

INTERVIEW WITH PIETER DIRK UYS

INTERVIEWER: VANESSA COOKE

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VENUE: DE LA CRÈME MELVILLE

VC: How did you end up in theatre, what was it that...

PDU: I think very specifically at school a few things happened um... the travelling theatre group from CAPAB [Cape Performing Arts Board] used to come to us once every six months, in the afternoon, and we'd be in the school hall and they'd be on stage and they'd do extracts from our set work plays, and it was magic, I mean, I just – I went back to those set works which I didn't want to read because they were just so boring. Suddenly they were alive for me because of this. Limpie Basson, Sandra Kotzer um... Cobus Rossouw and Nerina Ferriera, Jannie Geldenhuys, Ernst Eloff, Leonora Nel, they were... okay and then when I was in standard eight Miss Nel, Miss Eloise Nel our English teacher, took us to the Little Theatre to see KING LEAR which was our set work play. And it was with Alan Prior as King Lear, with Yvonne Bryceland and Joyce Birch as Goneril and Regan and with um... James Blanckenberg as the Fool. My first kadoing! I mean just extraordinary. I think that changed my life and then that just went (he clicks his fingers). Something just clicked and then when I went to - then again I wasn't going to be an actor. . that wasn't even in my thinking. I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I knew I was going to do something original. I always knew that. Even when my granny, sitting in the City Hall, when Tessie(Tessa Uys) and Ma and Pa were found playing the triple concerto with the Cape Town Orchestra and I was sitting there with the two grannies... (Vanessa laughs) and my German granny fed me chocolates and my Afrikaans granny patted my knee, and said to me eventually "Ag" ...

VC: Shame.

PDU: "Wat gaan van jou word?" I didn't mind about that because I had a sort of an instinct, a feeling that something "van my word." And then I went to university, Cape Town, to do a BA, Drama, BA, BA.

VC: Did you not go to the army?

PDU: Navy.

VC: Navy.

PDU: Navy.

VC: Before varsity.

PDU: Mm and it was amazing. Such a life changing experience because I was suddenly with rough boys from Goodwood and all those, you know not protected like me in my little Mozartian cocoon with three musicians in the family. Um... I wanted to be a teacher. I was so inspired by Eloise Nel and also Meneer du Toit who taught us this fabricated history as a sort of TV series. He made it so exciting you know. And after my first year at university my parents said "I think you've done enough". Quite boring, I did quite well. (VC laughs) "Go overseas, we're going to give you a trip overseas."

VC: Your Musgrave and Watson.

PDU: You know, I went on my Union Castle to London and there my parents had a friend called Betty Jones. And Betty Jones, was very English darling "Take you to the theatre, okay." OTHELLO at the Old Vic with Laurence Olivier, and Maggie Smith. Black and White Minstrel show. WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF with Ute Hagen, I mean. In the week and then a musical called MAGGIE MAY with Rachel Roberts.

VC: Ooh hey.

PDU: Well London, winter, TV mast, TV, TV. Radio, those radios that were on the Boats in the Channel.

VC: Mm Tubes.

PDU: Tubes, everything was just, I mean, then I went to Europe. I met my father in Frankfurt to go and visit my mother's old fiancée from Berlin. Uncle Frantz with his wife, Friedel. Snow in Wilsbaden(sp.), went to Paris, went to Rome, found Sophia Loren's apartment, put a note under her door. Came back to South Africa to find a letter from Sophia, number 1.

VC: No.

PDU: And number 2, I go back to university do my second year and I'm in the canteen.

VC: You weren't doing drama then.

PDU: No, not at all. And there I see in the canteen a girl with a beret and a cigarette holder and I think man what the hell is this. I want to look like this, what is this? Phyllis Punt (?)

VC: Phyllis Prunt?

PDU: Aktrise van Pretoria, who's coming to do drama.

VC: Oh.

PDU: Great friend of Limpie Basson. And she said, "Kom saam, come with, I'm going to the Little Theatre um..., come along." So she took me along and...

VC: There it was.

PDU: I just signed on to do a BA Drama and that was the beginning and I got involved, and then of course as time went by I spent more time at the Little Theatre because it was just so right to be there. I went to less and less and less of the other lectures. Eventually failed, failed. Ralph Lawson and I, we went to Mavis Taylor, who had our results after ?? she had everything.

VC: Except drama.

PDU: Except drama um... and that's where Rosalie van der Gucht said to me, on the stoep of the Little Theatre, because she was a great friend of my parents.

VC: Okay.

PDU: ...and she said "I don't know why you're doing – you've got no talent at all. You must get a job. Don't waste your time, and your parent's money. You're a terrible disappointment." Oh poes wat doen jy met nonsense" and I think she just forced me into gear.

VC: You had to do something.

PDU: And I think ten years later when she handed me my Three Leaf Award or whatever. I just said to her “Professor I’ve only got ?? – you won’t remember this but many years ago ...” She said “Yes I do remember and it worked.”

VC: (Exclaims.)

PDU: And so the theatre hijacked me. I say this to many people. I say “You know, you might want to be an actor but it the theatre doesn’t want you, you won’t be an actor.” How many of our colleagues from way back are not with us on theatre anymore because it just did not gel for them.

VC: Most of them.

PDU: And I think the reason we’re still there is because we are cadres. We’re really, we follow the structure.

VC: Ja.

PDU: And we went on with it, discipline is the oxygen by which we live. There’s no affirmative action in theatre. It’s a real gift, it’s a gift, producer, it’s a gift.

VC: Mannie’s [Manim] got that gift.

PDU: Absolutely.

VC: No doubt.

PDU: There’s no doubt.

VC: He allowed. I mean some of the interviews Andrew Buckland, wasn’t Barney that allowed Andrew to develop his style, it was Mannie.

PDU:... and me too.

VC: Mannie said...

PDU: I had very little to do with Barney, other than just meeting Barney in the coffee bar or wherever, and talking Afrikaans and making jokes. But really, it was Mannie, Mannie would say “Yes, do.”

VC: Ja say yes instead of no.

PDU: The only time when had a question mark was looking at a play, six months after my previous play had been banned, and he just said “I don’t think we can afford this luxury, because it will be stopped and what do we do.” Which is logical, and very, very honest.

VC: But look what you were talking about, you weren’t talking about – we not going to make our money for the year.

PDU: Never, never.

VC: We were talking about they’re going to ban it again and then we can’t survive.

PDU: It was an – there when I brought in STRIKE UP THE BANNED with Rika (Sennet) and that’s where the Café was, sort of, a – David Marks, is that right?

VC: Yes.

PDU: Mannie can't remember why, did David just leave?

VC: Yes. Something happened.

PDU: I think there was something about his business as a producer, music producer, I think he moved to Durban.

VC: Oh was it then he went to Durban?

PDU: Mannie said "No you take it over." We put a stage here. We had all the little tables and everything. Rika with me. We did STRIKE UP THE BANNED and Michael Maxwell, walked in. this little bushy tailed none year old. And he was my stage manager.(VC Laughs) Just so sweet. And that's where that started. So we did that there, in the Café.

VC: When did you change it to the Laager?

PDU: The, now we're in 1977 now. Um we, then VAN AARDES VAN GROOTOOR , which I did down in Cape Town with Dawie Malan. And it was wonderful. I lived in town, in a little place up in Berg Street.

VC: Didn't you live in an office?

PDU: I lived in an office.

VC: I met you there once. You actually didn't have a home.

PDU: No I didn't have a home. I was like a kat. (laughs) And I lived in an office, slept on the floor. I went, I would write my little play, on my little tik-typewriter because it started as a revue sketch in STRIKE UP THE BANNED.

VC: It was a sketch ne?

PDU: A sketch where Rika would be knitting, and we were doing a radio play called DIE VAN AARDES VAN GROOTOOR , and how we knitted and did all the sound effects and all that nonsense. And at the very end of the play the big line. Listen to this for the punch line is, I said looking at her, saying, "Wil jy naai?" Toe se haar "Nee ek brei." Excuse me, oh ... (VC laughs) ... oh everyone went – oh dis slim. This thing developed into DIE VAN AARDES VAN GRROOOR. We did it at the Baxter, in the Studio, with Billy Curry and...

VC: So you'd done it before you got there?

PDU: Yes. Nobody took any notice of us, whatsoever. Nobody came to us, no critics came, nothing happened. We just did it. (They laugh). And we were, you know, that's the way it is.. why should anyone care anyway. Went up to Joburg, came to Joburg. Looked at the little place." Mannie can we do it? Can we build a stage, a real stage?" Mannie said "There's no money."

VC: But he thought it would run for three weeks.

PDU: He did. So he said – go ahead. So we took nails out of things and used nails. Wood here, we just reinvented.?? And there was this big pillar. This little stage – which went into the pillar. Little dressing rooms.

VC: Tiny.

PDU: Darling it was smaller than the table... and VAN AARDES had six people. (They laugh). Six people dying on that stage. We had to leave the bodies at interval (VC laughs). SO VAN AARDES came and VAN AARDES was like, I mean. Extraordinary. Even while we're VAN AARDES the train would be GRRR past the...

VC: You had to wait ja.

PDU: ...and the, the lighting box was in that little kitchen. There was a little window.

VC: We made sandwiches when it was the Café.

PDU: That's right, that's right, ja. So that's where it started um. And then VAN AARDES also went to the Main Theatre. That was a helluva move because we'd never thought...

VC: Yes.

PDU: ... we could perform in the Main Theatre.

VC: And was that with Thoko [Ntshinga] or was...

PDU: No, still Nomsa [Nene}

VC: Still Nomsa.

PDU: Nomsa was in all through.

VC: Ja.

PDU: ...right through to the full two years of VAN AARDES she was in that. Every single Afrikaans performer in Johannesburg, at some stage, was in DIE VAN AARDES for nothing. There was no money. I mean there was like, R10, R20 for petrol it was amazing, just like one, you name them, everybody was in.

VC: Then it got banned, right?

PDU: It got banned in the Laager.

VC: It got banned in the Laager coz Mannie spoke about how the Board could fit onto the theatre.

PDU: No, this was wonderful. Mannie, we could afford a lawyer.

VC: Yes.

PDU: And we had to both wear suits and Mannie still said, "My God, where are we going to find suits?" We found suits (VC laughs). We went to Pretoria. Mannie got us a lawyer. Who was our lawyer, at that time? There must have been someone...

VC: There was a whole, there was Raymond, there was a whole lot of lawyers.

PDU: Was it Raymond?

VC: Tucker.

PDU: I think it was.

VC: There was Ernie Wentzel. There was...

PDU: I think it was Afrikaans.

VC: Charles Nupen. Ja you got an Afrikaans lawyer.

PDU: Ja going to Pretoria. They had just finished building this new headquarters of the Publikasie Raad. The room, this big room was not yet finished so they set us up in the passage.

VC: Did you do the show?

PDU: To have this review, this trial. And then while we were all seated there, there was suddenly this was suddenly this coloured lady –“Excuse me” – cleaning the floor ?? and we, they had this nonsense thing where we, where they suddenly found out that they’d banned the play for obscene words and none of the words actually existed.

VC: No – for instance...

PDU: Well for instance – naaimasjien. We didn’t say naai we said naaimasjien. And also boerewors but in the context of - one of the things they banned was, when the one lady says to the other “ ‘n Vrou sonder liefde is soos ‘n koek sonder a kers.” They banned that. So they said “You’ve got to replace those words.” So we replaced it with – “‘n vrou sonder ‘n liefde is soos ‘n doos sonder ‘n deksel. (VC Laughs) Even better. So we got the play back with the changes which worked much better for us because we just made this publicity. We just. And Dawie...

VC: Everyone wanted to see it.

PDU: Everyone came and the reviews were unbelievable. There were just people, it was of its time extraordinary because it took all those sacred cows, and not only milked them but ate them and then hugged them, you know.

VC: Ja.

PDU: Um.

VC: There was you and then there was Robert Kirby doing it for English people.

PDU: The difference was Robert was a real satirist. I’ve never been a satirist. I always had to have a certain sense of compassion, because there but for the grace of God go I. He was, he took no .. he was Isis. He really was. Brilliant – God I miss that voice. It was so, so strong.

VC: But I mean that was going on in the Laager as well.

PDU: While we were in the Laager with VAN AARDES he was upstairs.

VC: He didn’t like any of us.

PDU: No no, mad about my great friend Val de Klerk and Val de Klerk teased him all the time. Then the Baxter did a production of WAITING FOR GODOT.

VC: Yes.

PDU: Directed by old Donald Howarth.

VC: Donald Howarth yes.

PDU: And they wanted me for Pozzo and oh my God how can I, I don’t know if I can act. John and

Winston and Peter Piccolo. And I remember saying very clearly to them “I’d love to do it, but I’m not sure why you’ve cast me. Is it because I do PW Botha? I mean is our WAITING FOR GODOT going to be a South African version?”

VC: ??

PDU: And they said, “no, no, no” and John said, “No and Winston nodded. And everybody said no. we rehearsed it and we did it at the Grahamstown Festival, which was very exciting.

VC: That’s right.

PDU: We did at the Baxter. We did it. Then we came up to The Market.

VC: Soli Philander was in it.

PDU: Soli was the little boy, came up to the Market Theatre. We did...

VC: Main Theatre.

PDU: Main Theatre. Beautiful three week, three week run and in the last week of our run, we were going to rehearse it because the next time we get it together in six weeks time we are going to the Old Vic in London with the play.

VC: How insane s that?

PDU: We get into it but we had done is absolutely as [Samuel] Beckett wanted it. It was a British, you know exactly as the whole thing was supposed to be.

VC: Ja.

PDU: Um we do the first get together and Howarth says “Listen, we’re going to London, you’ve got to understand they’ve seen it done in this style, and we think, everybody does agree that it must be done in a South African style.” I said “Ah is that’s what I expected.” “No but you have to understand Pieter, we’ve done it now. Of course we don’t do it here...”

VC: But Winston should have played Pozzo.

PDU: “And we’re going overseas and I said “John” God I’ll never forget it he says, “Come on, you can do it man. Come on you can do it.”

VC: Of course you can do it.

PDU: Of course we can rehearse it. “No you’ll do the performance tonight. And you’ll do it like that.” Well I didn’t know what to do. I honestly didn’t know what to do. I really thought at one stage, if I drink a whole bottle of whiskey I’ll be too pissed to do it. That’s how desperate I was.

VC: Coz you knew it was wrong.

PDU: It was just not right. I phoned Steven Gray

VC: Ah.

PDU: I love Steven Gray. He’s always been a fantastic sounding board and mentor for me. I love him very much, um... and I phoned Steven and I said “This is what is going to happen tonight.” He said “No.” I said

“I have no alternative but you must come. You must come and watch. Please be there for me.” So I go back to the theatre, go into the wardrobe, which is just a box in the corner.

VC: And what was Peter Piccolo going to do?

PDU: Well Peter just did nothing except hmm. I mean, he just, one of the reasons I think instinctively one didn't make a big fuss then, not to frighten Peter into a complete coma because that was the most difficult part of the work to do.

VC: And he wouldn't do it?

PDU: So now is he suddenly going to be a coloured?

VC: Exactly.

PDU: To be a coloured, which is exactly what I think they wanted him to be. So I find a Patrick Mynhardt costume, a hat, this thing here.

VC: Groot Marico, Moonshine and Mampoer.

PDU: And I think okay and I 'm on there and John and Winston, great, great.

VC: Oh God.

PDU: And I'm in the kaffir mode now. You behave like this and I'm in the kaffir mode. I whipped them into – I beat them on the stage (flick flack).

VC: You must have had to beat Pic as well.

PDU: I had beat him as well. And at interval Robert and Donald Howarth came backstage and said “So brilliant, so brilliant.”

VC: Nee man.

PDU: I vomited. I think I actually got sick in the corner there. I did the thing. Steven Gray came to the dressing room, stood in the door, witgeskrik, and he just went “Mm” and then just disappeared. I went back to my room in Melville and I wrote something down and the next morning at 9:30 I, I sent it down with the express mail to Donald, to um... Baxter Theatre, I said I hereby hand in my resignation.

VC: Of course it was a Baxter production.

PDU: Baxter production. My resignation...

VC: Slemon.(John)

PD: Yeah Slemon. I said, “I'm out of here. I'm not doing this, and if you make me may fuss I go to the press.” That was it. We finished the run. I mean John and Winston were hell on stage. They were so busy with scratching their arses.

VC: Terrible that time.

PDU: Busy looking at the audience.

VC: Oh God,I don't think they've changed.

PDU:I don't think John has changed, darling. Um...except he's a doctor, doctor, doctor, doctor.

VC: Remember BESSIE SMITH with him and Janet [Suzman]. Oh.

PDU: Real nightmare.

VC: You have never, you have never...

PDU: You know then it was just arrogance. Now it's ego. It's very hard you know.

VC: It was astonishing. We were like wow.

PDU: So they cast Bill Flynn who was brilliant.

VC: I remember.

PDU: And they died at the Old Vic. People – and when they went over to New York as well so it was – OK the point I'm getting to now.

VC: It's like TITUS ANDRONICUS

PDU: Yes.

VC: In a way.

PDU: Suddenly I'm now pretty shaken because I've now actually broken up a company um... I made a threat; I've never done this in my life.

VC: And you had the chance of being at the Old Vic.

PDU: That sort of stuff. And I thought – I was in my little house in Second Avenue, and the black and white TV was on but the sound off, because it was the news. PW Botha and I did it clack, and my little cat went hee hee.

VC: Ah.

PDU: And I suddenly thought ADAPT OR DYE.

VC: Here we go.

PDU: And I put this little thing together and I went to Mannie and I said "Listen, I don't know what this thing is now"."

VC: ??

PDU: I want to do a late night. You better do a late night. We'll do it at 11 o'clock when the security police are either drunk or in bed with the maids you know. And he said "Try it out because um" oh damn man, the Indian man, the lovely Indian man.

VC: Alan [Joseph].

PDU: Alan was in Durban running um Saira Essa's little venue.

VC: Yes we opened it with ARABIAN NIGHTS.

PDU: remember. So I went down and on the 1st April, April fool's day, I opened ADAPT OR DYE.

VC: Late night.

PDU: Late night at theatre little venue. I played three nights there.

VC: It was hot there, do you remember. I nearly died.

PDU: And then I came up, and then Janice [Honeyman] was doing MET PERMISSIE GESE in the ...

VC: Restaurant.

PDU: ... little restaurant area with all those curtains and I did ADAPT OR DYE as a late night. And that's when it started. That's where Mannie just said "Go do."

VC: He was amazing like that.

PDU: He never, ever said "Don't."

VC: Only to Barney.

PDU: Really how interesting.

VC: Well he tried, like Barney would want to do LONG DAY'S JOURNEY(INTO NIGHT), very expensive.

PDU: You see because of that practicality of funding and things.

VC: And he would say no.

PDU: But I mean I never really had that problem with me because it was just me.

VC:???

PDU: And we just made our sets. We just got boxes. That's where those boxes started, because I just got cardboard boxes and put them together. That was my set – to this day.

VC: Crates.

PDU: Crates, eventually the crates, you could sit on them. Couldn't sit on the cardboard boxes. Um... and then I did, I think I did SLY FOX that lovely Gary Gelhart which we opened in the week of New Year and I remember this little poepgat, the critic on The Star was a little poepgat, little man with the lovely foot.

VC: Robert Grieg.

PDU: And it just died.

VC: He did that to LONG DAY'S JOURNEY and MOTHER COURAGE.

PDU: Just vicious. Vicious. And also Mike Venables – vicious.

VC: Oooer.

PDU: I mean Raeford (Daniel) was, was really, truly listened and was there.

VC: He was the best.

PDU: And even that awful man with the ghastly wife, I mean um. They were trying but...

VC: Ja.

PDU: But darling they had the power, the power was huge. Total. Now there's no power coz critic's fuck all.

VC: Sunday Express. Evelyn Levison.

PDU: Ah committed suicide with her husband in their flat in Rosebank. Oh God. Eventually.

VC: Robert Grieg tried to commit suicide but it didn't work.

PDU: Didn't work.

VC: Ooh.

PDU: But okay – darling it was, no, it wasn't Levison it was the Winkleys. Do you remember the Winkleys? Used to write reviews for the, Winkelys in the early years for the Sunday Express, before Evelyn Levison.

VC: Before her.

PDU: Yes.

VC: Oh okay.

PDU: The Winkleys, one day decided that – time to move on.

VC: (laughs).

PDU: So they swallowed pills and went away.

VC: The Winkleys.

PDU: The Winkleys, yes. (VC laughs) And it was, that was, my beginning of my, sort of golden era at the Market. And we were – now '81

VC: So it wasn't Evita yet?

PDU: Evita was in ADAPT OR DYE but just as a character.

VC: Ah.

PDU: And just slowly, slowly and then I wrote FARCE ABOUT UYS with Evita, with a family. De Kock playing the family.

VC: That's right.

PDU: And that we did at the Market with Dawie Malan directing with Thoko Ntshinga. Now in the meantime, before this, in 1979 with the Lager, after VAN AARDES, Tessie came and we decided to do a show together. We did UYSCREAMS. UYSCREAMS FROM THE WIMPY ARCHIPELAGO.

VC: Oh was that the first one?

PDU: UYSCREAMS FROM THE WIMPY ARCHIPELAGO um with Martin Clohessy, who was on stage (VC laughs) and he did one song, and he stood there with a little triangle, and at the end of the song – klong. That's all he did in the show (they laugh). Klong um... and Tessie then got engaged to Julius Eichbaum. Because it was, theatre it was the theatre you see – it unhinged her, to a certain extent.

VC: I'm sure it did.

PDU: Sent her flowers, and the audience loved her. And she was gorgeous.

VC: And famous.

PDU: So funny.

VC: She was beautiful as...

PDU: And then of course Thoko was in the foyer, in the coffee shop.

VC: Ja.

PDU: We had coffee and we, especially Tessie and Thoko really clicked um and Toks with his gorgeous voice and Tessie took her to the piano and Toks started to sing. And ah – we'll do UYSCREAMS with her – and HOT CHOCOLATE SAUCE.

VC: It was so brilliant that.

PDU: And so we did that in the big theatre. We did that in the big theatre and it was just such a lovely show to do. Um... and then, well then it was, sort of like, Evita.

VC: Started.

PDU: Again Evita wasn't in those shows Evita wasn't, but we already had looked at the idea of a homeland.

VC: Of Bopetikosweti.

PDU: Homeland of thing, for that little, I think was ADAPT OR DIE was before CHOCOLATE SAUCE.

VC: Ja.

PDU: ADAPT OR DIE, was before CHOCOLATE SAUCE. ADAPT OR DIE went on and on.

VC: Hey.

PDU: And then, in 1983.

VC: Oh no it looks like it was after – no but I might have missed it.

PDU: Because I know what we did was, in CHOCOLATE SAUCE Thoko played a the president of the homeland, and I think that's where we worked...

VC: Started.

PDU: The whole Bapetikosweti thing. Thoko helped us with that word – Bapetikosweti and then Evita then we took it for Evita later on. Then I wrote the FARCE ABOUT UYS, which is the Bapetikosweti homeland characters. Um... And then we had another play, a play HELL IS FOR WHITES ONLY.

VC: Ooh, ja.

PDU: Which I did up in, up in the Upstairs Theatre um which was slaughtered because – “What are you writing plays for? It's all the lines from your reviews.” You know.

VC: So what anyway.

PDU: It wasn't.

VC: Of course it wasn't.

PDU: There was only one line from the review and that was the story of the coloured woman who was chucked out of her house because of the Group Areas Act. And I mean it was just my story darling. And it was the story of the country.

VC: But I mean that's how Barney wrote as well. Ag a You'd read something in the newspaper.

PDU: Mm. Ag and then we, I did JUST LIKE HOME, and SCORCHED EARTH. The big mistake and Mannie said to me, he said, "Not a good idea to be your own competition." And he was absolutely right.

VC: Were they on at the same time?

PDU: I was in the Laager, in the New Laager. This was the new Laager, new Laager and I remember how, we were sort of, like upset that we were changing the old Laager. But again it was, it was logical. We had...

VC: And now but anyway. The new Laager or whatever it's going to be called.

PDU: And that's again.

VC: Three hundred and fifty seats or something – seriously, it's going to be almost as big as the Main Theatre.

PDU: Well I remember when I was there last year. And James [Ngcobo] rushed in with a big smile and said, "I've got, "I've got millions for the renovation of the theatre upstairs. I said, "Why?"

VC: What's wrong with...

PDU: Why?

VC: What's wrong with the Laager?

PDU: What was wrong with the Laager? Nothing.

VC: Nothing.

PDU: No, nothing.

VC: New benches might be nice for the audience to be comfortable.

PDU: But of course, but I mean it was...

VC: Mm.

PDU: ... a very practical venue. You could see, you could hear. Anyway darling.

VC: We had worked it out form all the mistakes we made before.

PDU: Mm, mm. Anyway um...

VC: Let us not worry about that.

PDU: And then and then I... OK then also there ... across the road started.

VC: The Warehouse.

PDU: When did that start? 19...

VC: '86.

PDU: '86 yes.

VC: It was the whole Anglo Vaal Mall.

PDU: And that marvelous RANDLORDS AND ROTGUT.

VC: BLACK AND WHITE FOLLIES.

PDU: That was brilliant, God that was so good. That can – it's more topical now, hey.

VC: Right, well. SUNRISE CITY and HOTEL POLANA and all that.

PDU: Yes and we did also some wonderful things there. We did.

VC: I remember that's when you did Pik Botha.

PDU: And the AUDIENCE WITH EVITA BEZUIDENHOUT in there, and that was the cusp of change when Madiba was freed in 1990. We were doing AN AUDIENCE WITH EVITA BEZUIDENHOUT and we ran...

VC: REARRANGING THE DECKCHAIRS, CRY FREE MANDELA.

PDU: CRY FREE MANDELA.

VC; TOTAL ONSLAUGHT was before.

PDU: Ja, ja. I loved that venue, I loved that venue.

VC: Very nice there.

PDU: Ooh, yes it was a great venue, um, and then came '90 and my Pa got sick.

VC: That's right.

PDU: And that's when I left. Went back to Cape Town um...

VC: KISS ON YOUR KOEKSUSTER? And AN AUDIENCE WITH EVITA.

PDU: KOEKSUSTER was also in that venue. I did that, Janice [Honeyman] worked on that with me.

VC: Right.

PDU: But also SCORCHED EARTH was in the Main Theatre, JUST LIKE HOME was in the Laager.

VC: Ja.

PDU: With Margaret Inglis.

VC: Peggy.

PDU: Peggy, Peggy, Peggy. God that was, you see, sentiment.

VC: Ooh, SCORCHED EARTH, ooh.

PDU: I was in London.

VC: Aah.

PDU: And I met her, and she was such a wonderful lady.

VC: Ja.

PDU: Gorgeous and “Oh I’d LOVE to go back to the theatre – work in South Africa.” “So I’ve got this play with a matriarch in the house.”

VC: Fiona [Ramsay] was in that as well, hey?

PDU: Fiona was in that. Gorgeous. And also thingy who fell down the thing. What’s her name um?

VC: Bess [Finney] was she also... oh Gaynor [Young].

PDU: Gaynor.

VC: Oh.

PDU: Gaynor. And so there was this wonderful part for her as this matriarch of the beautiful estate in Durban Natal and they’ve got to give up most of their land for a homeland development, and everything. And I sent her the script and everything. And when she arrived here, she’d learnt every word. And when, in rehearsal, obviously there’s a lot of changes, when I changes she screeched “Don’t touch my lines!”

VC: Oh.

PDU: Couldn’t touch her. She stayed there, and everybody else had to play around her.

VC: You couldn’t develop her.

PDU: It was very, very hard. But still... and many people say it was the best play I’d written. Nico and Peet still say that it was the best.

VC: It was dark.

PDU: It was under that willow tree.

VC: Mm.

PDU: It was, I wanted a set. (VC laughs) And Sarah [Roberts] did me something (clicks his fingers) doors, doors, doors, bang, bang, bang. Ah no, can’t afford that. Let’s hang pieces of material, right down from there, willow tree and we’ll have some Chekhov, Chekhov benches and so we did it that way. And that was the thing. But then I, then I sort of, only got back again after...

VC: Ja you sort of...

PDU: ... a couple of years.

VC: Ja ’94 you were back, and then I don’t know coz I’m not doing later than that. So ’94 was POGGENPOEL SUSTERS.

PDU: Oh yes, oh I loved that.

VC: And then after that you...

PDU: POGGENPOEL SUSTERS and after that, Nico rushed to the theatre on the night, after the six o’clock news.

VC: Nico?

PDU: Nico de Klerk when we saw for the first time the South African flag, the new one, and it made a Y.

VC: Y front.

PDU: Ja, Jockeys – Evita could actually...

VC: Oh.

PDU: ... in the show suddenly say “Oh by the way, this is our new flag. Did you know?” It was great. Singing Kurt Weill in the first half , and Evita in the second. Lovely concept for a show.

VC: Mm.

PDU: Very nice.

VC: Mm.

PDU: Um...

VC: But then you kind of, you also spread your wings somehow.

PDU: Then I did a lot of work around, I went to London.

VC: But also Barney died and other people took over.

PDU: Barney died ja and Mannie left.

VC: Mannie left ja in 1990, do you know that?

PDU: Mannie left in 1990.

VC: I always forget that.

PDU: I don't think Barney was very comfortable without him. Who took over after Mannie left? Who was running it then?

VC: I think Alan [Joseph] and somebody, at some point Jon Whitespinner.

PDU: Yes Jon Whitespinner, that's right. No that's fine. We were all old pals.

VC: Then after Barney died than John [Kani] became Artistic Director.

PDU: That's right ja.

VC: Ja. That was tough.

PDU: Ja right, energies move. I remember the Space Theatre. I was there '72, '73, '74 or '73, '74, '75, middle of '75 we left.

VC: Then you left.

PDU: We left. It was one of those things, we just went you know.

VC: Can I ask you like, if you thought about The Market, not just as a building, which you can, what did it mean in your work?

PDU: It was my High School. The Space was my Junior School. And this was my High School and I felt I was a prefect. (VC laughs). I was not Head Boy, Barney was Head Boy and it just an unbelievable trust in

each other um ... we listened to each other, but we didn't bullshit each other. We didn't sort of say – darling that was gorgeous.

VC: Wasn't time.

PDU: Wasn't time for it. And there was Lynette Marais.

VC: At the Box Office.

PDU: Yes with the, with the dooswyn, we'd get pissed. She was such a great...

VC: A club. Which I never belonged to because I was always performing, probably you too. People used to bring wine on Fridays.

PDU: That's right (VC laughs).

VC: At the back.

PDU: No but she was gorgeous, and her wonderful experiences of ... we were all there with the experience of theatre, but with the experience of some journey that...

VC: But it was always theatre.

PDU: ... we had all gone, and always we brought our bits to the campfire. You know, all our little ox wagons came into the Laager, and we had this big ? and we would swap stories. It was the purest concept, I think. It goes back to all the purest concepts of the original Brecht Ensemble.

VC: And we didn't even know.

PDU: Because we didn't take ourselves seriously, otherwise we would have destroyed it.

VC: Imagine if we became the Brecht Ensemble.

PDU: We were just doing our jobs. The Space was like that too um... and, it was you know, people just keep on saying, "I wish we had another Space Theatre" I said, "You can't have another Space Theatre."

VC: There's no such thing.

PDU: I mean the closest now is a little thing called Alexander Bar.

VC: I believe it's nice.

PDU: It seats thirty-five people, and a little stage. And the kids are coming with their stuff and they are vomiting their stuff there. And some of it is absolute crap but it's there. It's live and it's, and the kids enjoy it. They sit there with the shorthand that I don't have. You know, the kids, the kids don't have any, any, you know, to, exposition. It's like (clicks his fingers) you know one, two, three, boom, boom boom, klaar. No it's just I mean, I just think yo what a fantastic alphabet I was given, and that's how I can do everything, you know. I was trained as a stage manager. Rosalie [van der Gucht] said you not an actor and I was stage manager. Thank you very much for the greatest background that I could wish for, coz I can do anything. I run my business. I have been unemployed since 1975. I am my own job. I'm in charge of everything I do. Um... I do not have to listen to any advice anymore because usually advice is very questionable.

VC: And you wonder why.

PDU: The mistakes I've made in my life, in my work, all go back to advice that I took that I shouldn't have listened to. We had no confidence from that point of view.

VC: Barney also had no confidence and he would listen to...

PDU: They'd come with, you know...

VC: Theories.

PDU: "And nee man jy moet, you must, who do you think you are?"

VC: And Barney would just get twisted.

PDU: Like bloody Michael Venables. "Oh this Pieter Dirk Uys, sick of his voice." When you could just go on and do something.

VC: Shit on Barney. All the time. Every crit.

PDU: Awful man, awful.

VC: Coz I've been doing the archives, trying to fix them and I see there's...

PDU: Shocking to see what they wrote. I also did that.

VC: Horrifying.

PDU: Because to get my archives together and first of all I thought...

VC: How dare they?

PDU: Who are you? I can't even remember your face. You did nothing. Look what you did.

VC: Terrible, terrible things.

PDU: I remember Garth Verdal, do you remember him?

VC: I do.

PDU: Who said to me once at the Space, at a party. They always elbowed their way into those things.

VC: That's what they wanted was the drinks.

PDU: Love it, when you have a new play. He said "I just so look forward and I can kill it." And he did, he came in and massacred the work. Even put it on page one. The review would be on the arts page, but on page one he had a block "Pieter Dirk Uys lays an egg."

VC: I read a couple of Barney's ones.

PDU: APPASSIONATA, with Tessie on the piano. Wonderful, with the piano, beautiful piano at the Market.

VC: It's still there.

PDU: Still there.

VC: Yes believe it or not.

PDU: Mm, mm.

VC: After all that, it's still there. But with Barney, someone like Michael Venables would do, Robert Grieg also – terrible, disgusting don't know what he's doing da da da da. Doesn't fit into anything about theatre. Review at the end of the year of all the shows – great step for theatre. Cincinnati or...

PDU: Oooh.

VC: What?

PDU: Assholes.

VC: And now it's all there.

PDU: Yes.

VC: Sitting there and you think – oh my God.

PDU: Ja, but you see I'm also glad that in, in the world on internet we building websites. We can also censor. We can actually say, we can put in what works.

VC: Exactly, everybody else does it.

PDU: I'm not going to put in bad reviews and things. I've done a, a website for Dawie.

VC: That's fantastic.

PDU: Coz there was nothing. And it's dawiemalan.co.za

VC: I loved Dawie. I loved him so much.

PDU: Vicious things that people said about him. And I just thought, fuck I'm not going to put that in.

VC: We did EXIT THE KING remember.

PDU: Yes I do. That was his great bête noir huh. EXIT THE KING, his thing, Ionesco, just ja.

VC: Met Brums [Brumilde van Rensburg].

PDU: Dramaties, ne ha ha. They did it also at St Georges Cathedral with Bill Curry. The trouble is, St Georges Cathedral, the echo killed you. Wa wa...

VC: Ooh.

PDU: Oooh ooh you know.

VC: At least we...

PDU: It was a wonderful moment.

VC: Ah Dawie was brilliant.

PDU: Mm.

VC: So brilliant.

PDU: Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely.

VC: But so many, just came, did their thing.

PDU: But they all sort of, all that energy made it, just because a sort of a...

VC: It spread.

PDU: ... a sort of a cloud of brilliance, like you store things on clouds now.

VC: Ja.

PDU: It was the cloud of brilliance. Just...

VC: And then a Black Sun would happen.

PDU: Black Sun and 54(58) upstairs. Jamesons.

VC: Yes and all because the Market was there.

PDU: Mm.

VC: I think.

PDU: Ja.

VC: Ja.

PDU: Um, yes and then of course we all started our own little companies. I had the Circle and that moved around and then touring around with banned plays. And then of course suddenly it all changed,. The democracy was here. And then suddenly the Market changed.

VC: Ja.

PDU: Because we were legal and because suddenly...

VC: What do you write about now?

PDU: That's not the issue.

VC: But at that time...

PDU: I mean um... I mean I just, well I mean Evita was there. I just gave it to her.

VC: Fantastic ja.

PDU: Then money came in and I think money is the absolute Ebola of creativity in this country, because suddenly as now, they have got enough money to pay their salaries so they don't bother to sell a ticket.

VC: But also, like what's happened at the Market. They've been waiting for Lottery.

PDU: Yes.

VC: So there's nothing on at the Market...

PDU: They should be fired. Don't wait for- it's unbelievable. But you know I have a play, a new play I'm doing at Grahamstown. And this is just between us. I don't want to skinner about things.

VC: No we won't, especially on here.

PDU: Called AFRICAN TIMES. Which, the first person I sent it to after I finished writing the first draft was James. This was two years ago. I said, "James, I've already penciled in five weeks, eight months from now." He never read it. He never reacted. I have gone back to them. Yes, fantastic, fantastic. I was there last year with that ghastly season, of no audience because they have no audiences. Fantasy because

nobody comes there. Um... six months have passed. Last week I get a message. Please I want to talk to you about AFRICAN TIMES.

VC: James?

PDU: Mm so I spoke to Tshiamo (Mokgadi) who I like very much. She's a nice woman. I like her. She's very solid, and stressed. And I said to her, "Darling you know I've been waiting for James to phone me after five, six months. It's no longer available for you, here. I'm not going to do it here. I've made other arrangements," which is a huge shame. It's, it should be there.

VC: It's perfect for the Market.

PDU: It should have been up in the Upstairs Theatre where GOD'S FORGOTTEN was on in 1975. Now it's AFRICAN TIMES in 2015. It's, it's a marriage of madness after all.

VC: Oh what a shame.

PDU: Ja, it's a terrible shame, it really is a terrible shame (they laugh). Have you got everything darling?

VC: I think so.

PDU: You can always send me a question and I'll give you an, you know.

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