I suppose in a way he said "Look you need to take yourself seriously."

**VC: You know you're not fooling around here.**

AB: Don't fuck around.

**VC: You can do that.**

AB: Occasionally, but you need to train if you wanna be, if you wanna make art then you must, you can't just do it because you think you're going to. So that was a huge shift in my mind, and in a way

it, it made me review my training here, you know, such as it was, in the sense that there was no time because if you had an acting class it was once a week you know.

**VC: Ja and you were doing all sorts of other things, ja.**

AB: But when I needed to get up in the morning and do a mime class I knew what to do because Gary had given me that structure so I knew.

**VC: But you didn't do it.**

AB: Not all the time, no. Now I knew how. Now I had the means to train myself. So having started that journey, when I came back from tour, every morning I was up. I would take the kids to school...

**VC: And work...**

AB: And work and work. So when I came to do the NOONOO I was just itching to use as much of the kind of the theatrical performance of technique...

**VC: And you were ready.**

AB: Ja,ja so then that hit the stage, and then on my first night Mannie came to me and said, "Look, there's something there."

**VC: "Andrew."**

AB: "And let's talk about, you know, develop it further and, you know, we can make a deal at the, to show it at the Market."

**VC: So it was through Mannie rather than Barney that...**

AB: Ja,ja Barney came and watched and you know gave the kind of feedback that he would, and the kind of insights to the things that had the impulse that it did...um... but it was obviously from the production point of view.

**VC: Mannie.**

AB: And that was the beginning of a really long history of a relationship with Mannie where he provided that support.

**VC: And space.**

AB: Space...um... and funding us as well I suppose, and would say fifty/fifty and we'll support you with marketing and that was a damn good deal for new work, for a young artist, a young writer. It was an, it was – I wouldn't have been able to do anything like what I did without that support.

**VC: You wouldn't have afforded it.**

AB: No,no I couldn't have afforded to do any of that. That support...

( He answers a knock on the door)

AB: I'm just finishing something with Vanessa.

(Inaudible. He closes the door)

**VC: Oh so...**

(noise interference)

**VC: No it will be alright.**

AB: So based on that immediately the UGLY NOONOO – I made the second half and he came and watched and Barney and we got support from them, creatively as well as in terms of production. And it hit the popular vein.

**VC: Oh, I, we all loved it. We were waiting for something like that.**

AB: Oh ja.

**VC: Actually that we could understand – the style you know.**

AB: Ja, ja and it felt to me as well that so much of the time that protest work had hit a wall, where people just said, “You shouting at me and I know it’s bad, and I know it’s wrong, well what the fuck do we do?”

**VC: It was all going very weird, ja.**

AB: And somehow it just touched something where one was able to work through to the fear and the pain through laughter, through joy, you know. And...um... I don’t know if I was conscious of it at the time but I, I know I love humour and I love comedy and I love laughter.

**VC: Laughing, me too, I love it.**

AB: So, so and then you know, when I, after when I like did a third version of the NOONOO and made it into a trilogy and I thought that would be a thing, one thing ??? we should... and it was a disaster. Maybe I should have just stuck with one what was ... But Mannie said, “No just do it.”

**VC: Try, try it.**

AB: And I said, “The next thing I want to do, completely different, and I made BETWEEN THE TEETH which was just much less popular, much less accessible to a wider audience, just bombed in terms of box office, you know.

**VC: But you had to do that.**

AB: Ja.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: Ja and again Mannie just said, you know he said, “Look this is, you know, it’s too clever for its own good but just do it.”

( He laughs)

AB: And then I , I met Lionel (Newton) and by then, then Barney had started to see the work, and we’d started to meet and talk, and I’d started to make friends with him really ...um... and then when the Market Lab started he came and said, “Please come and do mime classes there.” So from there...um... I started to teach mime there on a regular... and meet, that’s where I met Lionel, started to work with Mncedisi ( Shabangu)

**VC: A bit later but ja... round...**

AB: I suppose my relationship then was with him, but several other people. But Lionel and I sort of made friends straight then. To see him on the floor, he made me laugh so much you know. And he came and saw BETWEEN THE TEETH and said please can we do something. So that’s when I took the



third part of the UGLY NOONOO and rewrote it for two into BLOODSTREAM – went to Mannie, Mannie said, “There’s a slot fifty/fifty. Here you go.”

(He laughs)

**VC: So sweet,hey.**

AB: It was just amazing, can’t tell you how – I knew that I had a home there , you know, I just knew.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: And you know what it’s like.

**VC: ???**

AB: People greet you and you know that people know the market and they understand what the, the ethos, is that the right word, but that’s the spirit of the place. We’d also come back. I started working with Soli.

**VC: Philander.**

AB: Ja – EVERYTHING BUT THE SHOWER SCENE.

**VC: Oh yes.**

AB: We played that, and often in the little experimental venue. Yes. So...um...

**VC: Was there something that I saw – was it ROSE COLOURED something or ...**

AB: ROSE COLOURED SPECTACLE yes where I...

**VC: That was you as well, hey.**

AB: I sort of acted like a director for Soli, but I didn’t really know what I was doing.

**VC: It was Soli.**

AB: Ja it was his work ...um... I was saying that through those years my focus was absolutely on the Market as a place where I wanted to present work. I didn’t want to take it anywhere else. It was home. You had these amazing minds you know, and this amazing community of artists together to give you responses to your work, to support your work, to be honest about it. So ...um... and that was so until, when I took this job in 1993.

**VC: Was it ’93?**

AB: Ja.

**VC: Oh before Barney died.**

AB: Ja,ja. It was just in fact, BLOODSTREAM had just sort of peaked. We’d done it, it was before WELLBEING and Nicky Rebelo said, “You leaving Joburg!”

**VC: You’re mad!**

AB: “You’re just about to peak,” whatever. But at that time Matthew, my eldest, was leaving school. He wanted to study. I couldn’t afford that.

**VC: Mm.**

AB: And if you’re teaching at university it’s 75% of the fees off. So three sons have gone through

Rhodes with ?? degrees each for a quarter of the price. So it really was , so I thought I might as well. I was spending so much time doing commercials and selling fucking BMWs.

**VC: Horrible – corporate theatre and stuff.**

AB: Corporates, this is heartbreaking. If I can be here. Gary was then head of the department. He said, “Come we’ll make a department that works with the Physical work.”

**VC: And you can still do shows if you want.**

AB: “Still do shows if you want, work, do your own work.” So I made FEEDBACK and the WELLBEING, and again these were welcomed back at the Market as well so it felt like...

**VC: And you toured quite a lot as well.**

AB: Ja, those got nice exposure through Edinburgh too. So we got some tours around the UK and Canada and...um... but again this as a ...um... as a base from which to work and to have time to do research work and other things. And it struck me that the teaching Theatre Making was a really good combination because you are, are, you, you, if you’re talking about it to the students you have to apply it yourself.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: Otherwise it’s just a bit of a fantasy.

**VC: Ja some people...**

AB: Ja so it’s my constant, you know, if I think about Joburg I don’t think of any other theatre, can’t. It’s the only place that I would want to show work and I’ve been aware that it’s gone through really difficult times, you know, and the leadership. It’s the last thing I would hope to, to have that put on me, to try and lead that in a creative or...

**VC: But I think James( Ngcobo) is quite brave.**

AB: Ja, ja and he takes it on with such a positive, great energy and I think that there’s real hope there for that. And it certainly feels like that it’s being programmed.

**VC: I feel very hopeful. I’m upset about the main Theatre, which has been somehow made impossible again.**

AB: The actual theatre itself?

**VC: Ja they redid it, inside, the main.**

AB: Oh really.

**VC: And you can’t hear that well and you can’t see that well.**

AB: Ohh.

**VC: Specially from upstairs.**

AB: Oh really.

**VC: Ja so they’re going to have to think about it again. But that’s not James.**

AB: Ja, Okay.

**VC: He’s just got to deal with it.**

AB: Ja,ja.

**VC: But he seems to be full of the right kind of spirit.**

AB: Ja I think so too, ja.

**VC: Because for me, obviously, when Barney died, went through a terrible...**

AB: Ja.

**VC: ...thing, but the Lab was working.**

AB: Ja, ja and that engine's still going.

**VC: It's still there – Clara (Vaughn) is there. I don't know if you know her.**

AB: Ja she was a student here, of ours.

**VC: And she seems to be...**

AB: Ja, ja.

**VC: Understanding.**

AB: Ja.

**VC: I think fieldwork is not so...**

AB: Okay.

**VC:..placed anymore.**

AB: Okay.

**VC: I'll try and help with sorting it, the school I think will be fine.**

AB: Good, great, great.

**VC: Ja so I think there's hope. Some people think there isn't but...**

AB: I think that's always the case.

**VC: Is there any particular memory you have of something that happened, for you, or at the Market, I mean. Frantz Dubrowsky knocking down the dressing room door or anything like that.**

(They laugh)

AB: um... no but I have a clear memory of just warming up backstage, of what was then the Upstairs- and you know the red concrete room with the big window there.

**VC: Ja.**

AB: You know, over like four, five productions there. So, and just the routine of getting there every night and looking out of the window and everything.

**VC: All the people.**

AB: And then going back on the floor and warming up. It's just dear. I get almost actually tearful about it, just amazing, amazing...um... You really felt that you belonged and that this place took care of you, and really cared about work.

**VC: I think that is, whatever else was going on.**

AB: And I suppose, being independent I was free enough to be able to come in and out and not get caught in the ...

**VC: Not worry about...**

AB: So,ja.

**VC: That's great. Thank you very much.**

AB: I can't remember...

**VC: That's lovely thank you.**

AB: Pleasure, thank you, man.

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