

1 M: ...involved, the plays you were in, the detail of the plays you were in, your
2 relation with the other artists [inaudible 00:07] why you did what you did,
3 the impact it had, a little bit about [inaudible 00:14] would be quite
4 interesting, it helps us connect [inaudible 00:17].
5
6 I: The dynamic of the collective, how that worked, and bits about your
7 impressions of the building, and about why it became a theatre as well,
8 you were talking about. So, yeah.
9
10 MI: Yeah. Okay.
11
12 M: You're welcome to [voices overlap 00:33], so...
13
14 I: Okay. So hello, good afternoon.
15
16 MI: Hi.
17
18 I: So could you just tell me your name, and spell it?
19
20 MI: And spell it. Right. The name is Michael Irving, and it's spelled M-I-C-H-A-
21 E-L and I-R-V-I-N-G.
22
23 I: That's cool. Thank you. So can you tell us about how you've been
24 involved with Half Moon?
25
26 MI: Yes. Well, basically I was at school with an actor, at drama school with an
27 actor called Maurice Colbourne, and we left, we went our various ways; I
28 was doing some Shakespeare plays up at the Edinburgh Festival, and
29 Maurice rang me and said that he'd spotted this synagogue that would
30 make a good place to live. So we moved into the synagogue, we were
31 renting the synagogue from the Federation of Synagogues in Brick Lane,
32 and we converted the balcony – both sides of the balcony – one side was
33 for Maurice, one side was for me, to have as our rooms, and we were
34 going to use the main hall of the synagogue as a sitting room, a very
35 grand sitting room, with a palm tree, we were intending, because there
36 was a up-at-the-top skylight, a dome, glass dome, which would have
37 made a rather nice conservatory kind of sitting room.
38
39 So we started working on our rooms, we converted our rooms, and then
40 we decided that it would be rather silly to have such a huge grand sitting
41 room and what a good theatre it would make.
42
43 And I had decided that I would like to have a theatre that was completely
44 adaptable insofar as that one could convert it, the space, into whatever
45 play that one was doing, completely rather than just have a set that stood
46 at the end of the room. So we converted it, and we put seating in, rostra
47 and so on that could be moved around; and we did our first play, we set a
48 date, and we met up with a fellow called Guy Sprung who had been in
49 Germany attending some rehearsals of some Brecht plays. And another
50 young student called Jeffrey Hooper joined us and we put on In the Jungle

51 of the Cities. And that was reasonably successful, there was a certain
52 amount of controversy because it was a German play in a Jewish
53 synagogue and a certain fuss was made by the local papers, and the
54 Federation of Synagogues got a bit upset; but we carried on, we ignored
55 it, we just carried on and produced quite a few plays during the first year.
56

57 The interesting thing about it was the fact that one could, because of the
58 space one could convert it completely into an interior environment, so for
59 instance we did a play based on a comic strip called Dan Dare, which was
60 a comic called The Eagle used to have it as its main story; and we
61 converted the inside of the synagogue into a space ship, and we had
62 some lighting effects up top where the dome was, so that when the
63 audience came in and took their seats there was a countdown happening
64 which actually became quite tense as you got to 20, 19, 17...18, 17, 16,
65 and then ten, nine, eight... And then we had a friend who had got
66 something called quadraphonic sound – quite new at that time – and that
67 started this roar like an engine going off; and then an electric door went
68 down at the entrance to the theatre so that everybody felt like, oh, my
69 God, we're inside; and then the theatre started to shake, and then stars
70 started to whizz past up above. So you have this completely inclusive
71 environment. And that worked extremely well, and people loved it.
72

73 [05:26]

74
75 And we did another play, called Female Transport, where we converted
76 the inside of the theatre in – whoops – into a...the whole of a ship, which
77 was taking women prisoners to Australia; and again very successful, and
78 very inclusive, and it added to the experience, the theatrical experience
79 for the audience.
80

81 What else do you want to know? I mean...

82
83 I: Can you describe In the Jungle of the Cities a little bit? That first...

84
85 MI: In the Jungle of the Cities. Well, for that we had a boxing ring, and we
86 treated it as a contest, the play as a contest, and the audience had a...the
87 rather crude, I realised when I looked at...looked at the programme
88 recently, just a typed piece of paper had a scoreboard on it, and the
89 audience were invited to actually to score the two opponents, one of
90 whom was I think his name was Garga, and then another fellow called
91 Shlink; they were kind of in contest with each other, and the story was
92 told, typical Brecht kind of involvement.
93

94 And it, we played it out within a ring, so we built a boxing ring with ropes,
95 and the audience sat outside as if they were attending a boxing match;
96 another idea of how to use the space completely as an environment.
97

98 I: And how was that received as the first show?
99

100 MI: Well, it was in a new theatre, an unknown theatre; we did actually manage
101 to get one or two critics in, who enjoyed it enormously; and it kind of
102 launched us, I mean, you know, we didn't suddenly have packed
103 audiences for one or two shows, but word of mouth meant that within a
104 few months we were able to fill the theatre. Not very big, mind you, it was,
105 what, a hundred – hundred – I can't remember actually. Yeah.

106
107 I: And how did that collective of you four...?

108
109 MI: Well, the idea was – and I'd discussed this with Maurice previous to us
110 starting the theatre – the idea was that we would work with various
111 people. In the first production obviously it was people that we knew, there
112 were two or three people that were at drama school with me and Maurice,
113 and we would work with actors until we felt that we'd got a group of actors
114 that could work literally as a collective, literally all of us sharing the
115 responsibility for the plays, all of us having an equal say in what we were
116 going to do, and so on.

117
118 And in order to make that work, obviously you have to have done several
119 productions, you have to have worked with several actors and get to know
120 them and to realise who it was that was going to be able to work within
121 that environment. So we had a series of slots, my slot and Guy's slot, and
122 Jeffrey's slot, and Maurice's slot; and that was left to us to decide what we
123 were going to do in those slots; until such time as we had a company that
124 was literally operating.

125
126 Unfortunately it never arrived at the point where we felt that we had a
127 company of people, and it carried on being individual slots for quite some
128 time. But, you know, I mean that worked, that was fine. I guess really
129 maybe one actually got to the point where one realised that the idea of a
130 real democracy in the sense of, you know, when it comes to theatre, is
131 actually very difficult to achieve, and certainly we didn't achieve it. Yeah.

132
133 [09:51]

134
135 I: And so sometimes you were an actor, sometimes you...

136
137 MI: Sometimes I was an actor; pretty well always I was an actor, pretty well
138 always I pitched in for the biggest part – which is very actorish – except in
139 some slots obviously where, you know, the other actor in the company
140 was also pitching in for the biggest slot. No, I mean that sounds very
141 selfish, but no, I did a lot of acting, and a lot of directing, a little bit of
142 writing.

143
144 I: Yes?

145
146 MI: Yeah.

147
148 I: What were the shows that you wrote?
149

150 MI: Dan Dare. With permission of The Eagle comic, I wrote Dan Dare. And I
151 participated in the writing of several shows that were put together
152 collectively; like Will Wat, if not, What Will, which was about Wat Tyler.
153

154 I: And how did that collective process work...?

155
156 MI: Well, basically, you know, we took a subject, and we wanted to do
157 something that was, you know, had some connection with the local area;
158 the Peasants' Revolt, which ended up in this part of London. And we
159 decided that we would all do some research, we'd all come in with little
160 bits of research that we had done, and come up with suggestions about,
161 oh, we could do a scene where this happens, we could do another scene
162 where that happens, and then slowly we decided who was going to be
163 which character; which is why I ended up as Wat Tyler. But it was truly a
164 collective effort, except of course in the end when it comes to the line
165 that's got to be said, you need a writer. We had a writer, Steve Gooch.
166

167 And it was a very successful...I think we published it, I think it's actually in
168 existence somewhere. Yeah. Along with, what else was published,
169 several plays were published I think; Female Transport. In fact over the
170 years since, particularly when I've been teaching, several times actresses
171 have come with a piece when I've said, you need to bring me a piece to
172 work on; and lo and behold the number of actresses that turn up with a
173 speech from Female Transport, quite extraordinary. Yeah.
174

175 I: There's something special about the play?

176
177 MI: I think because it's all females, apart from the captain of the ship and one
178 or two of the guards – very small parts – it's all lovely female parts
179 throughout the play. Yeah.
180

181 I: So you talked a little bit about making a show that was about local issues;
182 how did you sort of, as a collective and in your individual [voices overlap
183 12:49]...
184

185 MI: We were always [voices overlap 12:50] we were always looking for local
186 issues, or plays, existing plays that somehow were kind of relevant to the
187 area that we were living in. So you're going to ask me to quote which
188 plays and what their relevance was, and I'm going to struggle, I would
189 have to think that through; but certainly we did plays about local schools,
190 and Stand Up and Follow Me (NB actually called Fall IN and Follow Me), I
191 think it was called; this is a long time ago, this is, what, 45, 50 years ago.
192 And when we did a play the angle was always, for instance, you know,
193 there was a writer called Andy Smith who I liked working with, who I think
194 was actually a very good writer – and I'd really quite like to know what
195 happened to him – but he wrote a play called Sawdust Caesar, which was
196 based on, again a simple thing, it was a children's show, but good to
197 watch as an adult, and it was based on the Aladdin story, and it had a
198 political angle to it, you know, we had the genies were...the genie of the
199 lamp, there were two genies of the lamp and they were trades unionists,

200 and so we were able to discuss and touch on certain issues that were
201 affecting certainly the unions at that time, and so on.

202
203 So, you know, you just take a story and then you twist it, or colour it to
204 reflect issues of that area or that time. Yeah.

205
206 I: And who were the audiences that came?

207
208 MI: The audiences were pretty varied at the beginning, but then the inevitable
209 thing happened which is that it became fashionable, became successful,
210 and then people start arriving from all over London, until you end up with
211 pretty well an audience that you would find in a theatre somewhere,
212 somewhere else in London; it's a quite difficult thing to control. I mean
213 how can you, you can't stand at the door and say, I'm sorry but where do
214 you live. So it slowly...

215
216 [15:25]

217
218 And I, after I think it was about two, three years, I decided that I'd had
219 enough and I was going to go off and do some other theatre work. And I
220 think that probably that became more and more so, that the more
221 successful the theatre became the more it was about a theatregoing
222 audience, maybe a theatregoing audience that was more interested in
223 slightly less conventional things, but nevertheless it wasn't the local
224 population any more.

225
226 And that's a shame, but that is, that's a difficulty that one is always going
227 to face, getting... And particularly getting people... I mean what was good
228 about the early years of the Half Moon was the fact that because it was a
229 kind of strange thing to be happening in that area at that time, we did get
230 a lot of local people coming in and saying, oh, this is interesting; and
231 particularly children, but I mean that was we got a lot of young people
232 coming into the...and when I say young, I mean literally sort of ten, 12,
233 you know, at an age where they could be out on their own but at the same
234 time...and that was actually probably the more exciting part of it really;
235 and it was a shame when that, you know, the bookings excluded people I
236 guess really in the end.

237
238 I don't know what you do about that, I wonder whether, you know, I mean
239 it's the same problem now, what do you do; what do you do.

240
241 I: What was your relationship like with the local community? Because you
242 were a resident as well as a [voices overlap 17:19]...

243
244 MI: Yeah. Yeah, well, I mean I had been living in the area for several years,
245 and indeed now I've spent probably the majority of my life living in the
246 area; I like it, I like the area, and I like the fact that it's incredibly di... I
247 mean it's even more diverse now than it was then. And when we...it
248 started, the Half Moon, on one side we had a Jewish barber, and literally,
249 you know, right up against us; and on the other side there was a tailor;

250 and they both retired, which was probably a mistake because they both
251 died fairly quickly after having retired, and I think that's what happens to
252 people if they stop working. And then in came a Bangladeshi leather
253 goods person on one side, and on the other side there was a little bit of a
254 sweat shop situation arose, which we kind of tried to expose; I noticed that
255 there were children in there, you know, young children working away for
256 hours on end. So we managed to actually sort of do something about that.

257
258 And the population started to change, we had some Nigerians over the
259 road. The fellow that we used to call Groucho, who had the local shop,
260 was still there for quite a long time. Yeah, it was nice, it was nice. And, as
261 I say, now, you know, I live and still live in the area, at the other end of
262 Brick Lane, and it's even more diverse now, even more diverse; a little bit
263 moneyed, I have to say. But I could go out from where I live now and I
264 could probably have a meal from pretty well every country in the world,
265 within five minutes of walking; amazing. Amazing place.

266
267 I: Could you describe the actual theatre building and the way you made it
268 into...

269
270 MI: The theatre building. Well, I mean the theatre building, I mean it was a
271 typical small synagogue that had been built behind a house, so in other
272 words the house had existed and what they had done is they had taken
273 out the ground floor which then became the foyer, and in the yard behind
274 they had built a hall, a synagogue, they'd roofed it over, put a glass dome
275 on it, and that was the synagogue.

276
277 [20:02]

278
279 And there were several of those around the East End at the time, and in
280 fact there are still a couple of them that still exist, that have been
281 preserved. And so you had a balcony, two balconies, one on either side,
282 which apparently was where the women used to have to be during the
283 service, and then a nice flat area with some pillars holding up the balcony.
284 And it kind of adapted rather well to certain environments within.

285
286 I have to admit that I personally, after the Half Moon, always had an
287 ambition to...what it did was it formed in my mind what I thought would be
288 an ideal theatre space. And the ideal theatre space that I always had my
289 eye on was in Camden, which was a large factory where you could have
290 three floors, a floor below the theatre space, a floor above the theatre
291 space, and lots of space on either side; so you actually basically had a
292 cube and you could enter that cube from any direction, below, above,
293 sideways, backwards, forwards, and you had an audience around that
294 cube that could be moved according to how you wanted to do the play.

295
296 So the Half Moon was just the beginnings of realising that having a solid
297 floor stopped you from certain magic things; because I'd really like the
298 idea of magic in a theatre, and that was why I was always with my

299 productions just trying to think up new ways of just making the audience
300 go, ooh, wow, this is amazing.

301
302 So I did a play called Heroes Of The Iceberg Hotel, at the Half Moon, the
303 original, and basically what we did was we made a huge book out of
304 brown paper stuck together, painted the seams on the book and had the
305 book shut at the beginning of the production, so when the audience came
306 in all they saw was a big book, shut. Then the actors were able to slip in
307 between the pages, and when the play starts the book opens, the cover
308 goes right across the stage and there's the scene painted on the pages of
309 the book; and when each scene, a page sweeps across the stage and the
310 actors are already in there and just playing the scene: perfect.

311
312 For the dragon we had a dragon that was basically painted onto a large
313 piece of white cloth at the back of the auditorium, and at a certain point
314 when this dragon is supposed to take off and fly over the village I would
315 lean out of a window and pull a piece of cord and that would release some
316 weights which would fall from way up on the top of the roof down by the
317 side of the building, which would run some ropes over some pulleys, and
318 this dragon would suddenly appear above you, bong, a huge dragon up at
319 the top of the theatre, and then, bumph, it would disappear as if flying out
320 of the roof – I loved that sort of stuff – and there were various other things
321 that happened in that production, and other productions. That was what I
322 got off on with the theatre; and I think that's what the audience, those
323 early audiences, really enjoyed was the fact that there were all these
324 magic things happening in the theatre space.

325
326 I: Did you work with other lighting designers and set designers?

327
328 MI: Yeah, if I possibly could, but I mean we didn't have enough resources,
329 everything was self devised, basically. There was a fellow called Simon
330 Jeffes, who eventually ended up starting a thing called The Penguin Café,
331 he had a group called Penguin Café, which I think is now quite sort of
332 famous and has become a classic; but in those days he was just
333 experimenting. So he used to experiment with sound, he was the one that
334 did the quadraphonic sound and used to do some pretty terrific sound
335 effects.

336
337 [25:02]

338
339 I: Did you have a vision for Half Moon when you started it? Or was it more a
340 sort of desire to make...

341
342 MI: Did I have a vision? I mean I was a little bit too young for visions really; or
343 maybe not, I mean maybe one does... I had a vision in the sense that I
344 had a vision of what I thought was truly theatrical and exciting, and I felt
345 that I knew how you created an atmosphere within a space, within a
346 theatre, that made people totally concentrated, made people get goose
347 bumps; and it was probably a mistaken conviction on my part that I had
348 the answer, but I certainly did. Yeah. And I felt that one shouldn't, you

349 know, there wasn't 'the right way' to do something, there wasn't 'the right
350 thing' to be doing in a theatre; I felt that you couldn't make judgements
351 about what was a good play and what was a bad play, any play, any work,
352 as far as I was concerned, would be successful and important and
353 effective if what you did with it on the night was top quality.

354
355 What I always felt I wanted to go for was I wanted to create a theatre –
356 and I talked to Maurice obviously about this – and obviously Guy, and
357 Jeffrey eventually – I wanted to have what happens on the stage on the
358 night as being the most, the top of the list, that is the most important thing
359 that happens. Anything else to do with it – obviously I'd worked in other
360 theatres and by then I had already done several – and I realised that there
361 was an awful lot of stuff that went on apart from what was happening on
362 the stage, that seemed to be considered to be more important. And this is
363 literally in a simple sense, yes it's important to have advertising, yes it's
364 important to have a director and all the rest of it, but actually in the end an
365 audience is only going to get excited and come back if what happens on
366 the night; and if you don't concentrate on that, if you have just one night,
367 or two nights, where it isn't top class, it's going to be a real handicap. So
368 that was what I was always pushing for, and idealism. Yeah.

369
370 I: And those ideals, were they different? How did all four of you...what were
371 all your different visions and ideas for the theatre?

372
373 MI: Well, if you're talking about the difference between us I guess Maurice
374 Colbourne was I suppose just more interested in classical theatre, almost
375 exclusively interested in classical theatre. Guy was I think quite bent on
376 political theatre. I was neither, as far as I was concerned a good play had
377 politics and the politics would be a natural part of the story that you were
378 telling rather than it being any kind of doctrinaire politics, so rather than it
379 being...you know, I only do a play if it is left wing, always struck me as a
380 bit silly because really good plays, and the really good plays that have
381 come to us through the centuries and survive, are because they are very
382 political, they have the politics of being a human being living in this world
383 trying to make sense of it, and how we relate with each other is politics.
384 To say that there is a line of politics that somehow is...got the answer, is
385 as far as I'm concerned, nonsense, always was. So there was a certain
386 amount of conflict on that front; healthy though, fine, it's good for people to
387 have different ideas.

388
389 I: What were Jeffrey's ideas?

390
391 [29:55]

392
393 MI: Jeffrey? I don't know. I don't know. Jeffrey came up with plays, and I liked
394 the plays, and so we did them. Yeah.

395
396 I: So you mentioned obviously that you left; and I know that you did come
397 back at...

398

399 MI: Yeah, I did come back a little later, I mean I came back in the sense that
400 Rob Walker was running the theatre later – I'd met Rob while I was doing
401 the Half Moon – and he asked me to come back and redo a play that they
402 had done at the Half Moon, a play called Cool Million which was based on
403 a novel – what was the author of Cool Million? I've forgotten his name
404 now – anyhow, so it was revived and I worked with Rob Walker, and we
405 took the play all the way round Holland; which was an interesting
406 experience I must say, seeing the kind of commitment that the Dutch had
407 made to their fringe theatres, their small theatres. There was a theatre in
408 Holland called Mickery, in Amsterdam, and we did it there, we started
409 there and then went on tour with it. But on the tour you had well-kitted,
410 well-financed small theatres all over Holland; so that was a bit of an eye
411 opener, we certainly didn't have that in London, in England.

412
413 But on the other hand in England of course at that time we still had a
414 really good system of repertory theatres, theatres in a lot of towns, that
415 were surviving and producing plays; so that anybody coming out of drama
416 school at that time could find work pretty well, they could do a season
417 somewhere in some rep somewhere, and learn the business.
418 Unfortunately that's to a large extent disappeared, a lot of theatres have
419 closed down over the years since then, which I think probably in the end
420 will be detrimental to the standard of acting; probably, maybe not, who
421 knows. And also whether it's relevant to television acting and film acting is
422 debatable.

423
424 I: And did you see anything at the next home of Half Moon, in Mile End?

425
426 MI: No, I didn't. I went and saw a couple of shows but I never did any more
427 work with the Half Moon I'm afraid.

428
429 I: Do you remember what you saw?

430
431 MI: Yes, I went to see a famous thing that they did...

432
433 I: Sink The Belgrano?

434
435 MI: No. Did they do Sink The Belgrano? Did they indeed? Oh, right. No,
436 earlier than that.

437
438 I: Dracula?

439
440 MI: No, didn't see Dracula.

441
442 I: [Inaudible 33:21]?

443
444 MI: No. Was that at the new Half Moon? Right. I thought that was at the old
445 Half Moon, I thought that was in...thing; but I'm sure you must know it
446 better than me. No, I'm thinking of the one about the workers, the
447 painters, they're all painting and...

448

449 M: Ragged Trousers?
450
451 I: The Ragged Trousered...
452
453 MI: The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist. Yeah. Absolutely. I saw that, in the
454 new Half Moon before it went into the new, new Half Moon. It was quite
455 impressive actually. But I was living in Sheffield so I didn't get much time
456 to... And I was doing plays all over the north of England.
457
458 I: What did that feel like, to see where your small theatre had gone to?
459
460 MI: I was kind of removed really, I mean it didn't seem to be much to do with
461 what I was doing at the time that I was doing it.
462
463 I: Are there any other plays from your era of Half Moon that you'd like to talk
464 about?
465
466 MI: Probably. Very probably. No, nothing springs to mind. There was a whole
467 series of plays, we did them, and the Half Moon was what it was. It was
468 good. I'm very pleased that the Half Moon has moved on from there, and
469 that just a remnant of it managed to splinter off; and I'm really pleased that
470 it's young people's theatre, I have to say.
471 [35:31]
472
473 I: What do you think your time at Half Moon, what impact did that have?
474
475 MI: On me?
476
477 I: Yes.
478
479 MI: On me. Well, it probably was fairly detrimental actually, but only on a
480 personal level and therefore it's not really very relevant to the general...
481 My agent at the time said, do not do the Half Moon; because at the time I
482 was supposedly going to be a big film actor. And I decided I didn't want to
483 do that, I wanted to have control over my...I got fed up with getting in and
484 out of chauffeur-driven cars and what have you, and then never finishing
485 the films anyhow because the finance has collapsed. And so that's why I
486 was interested in carrying on with doing the Half Moon. And since then,
487 basically, because of the experience of having that freedom, the
488 experience of that creativity that occurred during those early days at the
489 Half Moon I have always been more interested in doing stuff that was
490 more innovative or small scale, not the big theatre. I've had obviously to
491 earn a living, work in the big theatres, certainly all the repertory theatres
492 and what have you, but yeah, I enjoy that.
493
494 Last year I did a play – do you really want to know about what I'm doing?
495 – last year, or it might have been the year before, I did a play with a
496 company called Punch Drunk, and they tend to do site specific stuff; and
497 there was a festival in Aldeburgh for Benjamin Britten, and they were
498 going to do a production on the beach of Peter Grimes; and so they had

499 got together a little experience for the audience which basically meant that
500 each member of the audience went and sat in a deck chair on the beach,
501 one at a time, every ten minutes, just one member of the audience sat in a
502 deck chair; and they put a set of earphones on and they heard my voice
503 coming in saying, hello – with a lovely Suffolk accent – I’m going to take
504 you on a little journey now; and so they were invited to get up and they
505 went to various places all the way round Aldeburgh, so they’d go into a
506 hut, a fisherman’s hut, and something would happen in that hut, and then
507 they went on to a pub, and something would happen in the pub, and then
508 they went on to a garage, something would happen in the garage. And
509 then they slowly made their way all the way round Aldeburgh until
510 eventually they ended up out on the salt marshes and had an experience
511 that some of them found absolutely overwhelming, were in tears, crying.
512 And that to me was just perfect.

513
514 So I had the experience of being in a garage and frightening the life out of
515 50 people per day, one at a time; and that was good, I enjoyed that.

516
517 I: Do you have a strong memory like that from Half Moon [voices overlap
518 39:13]?

519
520 MI: Yeah. Absolutely. There were lots of moments at the Half Moon that I felt
521 were on a similar level. Yeah, they were exciting, and I knew that the
522 audience was with us totally. And I mean that’s happened in other
523 theatres as well, but that kind of environment at the early Half Moon
524 certainly added, leant itself to that.

525
526 [39:38]
527
528 I expect you’ve heard about the time when we were doing – I can’t
529 remember which show it was – but it was when one of the blackouts,
530 London blackouts, happened, and we had to drive a Mini into the foyer of
531 the Half Moon and shine the headlights onto the stage in order to carry on
532 with the show. It’s little things like that that audiences remember.

533
534 I: What show was that?

535
536 MI: I can’t remember which show it was, but it was good. And I have met
537 people since who have said, do you know, I remember when they had to
538 drive a Mini into the foyer. Yeah.

539
540 I: One of those urban legends.

541
542 MI: Yeah.

543
544 I: And you mentioned a little bit about the critics who came in the first few
545 shows. What was the...

546
547 MI: Yeah. The critics were excellent. The critics were actually very supportive,
548 from the very beginning the critics really enjoyed the experience and

549 thought that it was a successful venue and the work we were doing was
550 good. That's my memory of it.

551

552 I: And then you talked a little bit about obviously that we're a young people's
553 theatre now, and you talked about some moments where young people
554 came to see shows. There were some shows that were just for young
555 people, is that right, during your time?

556

557 MI: Yeah, there were. We always did a Christmas show. It's a tradition. It
558 wasn't throughout the year, it wasn't a young people's theatre. We did
559 actually at one point try to do some stuff out in the community; Andy
560 Smith, who wrote several of the plays that I did, also put together a kind of
561 a comedic version of Punch And Judy, with us being the puppets; and we
562 went out to various housing estates and set up a little puppet thing and did
563 the show. We did it twice, and that was fine; but on the third time the
564 children completely overwhelmed us, we ended up with about 50 children
565 on stage, all throwing things and attacking the actors; and so we beat a
566 hasty retreat, we were seen still running to get onto the back of the van as
567 bottles and tins were hurled at us as we disappeared off the estate. So we
568 kind of felt that that was a little bit too dodgy for the actors, particularly the
569 actresses were a little bit less committed to the idea of fighting their way
570 through hordes of East End kids at that time. That was probably the
571 beginnings of children's theatre with the Half Moon actually, apart from the
572 fact that we did Dan Dare and Sawdust Caesar, and what have you,
573 particularly for children.

574

575 I: And are there any other sort of people or activities that the Half Moon was
576 doing that you want to talk to us about?

577

578 MI: No, not that I can think of. No.

579

580 I: What will be your resounding memory?

581

582 MI: Of the Half Moon? Well, I think I covered it, previous to now; I mean it was
583 a very exciting and very committed...and there was no financial reward or
584 anything else, one was doing it purely for the pleasure of theatre, the
585 commitment to theatre as a form, and particularly to that particular space
586 and in that particular area.

587

588 I: Do you think it was a product of its time as well?

589

590 MI: I think it very much was. Yeah. I think that era, that was a sort of a
591 blossoming of fringe theatre at that time, in London, I don't know about
592 elsewhere, but certainly in London, there were quite a few companies
593 starting up and flourishing. It was a good time. Good time. But then of
594 course it was almost the '60s, just after the '60s, yeah. The '60s was an
595 interesting period, you know, I mean the '60s that I had my adolescence
596 through seemed to be like a continuous party really. A much
597 underestimated time, and a much derided time; unfortunately as a result
598 of political developments later, in the late '70s and '80s, there was a lot of

599 putting down of the idealism of the '60s. It was an idealistic time, but I
600 don't think that that idealism was misplaced at all, I think it's been
601 misrepresented since and described as unrealistic. I think it was realistic.
602 The unfortunate thing was that there was this sort of, I think probably an
603 accident of history, change of government and a change of attitude on the
604 part of those people that were in charge of our finances as a country, and
605 it became a rather selfish society after that. It was a very generous society
606 through the '60s and early '70s, and then it became rather selfish and
607 rather bound up in making money and displaying it.

608
609 I: And was it hard financially at the Half Moon in those early works?
610

611 MI: Didn't seem so. I mean one had no money. Well, I mean basically I got
612 dole, I took what came my way. The idea was to actually really literally,
613 and honestly, share out the money that came in through the box office;
614 but we set a target of only charging 50p a ticket – 50p a ticket – well, it
615 must have been worth more than it is now, but it didn't make enough
616 money to... I had done film, some film work, I had a reserve of money, so
617 I was okay really. Maurice then did some television. Yeah, one made
618 money where one could.

619
620 I: But was that important to you to only charge 50p?
621

622 MI: Yeah, it was. Yeah. It was important to me, very much so; I wanted there
623 to be no barrier to the people, the local people coming into the theatre.
624 And if you started charging ridiculous theatre prices then that wouldn't
625 have happened.

626
627 I: Anything else that you want to talk about?
628

629 MI: No.
630

631 I: No.
632

633 MI: I've talked enough.
634

635 I: Yeah. I thought you felt like that.
636

637 MI: Yeah.
638

639 I: So, yeah, thank you so much for that, that was really nice to hear your
640 stories and your memories. Does it feel nice to remember, or does it feel a
641 bit...?
642

643 MI: It's very interesting. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I quite like it. Yeah. I
644 shall go back and think about it now. Oh, I shall sit in my rocking chair.
645

646 I: And dream about some of those magical moments of things that had
647 happened.
648

649 MI: Yes, indeed. Yeah.
650
651 I: Well, thank you so much for giving your time this afternoon, it was brilliant.
652
653 MI: Pleasure.
654
655 I: Yeah, really nice to hear about all of that, wasn't it?
656
657 M: Mmm.
658
659 I: Yeah. [Inaudible 48:04] a massive book [voices overlap 48:06]...
660
661 MI: I've felt. I've felt [voices overlap 48:06]...
662
663 I: ...as well as the next few theatre shows [voices overlap 48:08]...
664
665 M: That's a nice idea.
666
667 I: Yeah, I knew you were...I knew you [voices overlap 48:10]...
668
669 M: I've tried...I've done once [voices overlap 48:11].
670
671 MI: You what?
672
673 M: With the book opening, I'm doing the backdrop. So something must have
674 ripped that off [inaudible 48:18] but I can't remember what the show was.
675
676 I: Yeah.
677
678 MI: Oh really? You've seen it happen? Oh, right.
679
680 M: Yeah, I've seen it, I've seen it [inaudible 48:23]. Yeah.
681
682 MI: Right.
683
684 M: And actually I just can't remember...
685
686 **End of transcript**