

## **INTERVIEW WITH LARA FOOT**

5<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2014

1900

GRAHAMSTOWN

INTERVIEWER VANESSA COOKE

**VC: Just relax**

LF: Ja.

**VC: Lara what first made you interested in theatre?**

LF: The Market Theatre.

**VC:Really?**

LF: Ja, no really. I've told this story often in a lot of interviews but – I was going to study Law and I was in Standard Nine and my school came to see BORN IN THE RSA at the Market Theatre and ja, changed my life completely. I was, like, whatever those guys were doing, I want to do that. It was the first time I heard the truth about our country. It was the first time I understood what theatre, the possibility of theatre, truth of storytelling...um...

**VC: Your family wasn't involved in theatre.**

LF: Not at all, no. My whole life I'd only once been in a theatre, to a ballet with the school. I'd never been to a play. Um... I saw that, another time I saw POPPIE NONGENA and so within a couple of weeks, so, you know, although my family was slightly politicised and I knew a little bit about what was going on in the country, it was really a little bit. So when I saw BORN IN THE RSA um... I just couldn't believe it. It opened up a whole world for me, you know. And then, a couple of months later – I'm not sure if it was the following year, or...um..., I saw the OUTERS – and then that was it. It was like ...(She laughs)

**VC: Marcel(van Heerden) and Marius ( Weyers)**

LF: Ja, ja and re... just the humanity, you know. How life – it just opened so many doors of understanding people, people on the street, and people, people's opinions and um...you know er...complexities of our country, it's humour and tenderness and just words, and worlds fell into place for me. The Mmarket was like, if there was anything I wanted to do in the world, was work there, and only there. Um...Ja very emotional, like just so...

**VC: You didn't know Barney (Simon) then?**

LF: I didn't know Barney. I didn't know anything. But then, you know, obviously I went to Wits Drama School. So changed my mind. Didn't do Law, studied Drama and then started going to the Market all the time. Saw everything, and I think at a Grahamstown Festival I met Barney. Said hello, will you come and watch my play, sort of thing. And then I think he was doing SCORE ME THE AGES and then we started speaking and I said could I come in and assist him at some point. I was completely crazy about him.

**VC:**

**What did you assist him on?**

LF: On Handspring, the...um...

**VC: STARBRITES.**

LF: STARBRITES, ja.

**VC: At the Lab (Market Theatre Laboratory)**

LF: Ja

**VC: Were you involved in the workshop. No?**

LF: Ja.no I was involved when we were at Basil ( Jones) and Adrian's (Kohler) house. So Barney phoned me, it was just the holidays. It was after I finished Varsity and then he said, I was in Pretoria, and he said, "Okay so can you come?" I said, "Ja,ja. When? " and he said, "Well, tomorrow." ( She laughs) And I had absolutely no money, in the world, in the world, like nothing. And then...um... I would say to him like at some point I would say, "Barney um... any chance there might be a little salary attached or a little something? "And he would put his hand in his pocket and give me, like take out like ten bucks and say, "You know. There you go. You know. And so then I would use that for petrol...um...I'd pick him up in my little pink Volksie ( Beetle), and then, and it was the happiest time, just absolutely amazing time, you know. So ja, so then, that was my home, you know. Like I think hundreds of other people. It was the place you wanted to be, told the truth you know. I met other wonderful people there you know, Leila Henriques.

**VC: Did you ever meet Lucille (Gillwald)?**

LF: No, I never ever met her. It was just after her, I think, sort of ja...Then Barney gave me some opportunities, you know. I had already directed quite a few productions before he let me direct something at the Market. It was sort of hard to get into the Market. So I'd already directed Paul Slab's (Slabolepszy) ELVIS DU PISANIE, yeah.

**VC: Right.**

LF: EQUUS for Wits and for Natal. So, you know even though I'd been around for quite a few years I still had to sort of prove my mettle and pay my dues before I could get into the Market, which was, you know... So ja and that's how it started. I saw everything, absolutely everything and quite a few times I did follow spot for productions. It was the only place I wanted to be then, ja.

**VC: And your first, first production at the Market?**

LF: First Market Theatre production was HELLO AND GOODBYE which Barney mentored me through.

**VC: Did you enjoy doing that?**

LF: HELLO AND GOODBYE? (She laughs) It was very hard. It was hard working with my partner (Lionel Newton) and hard working with an actress of, you know, that sort of stature. (Dorothy Ann Gould)

**VC: Quite a thing to do for your first production.**

LF: Ja,ja but Barney was by my side and when we got a very bad review from...um...what was his name? Robert Greig him and Athol(Fugard) wrote a letter to Robert Greig where Barney said, "What you said is close to criminal."

(They laugh)

LF: They were very supportive there, you know.

**VC: They fought for years – like the crits for MOTHER COURAGE – Robert Greig, just too terrible.**

LF: Ja, I mean, Barney became like, I mean in a way, a sort of father. What I, in a way I was his, sort of, PA on some levels. Not even PA, sort of listener, you know, so I'd hear a lot about what was going on with the Board. Ja, I think he really struggled to try and get people to understand what it was he was trying to achieve, you know, and why.

**VC: Some people didn't understand him.**

LF: Ja I remember right toward the end when he was saying, "What is it that the audience wants to see now?" You know, "Do they want to see skill?" And he was going back to Berkoff ( Steven) – kind of confused by the times.

**VC: Ja, I think everyone was.**

LF: Ja, ja absolutely, but he probably started thinking about it before all of us. Like where's this now, you know. Ja. He was influenced watching movies all the time, you know. As you know everybody knows this about Barney but I suppose the light for me was Barney. And then the Market when Barney died, I don't know, I don't know if it maintained that light. Certainly the Laboratory held the light for a long time.

**VC: Did for a while, ja.**

LF: So you kind of, kind of want to see the new blood, you know. And that's very likely James (Ngcobo).

**VC: Ja.**

LF: Hopefully James, you know.

**VC: I really hope so.**

LF: He's got to back to the basics of, of what is it we're trying to do in theatre. That was what the Market stood for. I don't know what it's going to mean all this- building and the...

**VC: The Market looks about this big ( Indicates matchbox size)**

LF: Ja.

**VC: Can't even see it from the highway anymore.**

LF: And the big question about government subsidy and no government subsidy coz...

**VC: Ja one isn't sure whether it really helps.**

LF: One isn't sure ja. Offices have moved, people aren't in the building.

**VC: That's a worry.**

LF: It's a bit of a worry so I'm not sure. I'm helping you with the history. Where shall I go with the history.

**VC: No I just want your personal...**

LF: TAKE THE FLOOR was quite interesting because it was, it was when we were voting. We were rehearsing TAKE THE FLOOR, you know. It was quite??? Because that was what the audience wanted, coz it was very light, very whimsical.

**VC: But STARBRITES they didn't...**

LF: Ja.

**VC: He was disappointed.**

LF: Ja, can't remember how well it did.

**VC: Overseas they reacted very badly to it.**

LF: Is it?

**VC: Too light.**

LF: Too happy.

**VC: No substance. They wanted still heavy...**

LF: Ja. Well in South Africa TAKE THE FLOOR did very well. Canada it did very well. That's all we did really, Edinburgh, Canada. Barney wasn't happy with it. He made that very clear to me.

**VC: TAKE THE FLOOR?**

LF: Ja I don't even know if we travelled with the Market name. Ja it was maybe in association with us. Barney wasn't very happy that... I think it was too whimsical, you know.

(They laugh)

LF: Ja but he helped me a lot. Taught me a lot.

**VC: Was he still alive when you did WOMBTIDE?**

LF: He never saw the opening but he was in rehearsal and he loved WOMBTIDE, absolutely loved what we were doing there. But he taught me a lot through TAKE THE FLOOR about space and about not giving yourself parameters, you know, don't make rules. I kept talking about if it's outside or if it's in a dance studio can it be in the house and he was going, "Who cares" you know. Like don't make restrictions. And so it was a huge lesson for me you know, with space. And then of course with THE SUIT, he, you know, clearly used space as he liked. And that was beautiful about his way of working. As long as you believe where you are then you know what I mean so...

**VC: Any other influences at the Market?**

LF: Um... at the Market Theatre, in the Market Theatre?

**VC: Any other directors.**

LF: Um...I used to watch Clare's work, you know, Clare Stopford. And...um...I didn't really see much of Janice's( Honeyman) work, so I can't...

**VC: She didn't work much at the Market then.**

LF: There were people like, at the time, like Jennifer Ferguson that I was crazy about. There was a Barney era, all the workshop plays, you know, that seemed to resonate for me. I mean that I admired, you know. Mark Fleishman was doing things that were interesting, ja, but it was mostly...

**VC: Do you still feel the same about theatre?**

LF: Do you, do you?

**VC: I still know what I like.**

LF: I do, when I get that feeling, you know, that feeling of something. Do you know those plays are

hard to find, and, and if you find them. They're almost impossible to put on. You know nobody's going to come, you know. (She laughs) No but ja I do still feel it, can feel it occasionally where you know you're still completely engaged- one hundred percent. Ja. I don't think I'll ever be as good a director as Barney in the sense that, I feel he gave everything – you know what I mean – everything. And you can't, I don't know, maybe I'm making excuses but you can't really do that and have children.

**VC: There's another life.**

LF: There's a cut off, a cut off you know. And with me, like when I get home I want my kids and my life, you know...um...

**VC: I think Lucille was like Barney.**

LF: Ja.

**VC: Phone people at two o'clock in the morning.**

LF: Yes I don't want, I used to, but I can't have that in my life because then I wouldn't have a stable life with my kids, you know ...um... But producing has become very interesting for me. Could be a Barney, Mannie influence, you know. I find producing quite creative.

**VC: Do you.**

LF: Ja and making it happen and you know, getting involved, kind of putting a ...ja. I'm quite fascinated with figures and how to make figures work. How to break even, how to... Because I do believe you should take box office into account.

**VC: I'd say that's quite a good idea!**

LF: I mean these days you get a budget from the Market, it doesn't have box office in the budget. But ??? like I'm not saying it should be commercial but to have no thought for, you know. I mean...

**VC: It's got to be...**

LF: Being at the Baxter we were exactly like the Market. Now we count the pennies. It's very important. So that's how I know how the Market functioned in the years of Barney, Mannie, you know.

**VC: ???**

LF: And so I mean through the very difficult years after Barney dying I found it extremely hard at the Market and I'm sure you did as well.

**VC: Kind of counter proposals that made things worse. It was hard.**

LF: Very hard. Greed actually there- it was very little leadership. Suddenly there was money.

**VC: Very strange.**

LF: Very strange. That was when the Lab kept the pillars in the Market alive, you know. When I opened TSEPANG I didn't even apply to go to the Market. I went straight to the Lab, you know. Like I didn't want to go to a place that wasn't going to hold this production. So but the Lab did.

**VC: Ja.**

LF: But the Lab stood very strongly. A lot of kids came out of the Lab that are around now, that are, you know, doing very well.

**VC: Mncedisi( Shabangu).**

LF: He is fantastic. He's in my play.

**VC: Is he?**

LF: Yes.

**VC: So he's here.**

LF: Yes! He's in the play.

**VC: I didn't even know.**

LF: He came to Kenya with me. We went and did research – absolutely fantastic.

( Inaudible section)

**VC: (Laughs) I've been wondering where he is.**

LF: In Cape Town.

**VC: I think that's Okay. What we'll do is transcribe it and if we need more we'll talk to you in Cape Town.**

LF: Cool.

**VC: Thanks.**

LF: I always get a bit fucked about the Market, you know.

**VC: I know it's very hard.**

LF: Ja,ja. And I thought it was off.

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