File name: Chris Elwell
Length: 111.28

CE: Yeah, my name is Chris Elwell, and my first name is C-H-R-I-S, and my surname is E-L-W-E-double L.

I: Can you tell us about how and why you came to be involved with Half Moon?

CE: Well, I came here in 1997, so I suppose it would be interesting to get a little bit thoughts on the route that I took to that, because previously I'd been the head of education and community both for English National Ballet and the Royal Shakespeare Company; and I suppose the reason why this job became attractive to me was because it sort of provided a space – well, I believed – that would fuse together my passion for what would now be called applied theatre practice within an arts education context, but 19 years ago it was probably outreach in education; it's different sorts of words.

And I suppose I felt that there were very few spaces in the country, if not the only space in the country, I can't think of many at the time, that actually offered that real dual fusion of professional theatre work and participatory activity, and how I felt passionate about the two should be interlocking in some ways. Because just prior to coming I was a lecturer at the Central School of Speech and Drama and I used to run an undergraduate course in drama and applied theatre and MA courses there as well.

And in fact that's how I got to know the Half Moon a little bit in the last minute when they started looking for a new director, because there had been a student on placement here and I'd been in to visit them, and they had been directing what I didn't know but what became their professional show, called Different Lands Different Stories; and if I'm really honest, it was a bit eye opening because it wasn't quite working very well, it seemed to me that the company hadn't really thought through necessarily where it was at. So I just thought it was a really good opportunity; I saw it as if it wasn't a TIE company it was a TYP company, and there's a distinct difference between the two, with retrospect, and clearly now; maybe at the time I didn't quite know how to articulate it but I would know that now is that the old TIE companies – and none of them really exists any more – they were dealing with didactic performance in theatre, very much like issue-based ideas, but the TYA companies, Theatre for Young Audience companies, like Half Moon, had a really strong tradition of creative stories, human stories, that okay, they were about issues, but they weren't just about issues.

And I think if you look around I felt that that sort of slightly more progressive, more modern take on work for young audiences is something I'd quite like to connect with. And I gave it six months; I said that in the interview, I remember that, and when I got home I told my partner, I said what I'd said, and she said, oh, my God, why did you say that; I said, because actually that's what I want to give it, because I knew that it was in

50 a lot of difficulty really, I suppose, and I felt that if I could do something
51 within six months it would be worth moving forward.
52
53 And you must remember, 1997 was also the beginning of the Blair
54 government and Labour coming into power, so in a strange way it was the
55 right moment also to get a job like this because we'd had a Conservative,
56 I guess right-wing politics and monetary frameworks for many, many
57 years, and inevitably when you bring in a new what would be a more left-
58 wing government – although you could argue that the government in '97
59 wasn't particularly left wing – but comparatively speaking there would be a
60 real re-emphasis and refocus on a community, upon engagement, upon
61 inclusion and so on, and I think for me I just saw that opportunity without
62 realising it in some way. So I guess that's sort of where what brought me
63 and why I came to be involved in the Half Moon; I guess I applied for the
64 job and got it. But, yeah, that was the context.
65
66 I: Okay. Thank you. So you became the director of the Half Moon in 1997;
67 can you tell us about your priorities in these early days?
68
69 CE: Well, yeah, I mean I guess initially my priority was to try to make it a bit
70 more solvent, because within days of arriving it became clear that sadly
71 the company hadn't been looking after the finances, and I know that that
72 isn't everything in life you do need a core sense of income coming into the
73 company that allows the organisation to survive.
74
75 But more important than that it was the relationship with the major
76 stakeholders like the Arts Council was – well, it wasn't called the Arts
77 Council then, it was called Greater London Arts, I think, or London Arts
78 Board, or something like that – we'd forgotten the relationship with them;
79 and in fact they had lost their core resource in a way. So my priority was
80 to try to rebuild that relationship.
81
82 [04:58]
83
84 But you could only do that if you actually looked around what you're doing,
85 and whenever you go into a new job, everyone does this, they actually
86 talk to the stakeholders, talk to the staff, talk to people coming in and out
87 of the building in this case; and it became very clear that the company
88 had, for all the wrong and right reasons, it had lost sight of its community.
89 It wasn't maximising at all what their big resource was, which was the
90 building, it was just literally a building, the staff were on the first floor, no
91 one was in the entrance to welcome anyone; and so the nature of just that
92 was to restructure and rethink about what the company could do.
93
94 It's really hard to say this, but on day three we reduced the staff from eight
95 to three, because there was just no money to…and then plus me, so
96 that's four of us; there was nine, and four. Which at the time seemed a bit
97 shocking I guess, but actually you have to start somewhere, you have to
98 build from what you've got, because if we hadn't have done that the

99 money would have run out, basically, and the company would have just
100 gone under.
101
102 But it was more to do with actually the type of people and the ambition of
103 the company and therefore my thoughts about what the company should
104 deliver; because there was some youth theatre going on but the youth
105 theatre was being done to, i.e. they were being taught skills and
106 performing, but no one was asking those young people about what they
107 wanted to do and where they were placed within that arena, if you like; the
108 emphasis was on what the tutors wanted to do rather than what was
109 appropriate for those young people to engage with and be challenged by
110 and excited by.
111
112 The relationship with the schools had completely disappeared because
113 what had happened is that they were still presenting plays that were very
114 much of a time that had now finished. There's been a fantastic series of
115 plays that were by Lin Coghlan in fact, brilliant plays, but they were
116 continuing to do those type of plays by the writers in a period when that
117 sort of topic, if you like, that sort of style was no longer relevant to the
118 schools.
119
120 The same applied with the show I talked about before, the Different Lands
121 Different Stories, was a sort of an attempt to do bilingualism in Sylheti and
122 English, but again that work had been pioneering and exciting at the time,
123 but by 1997 the schools necessarily didn't need that style of work; what
124 they needed was child-centred pieces of work that really enhanced and
125 developed the learning of those young people within the context of the
126 school [inaudible 07:49] curriculum [inaudible 07:50] but also about their
127 holistic experience, about who they were as young people within that
128 context, if you like.
129
130 And I sort of started to articulate, without perhaps being as clear as I
131 would be today, what I call the continuous loop whereby you think of a
132 circle and the work you produce sits within that circle, that professional
133 place, and to get to it you have to engage with audiences, those
134 audiences need to inform the type of activity you're doing to allow the
135 writers and the artists to challenge and change their practice, change the
136 type of stories they create, which they then share back to those audiences
137 who then inform that play again in a sort of an R&D scratchy way.
138
139 And then in turn when that play eventually comes out somewhere in the
140 circle, the audiences are given back a piece of work, and then that then
141 starts the continuous loop again, that actually those audiences then
142 respond to that piece of work, and the artists, new artists, come and see
143 what those young people, or women in the children's centres in the
144 borough, or homeless people, whatever it might be, how they respond to
145 their work, and then as a result new work comes out; so it's like a
146 continuing loop. It's a sort of a dialogue, if you like, and I felt that was
147 really, really important.
148

149 And I guess again that was the beginning of what we would call now
150 providing the gateway, so that the Half Moon needed to be a gateway
151 somewhere for where young people, communities, adults, whoever it
152 might be, felt they had a place to come to, it was a gateway into the arts, a
153 gateway into meeting other people, a gateway into being creative
154 themselves. And then what we need to do is find the pathways to which to
155 do that; and that would be through, yeah, your theatre, or schools work, or
156 giving them a performance to engage with in some way.
157
158 And then, importantly, which is probably not for that time but this is what I
159 was wanting to do in the long term was to make sure that our practice was
160 documented, that it would then have an impact on the greater ecology of
161 the sector around us.
162
163 [10:00]
164
165 So yeah, those were the priorities in the early days, a mishmash of artistic
166 passion, the importance of the young person in our case right in the
167 centre of that experience, and then looking for ways of trying to maximise
168 the potential of the company in terms of earning money, be it through the
169 building, through applying to resources, grants, touching sort of strands of
170 income that was coming in to address certain things. It's very well
171 because if you wanted to do a play about road safety or something there's
172 no reason why you can't do that if that brings in some money to the
173 company, as long as you have the integrity to make it a human play, a
174 story that's going to touch in effect the audiences who'd see it as a whole,
175 and it does mean to say that you're starting to tap into where the priorities
176 of the community may lie, I would say. Yes, I would say that was the
177 priorities in the very early days.
178
179 And there were a few of us, there was only so few of us, and actually I
180 literally my priority was to probably survive the day, I mean I would be
181 having to review and rehearse sort of youth theatre, or be part of the
182 youth theatre, I used to be going into schools, meeting loads of
183 stakeholders, literally bombing around the borough visiting people and
184 saying, hello, we're here, we're here, we're here; because I think people
185 had forgotten a little bit that what the Half Moon was, or could be, or
186 potentially could be, that's very important; and it's just about building
187 bridges really, so it's all about that; and then of finding the right product to
188 put on the stage as well.
189
190 I: Yeah. As you have indicated, your role oversees the operation of the
191 company, the participatory work in professional productions; can you
192 begin by telling us about the professional plays, starting with the
193 teenage/young adult work?
194
195 CE: Yeah. Well, that's a good place to start, because what I decided to do
196 quite early on was to start to focus the professional work in two ways: one
197 was absolutely for the families and what I call the under-sevens, under-
198 fives work, I'm sure which maybe we'll talk about later; and the other was

199 to look at the teenage or young adult work. That was really important
200 because actually our greatest resource is the young people that come
201 here as autonomous young people, as attenders; once you get to about
202 the age of 11, 12, 13 you make that choice yourself, you're not brought by
203 your parents, you're not brought your carers – you may be brought by
204 your school – but what you need to do is make sure that that experience
205 is a long-term experience, as a legacy to that school visit, that the young
206 people feel that they want to come back for the reasons that the work is
207 relevant, that the work is exciting and so on.
208
209 So when it came to the teenage work I thought it was really important to
210 do two things: one was to place writers into the places where young
211 people were, so by putting the writers in a school, by putting them in a
212 youth club, by putting them in a community centre in the case of the
213 [inaudible 12:54] they could then start to connect with the language of
214 those young people; I don't just mean language as in the words they say,
215 it's more the language of what they're thinking, that their literacy in terms
216 of their thought processes and so on and what have you.
217
218 And so some of the early plays, a play called, Yeah, Whatever! – which is
219 hard to say – that was a very simple piece by a lovely writer called
220 Ashmeed Sohoye, because he's spent time working on projects that we
221 called [inaudible 13:21] or scriptworks, basically they were writers in
222 residence and performance projects. So the idea was that the writer – and
223 indeed the directors and the creative team, the musicians and so on –
224 spent time creating a story, creating scripts, but at the same time the
225 young people themselves created and performed their own show.
226
227 So at the end of that process the young people had a lovely play to
228 present to their families and friends in their school environment, and it was
229 over eight weeks of after school or something like that, we also ended up
230 with a commission; so Yeah, Whatever! was a really simple but very
231 effective play about three young – well, young – 15 years olds, who are at
232 school and meet up and chat about what it is to be a young person in
233 Tower Hamlets in 1990…I think it was 1998, it could be 1999.
234
235 And that doesn't sound very radical now, but actually I don't think, up to
236 that point people were writing plays that were reflecting and mirroring the
237 worlds of those young people, in two ways: one was the authenticity of the
238 stories that they were therefore telling us through those encounters and
239 then how the writers translated that, and the musicians created
240 soundtracks and stuff that created the world of it, yeah, there was an
241 authenticity to that, and maybe the authenticity of the language, actually
242 they were using words and phrases that you would use if you were 15 or
243 14 years old.
244
245 [14:51]
246
247 But also they were seeing on the stage people who looked like them, so
248 you had an Asian girl, a black lad, a white boy, whatever it might be; so

249 you had the…you were mirroring the people that were actually watching
250 the show. That's really empowering actually because that doesn't always
251 happen.
252
253 And so they're messing around on a sofa in someone's house in their
254 school uniforms, and talking about how they're feeling, and the rivalry
255 between the two boys over the girl perhaps; but more importantly what
256 they're thinking about their lives in the future, and actually it had
257 enormous resonance upon it. And I remember the first Yeah Whatever,
258 the first show of that one, that there was a concern that the kids wouldn't
259 be that interested and what have you, and I knew they would be
260 interested, I knew that; and actually they were, because actually they
261 were completely silent, not silent because they were bored but they were
262 silent because they were listening, and then at the right moments they
263 would just scream and shout with laughter, or they would talk among
264 themselves talking about what they were seeing on the stage as a whole.
265
266 And I mean I guess that, and Caravan, that followed, which was
267 successful for a different reason, in the sense that it was a story of two
268 girls who have to get to know each other because their parents
269 are…they've come together, the original fact that the parents have split up
270 and one's mum and then one's dad have come together as a relationship,
271 and they have to – in a caravan – have to get to know each other; which is
272 incredible, there's loads of tension in that, it's a really classic example of
273 performance tension. But the reality of it was that they had to get to know
274 each other, they had to understand each other; and although the play
275 would [inaudible 16:40] was a little bit, now it may look a little old-
276 fashioned, it was an opportunity for the two very different women, a young
277 Bengali girl and a young black girl, to talk to each other about who they
278 were, and to realise that they actually had so much in common. And so I
279 think that in a way was the success of those early plays coming out of
280 script writes, sort of script works, and [inaudible 17:01] and all the
281 commissions of human stories; we followed it with a play called Cued Up
282 by Paul Ashton, which actually looked at young people exploring what it
283 might be to meet someone who's old and how you have to realise that the
284 old people have something to say as well.
285
286 And then the next one was called Cutter, which was I guess was the
287 new…in fact by this point I decided that I didn't…I was too busy in many
288 ways, but also I felt that I want to…we brought by that time we'd got
289 funding from the Arts Council, we became a revenue company by that
290 point and they very quickly realised what we were doing was making
291 sense; we had more income coming in and I was able to build the staff
292 base up, and then I'd introduced an education officer, a producer – well,
293 that's what they would be called now – and then some associate directors,
294 and so by that time the associate directors, who were a little bit more hip
295 and trendy and younger than me, I have to say to you, seemed a much
296 more appropriate artist to be directing the teenage work.
297

298 And it allowed us therefore to be a little bit more ambitious, so in a play
299 like Cutter, which is all about self harm – well, I say it's all about self harm,
300 the framing is self harm – but it actually started to touch young people
301 who realised that actually they were in an environment where those sort of
302 topics could be discussed, I guess.
303
304 With Blowback it was about the environment and how we need [inaudible
305 18:30] take responsibility for the world in which they're part. And, as I say,
306 that was when the associates kicked in, and I was really privileged to have
307 people like Vishni, Liselle, Daryl Beeton, and so on, here who are really
308 young, quite interesting directors to start directing those pieces. Angela
309 Michaels followed, although not necessarily a young artist, an artist of
310 diversity. Because actually what was really important by that point is that
311 not only did I want the plays to reflect our community in a much more
312 empowering way, but it was really important that we found pathways for
313 artists and staff to do that route. And even now our sector, the TYP sector,
314 is overwhelmingly under-representative of the world in which we sit.
315
316 And it was really excellent to see artists, disabled artists, black artists,
317 what have you, to start touching the shows that we did; so if you look at
318 something like Locked In, which I still think is probably a play that was
319 way before its time, by Fin Kennedy, which used the hip-hop frames
320 written in complete verse, about three characters exploring what it is to
321 live in Tower Hamlets at the time; one young man who moves – an Asian
322 man – who moves towards fundamentalism, another young man who's
323 drawn into gun crime.
324
325 [20:00]
326
327 But the reason that play isn't just about that is because the young woman,
328 the mixed-race Asian black young woman, she becomes the victim of that
329 world and she's the one who is…in an attempt has tried to stop the Asian
330 young man from perhaps doing things that perhaps aren't conducive
331 towards a harmonious community. And the same with the borough guy,
332 she gets caught up and she's the one who is shot and killed at the end:
333 sorry I've spoilt the end of the story there.
334
335 I: That's okay.
336
337 CE: But what was important about that is that we were placing the stories of
338 the time absolutely on the stage in front of those young people.
339
340 And I think they were before their time in many ways, We Are Shadows,
341 that followed, another Fin Kennedy piece, was equally, not only in art form
342 style – the art form itself was quite groundbreaking in many ways – the
343 idea of monologue leading together and portraying really hard hitting
344 stories; so we have in that, We Are Shadows, there's a young woman who
345 has to give up her child…well, she gives up the child because she is
346 addicted to drugs and she gets drawn into the drug culture, and we see
347 her heartbreak of when she gives up her child, and in fact gives her child

348 away, she leaves it at a petrol station. And another, and the scene that
349 follows is when she is attacked by another character who's in a complete
350 racist way talking about that she's scum and she's evil and awful, and
351 depicting a young white man as a racist, because actually he didn't
352 understand her story, for example. So that human story stuff is really,
353 really important.
354
355 Weirdly, talking about adult work, a couple of years ago I came back to
356 direct a play again by David Lane, because we did a play called
357 Begin/End, which is about female sexuality, which was really shocking,
358 which was a bit of a shock, that play for the communities; the communities
359 found that really hard, if you think about it, the rise of…way that people
360 think about same-sex relationships and so on, to place two young women
361 on the stage who are explicitly talking about their love for each other –
362 although one rejects it – was actually quite shocking and radical for many
363 of the audiences that came to see it. But, as we know, within those
364 audiences there will be young women, for example, who perhaps are not
365 being able to express who they really are because for fear of what their
366 communities will, or what their parents [inaudible 22:29] may say.
367
368 So I was talking about FREE…so yeah, so actually I really came back to
369 direct a teenage show, and the reason I did that a couple of years ago, a
370 David Lane play: (a) because it was a brilliantly written play in a poetic
371 style using free running as the frame; but also I just felt that actually it was
372 really important as the director of a company that I did the research back
373 with the teenagers to actually really think about what it was to be a
374 teenager, so that the commissioning in the future was up to date. Because
375 I think you've got to be really careful that as a director of a company that
376 you don't continue to do the things you've always done, you have to
377 refresh what you do, you have to take chances, you have to challenge
378 yourself.
379
380 And so when I went back to do FREE it was extremely liberating and
381 exciting because it meant that I was absolutely hands on with teenagers. I
382 mean I was a teacher in the '80s so I used to teach teenagers, and I have
383 a teenager of my own, but it's just interesting when you're slightly older to
384 actually engage with that; so that's why I went back to FREE.
385
386 And so teenage work has become really important for the company, and
387 continues to be so, and yeah, so that would be my sort of overview of why
388 we just continue to develop and develop teenage work.
389
390 I: You're best known…
391
392 F: Let's just pause because do you want to talk about Look to the Sky?
393 Because that's the only one you haven't [voices overlap 24:01]…
394
395 CE: Oh, did I miss it out?
396
397 F: So it's up to you.

398
399 CE: No, I don't think I do actually.
400
401 F: And you are looking at your notes…
402
403 CE: A little bit.
404
405 F: …quite a bit.
406
407 CE: Am I?
408
409 F: So even if you have them a bit closer to you, because you look away and
410 you look down a lot, but you…
411
412 CE: I'm looking down…
413
414 F: …it looks like you're…
415
416 CE: Reading my notes a bit.
417
418 F: Yeah.
419
420 CE: Okay. Cool.
421
422 F: And you might…I just worry that you won't be happy with…
423
424 CE: Oh, I see what you mean.
425
426 F: It looks fine…
427
428 CE: Yeah. Yeah…
429
430 F: [Voices overlap 24:25]…
431
432 CE: I think I'm just being a bit humble.
433
434 F: …whatever you like…
435
436 CE: Yeah. No, I know what you mean.
437
438 F: Yeah?
439
440 CE: Okay. Did I not talk enough about the different plays? Are there enough…
441
442 F: Well, it's…you talked about loads of them, it's just the only one you
443 haven't mentioned is Look to the Sky, so it's just if you [voices overlap
444 24:37]…
445
446 CE: I don't know if I feel I want to talk about that one.
447

448 F: That's fine.
449
450 CE: Okay.
451
452 I: Next question?
453
454 F: Yeah.
455
456 CE: Yeah.
457
458 I: You're best known for your work for younger audiences and families; can
459 you tell us about the early work in this area?
460
461 CE: Gosh. Yeah, Well, that's nice of you to say that I'm known for it. Yeah,
462 I…yeah, I mean I guess for me I've learned over the years that artists tend
463 to reflect a little bit the people that they spend most of their time with. So I
464 think that the early-years work – or the young work – became important to
465 me because actually by the change of the millennium I actually had a child
466 myself; and so as a result I think tuned in very much to the world of a very
467 young person, if you like.
468
469 [25:25]
470
471 But also I find it really interesting because in a way, thinking about work
472 for young people, little ones, under fives, under sevens, it's that actually
473 often you don't have to worry so much about words; what you are really
474 wanting to talk about – or you, should I say – is the visual, the music, the
475 aural, the oral, to touch play, in a way; and for me play is really important
476 when making work and has always been that, it doesn't matter whether
477 you're working with teenagers or adults, whatever it could be; if you can
478 touch the play in someone therefore the playfulness will allow there to be
479 something meaningful and to be communicated to audiences as a whole.
480
481 So I suppose, yeah, my early work. Yeah, so the early work, hmm… Well,
482 there's two reasons why family work is much more commercial than
483 teenage work: audiences are much easier to connect with, but what I
484 didn't want to do was I did not want to go down the route of fairytale
485 adaptation or book titles and so on, which are great but they're prolific
486 now and I wanted to make sure that we had a USP, even in those early
487 days, that wasn't in those routes, if you look to our competitors they really
488 go down that route a lot, and they've been very successful and do some
489 beautiful work; but if the majority of people are putting out stories about
490 fairytales and then talking about book adaptations, therefore we should as
491 a public funded company perhaps be doing something different, we owe it
492 to our stakeholders at the end of the day our funding comes from the
493 government through taxes and therefore we owe it to challenge and
494 experiment.
495
496 And I think young people's work, the early-years work, is actually a good
497 place to do that. It's also the place where you connect with people for the

498 very first time, if you can really get the young person very excited, a little
499 one, about the experience of going to see a performance, you can get
500 them for the rest of their lives. And if the child is excited about a
501 performance in the early part of their lives, the parent or the carer will be,
502 and therefore they as a family, or they as – and in the case of a teacher
503 as well – they will see it as part of an entitlement, a part of an issue, to do
504 [inaudible 27:32]. So I guess the early ones, I suppose the very first one
505 we did was a play called Cloudwatching.
506
507 Cloudwatching was absolutely and deliberately a play that did three
508 things: one was to use what was at the time innovative technology, and so
509 we had a video artist. Now video artists in 1998 were…there was cassette
510 tapes and television screens, I mean it probably was a little bit more
511 sophisticated than that, but for touring that's probably where we were at at
512 that time, so it was very, very sophisticated. I wanted to use a
513 groundbreaking art-form artist to do that; I wanted to depict on the stage,
514 again, a world of different types of people, so I had a white guy, a black
515 woman, and an Asian actress, and together they told a story.
516
517 And we used meteorology as the frame for it, going on a beach…I worked
518 with a scientist as well, it's important to bring specialists, so there was a
519 meteorologist, scientist called Tim Reynolds to that experience, and we
520 wrote the play together. And in simple terms it's all about three people on
521 a beach playing, looking at clouds in the sky and talking about them. It
522 sounds a bit boring but actually it was quite playful and fun. And it showed
523 actually that that sort of product is very popular with my venues, so people
524 started to say that sounds like an interesting play for the story, I'll book it
525 in my venue; so I started to build relationships with venues as well, so
526 there's two things happening.
527
528 I suppose…I'm trying to think really what… The next one was called
529 Eclipse: A Tale for Winter, and we continued that design passion to
530 involve a diversity of cast on the stage. No one was in…people were
531 doing it, but people weren't really doing it; family shows are very much
532 sort of the same type of thing, so we had…in fact it was Daryl Beaton who
533 became an associate director many years later; disabled man, a fabulous
534 black actress called Nicole Davis, and an Asian actress, I can't remember
535 her name now. And Eclipse: A Tale for Winter, of course it was topical
536 because it was the time of the eclipse happening, but what we decided to
537 do was work with an innovative music maker to create a soundtrack
538 [inaudible 29:47] that story that's [inaudible 29:50] performance across the
539 world.
540
541 So we then visited four locations where the eclipse was taking place: so
542 India and Turkey, of course the UK as well.
543
544 [30:02]
545
546 So the idea of that was to bring an intercultural experience to the stage
547 with a cross-cultural, cross-integrated cast, using music which actually

548 drew on the styles and music of the worlds in which we visited. I have to
549 say also it was the beginning of a whole series of plays that were all about
550 loss and death and loneliness, which I think says a lot about me probably,
551 for the little ones, whereby they go on a journey on the big sort of a Saturn
552 thing, a sort of journey thing, journeying tool of the stage; and what they
553 do is they go in search of a lost mother in fact in that case.
554
555 And I guess that success of Eclipse was that actually we started to realise
556 that plays with stories can work in a really positive way in that way for
557 audiences as a whole.
558
559 But I think there's something about beaches really, and even in Eclipse
560 they end up in India as the sun goes down, and they're on the beach,
561 because of course the last place is the horizon the sun goes down, well,
562 the eclipse goes down, and they're on the beach and they all play on the
563 beach, and then the show ends.
564
565 The next play, Tuna Girl, was also set on a beach, again we had a really
566 wonderful actor, who's now the associate director Graeae, called Amit
567 Sharma, in this play. And Nicole Davis again, whose first job it was to
568 come and work at the Half Moon, and now in her second…in fact it's her
569 third show, whereby she, they, are visiting a beach, and on that beach the
570 young girl loses her toy, her doll, and she then has a relationship with that
571 loss of that…[inaudible 31:53] meets mythical creatures and various
572 people, but also through that encounter she realises that although she has
573 no mother she has a father. And that story is about the rebonding of a
574 young father with his daughter. Now whether the mother has died or
575 whether the mother has decided not to be with them any more, or whether
576 it's when she visits him on a day of…you know, it's the day he gets
577 access to his child, I don't know.
578
579 But also you can see what's happening here is the stories are starting to
580 actually be quite realistic, because actually it was about a single parent
581 and so on. And then I guess with the one, the play which I'm…I just love
582 the most in many ways from the early years, is Baa Moo Yellow Dog, and
583 only because it was an extraordinarily interesting title, about sheep that go
584 oink, and pigs that go woof, and what have you. But Baa Moo Yellow Dog
585 was about a little boy who lives in a tower block. And the reason I wrote
586 that story was because by that time we'd been working a lot in children
587 centres and nurseries and preschool, that's why I'm saying about this
588 loop, even I was doing it; and one day I was in a playground in a school
589 just round the corner, and we were playing in the sand with the kids or
590 whatever we were doing, I don't know, how you do; and I sort of stood and
591 I was looking around and I looked up, and I just saw all these tower blocks
592 all around me, and I realised that these kids who had a little park and a bit
593 of sand pit, their real lives were in the tower blocks, and therefore him
594 coming out of a tower block and playing in the park, and his mum looking
595 on was absolutely mirroring the world of the people who lived in this
596 borough around me.
597

598 And I think it was a truthful story in that way, I mean it wasn't because of
599 course pigs don't go oink or whatever, pigs do go oink, I mean, and pigs
600 don't go baa, of course they don't; and we met some magical creatures
601 and they were all lovely puppets, and all that beautiful colour and what
602 have you; and that was the beginning of my relationship with the designer
603 Alison Cartledge, and the musical director Rob Lee, Robert Lee. I found
604 some artists that really connected with that way of thinking playfully,
605 colourfully, abstractly, to create stories [inaudible 34:21]. So yeah, I think
606 that…yeah, I loved Baa Moo Yellow Dog, because not only did it actually
607 end up being adapted for telly, though you wouldn't even recognise it
608 because that's what they do in telly, they completely destroy your play, I
609 mean you just give them over and then you end up saying, what is that. I
610 felt people felt it was an important story because it had that urbanisation,
611 that sense of that…of being here. I think it was the first play that we really
612 made a statement to say, this is Half Moon, this is where we live, and all
613 the people around us are creative individuals if you give them a chance to
614 shine and be; and that's the ethos that I've always wanted to have for the
615 company as a whole. So yeah, that was the early family and young
616 audience work.
617
618 [35:11]
619
620 I: In 2005 you started what became a significant series of work for three
621 plus audiences that saw the integration of British Sign Language in
622 English; can you tell us why and about the work?
623
624 CE: Yeah. Well, there's two reasons: one is the company did have a history of
625 working bilingually in Sylheti and English, and in fact a little bit of signing
626 was put into those shows in the '90s – well, in fact the late '80s into the
627 '90s – I guess we were feeling confident about the way in which we
628 wanted to portray plays to our audiences. And it became clear that
629 actually although we in many ways hopefully were getting it right and talk
630 about the culture diversity, about the socioeconomic diversity, and really
631 exploring and being excited by the world around us as a theatre, and
632 being really influenced by those audiences coming through the door and
633 working in with schools, and be they teenagers or whatever they might be.
634 I just felt that although we had disabled artists working for us and had
635 done quite successfully, and we'd had placement schemes and we'd had
636 special bursaries to bring disabled artists in, and we'd been doing
637 conferences and events and so on, on that area; we weren't necessarily
638 explicitly championing the language of, in this case Deaf…or Deaf people,
639 and that was British sign language.
640
641 I'd seen a lot, and in fact Locked In, in fact Jacqui Beckford did several
642 signed performances of Locked In, our teenage show…performances of
643 Locked In in various venues. And she made me realise that of course you
644 don't necessarily need to have the sign language interpreter on site
645 waving their arms around, you can place that aesthetic, which is what it is,
646 within the mix of the play itself. So in Locked In, going back to that, and a
647 couple of other shows she did for us, she sort of stood in there inside the

648 show signing; she wasn't a character per se, but she was there doing
649 whatever she was doing, you felt she was part of the action though the
650 actors didn't necessarily recognise, didn't acknowledge her in that
651 traditional sense.
652
653 So I just thought, well, surely – and you think about the work of Graeae,
654 they were [inaudible 37:28] to do this in a very positive way – surely we
655 can therefore do better than that, because, you know, we had signers
656 come in and do signed shows, sure. So we actually then decided to place
657 the character in an integrated way into…well, the British signer in an
658 integrated way into the plays; and the only way to do that was to give
659 them a character, write them a character.
660
661 So in the plays that we produced, starting with Grubs, Slugs and Boogie
662 Bugs – another catchy title – brilliant design again by Alison, and with
663 music sort of glam rock style music, which was completely not what
664 people would have expected, again. With Baa Moo it was again with Rob
665 Lee he, I said to him, can you write me, well, basically a gothic soundtrack
666 for…a baroque soundtrack; and he did, a most brilliantly amusing, music
667 you'd never expect in the young people's play. The same happened with
668 Grubs and Slugs, that we therefore placed, with the glam rock style, Slade
669 – I hate to say the sort of Gary Glitter sort of style, which now it seems
670 completely inappropriate, but there we are, if you remember that was
671 before all that stuff going on – sort of that style into the show as a whole.
672
673 And we created a character who, in the time tried and tested way went on
674 a journey, went discovering the animals, journeyed, had sadness,
675 whatever it might be; but who were themselves Deaf, they were Deaf
676 performers. And they therefore spoke in their language, they didn't speak
677 English, they just spoke British sign language. And so what we needed to
678 do in those plays is to find a way that the language could be mutually
679 understood by audiences, not only in the sense that in any non-language
680 play, or a dance piece, the audience understands what's going on
681 because of the visual aesthetic of it; so in a way you could create a play
682 because of…without words, but if you put a language, two languages in it,
683 you need to find a way through that.
684
685 So first of all you need to find a way that the BSL in itself is expressive
686 and exciting, and if you look at BSL it is ultimately the sun rises, you're
687 sad; the idea is that the language itself is incredibly visual, even if you
688 don't understand, you're not a BSL user.
689
690 [40:03]
691
692 So that was one thing to really unpack, to make it a leading aesthetic
693 driver of the piece. But also it's to recognise that you don't necessarily
694 need to translate everything that everyone says to each other at the same
695 time. So if I say to you, do you want to go to the park, you don't
696 necessarily need to sign back, do I want to go to the park, yes, I'd like to
697 go to the park; and then I would then speak back in English, oh, so you

698 want to go to the park. You don't have to sort of, like, do that, because
699 that's not how language works; what you need to do is make sure there's
700 enough hooks in each side of the language so that both sides can
701 understand what is going on; which is actually quite complicated. It slows
702 down the action slightly, but also makes the audience work quite hard
703 because they have to invest in both characters in a different way, they
704 have to follow the narrative from both perspectives, both the visual from
705 the BSL, if you're an English speaker, and the language if you're an
706 English speaker, or the visual of the English speaker, the way they look,
707 they shrug, they smile, they look sad, whatever it might be, but also the
708 narrative of language as a whole.
709
710 So we then did, I think our next one was, yeah, a play called My Friend
711 Snow, which had a mediaeval soundtrack to it, which everyone absolutely
712 adored. And My Friend Snow was about a young boy who meets
713 someone who is a BSL user ultimately, and how together they go on a
714 journey, and go on a journey through different mediaeval landscapes
715 aided by, assisted by the parent, the court jester who keeps an eye on
716 what they're doing. And the two of them come together and they construct
717 an artefact, a toy, which they then share at the end when they play. And if
718 you like, like anyone when they learn a language, those two characters
719 coming together, if I was a French speaker and an English speaker, if you
720 threw a French child of five who was a French speaker, a four year old,
721 with an English speaker, and threw them in the playground, they would
722 learn to communicate, not only would they learn to communicate through
723 gesture and look and how they feel and the way they sit together and
724 what have you, they'd also start picking up words from each other; and
725 that's what happened in the story as a whole. So that's what happened in
726 My Friend Snow.
727
728 So My Friend Snow, Snow was the BSL user, and he became the friend.
729 And the dad, to represent his community, looks on and realises that
730 actually this young boy has a role to play within his son's life, and he is
731 enriched by it. So at the end of the story, when naturally the two kids
732 move away from each other, because that's what happens in life, kids
733 don't always…aren't friends together forever, both of them are enriched
734 by encountering both sides of their lives, if you like; and I think that was
735 sort of like the idea of My Friend…My Friend Snow, Snow made a big
736 impact upon him, he was his friend and he always remembers him as a
737 whole.
738
739 There's a really amazing scene at the end when we have all the…a
740 beautiful piece of music, and when they go for a walk through all the
741 fireflies together, and they play and then a dragon that they've made
742 friends with as well – of course you have a dragon in the show for these
743 little ones – comes and sits with them, and the two of them together share
744 a language, a visual language actually, one is a non-verbal language by
745 the English speaker, and one is the sign language by the sign user; they
746 share the story of how they've got to that point; and then of course the sun

747 comes up and then they disappear. So it's a sort of symbolic little play
748 really, in many ways, I guess.
749
750 And, yeah, I guess by the next one, Igloo Hullabaloo, we really had got it, I
751 felt, we'd just started to get it right, and what we then did was translate,
752 we for the first time wrote or transcribed what the BSL was, so we had a
753 script that was both in English and in BSL. And although the story was
754 really, really simple, for me the impact of that show was the fact that for
755 the first time I believe ever that a script for young people was published –
756 and you can see on our website it's the one even there today – that was
757 truly in two languages, exploring and unpacking what actually happens in
758 the BSL sign, although I could do BSL very badly, I mean I was quite
759 reasonable at one point but I'm terrible now, I'm not a BSL user. And it
760 was really empowering for our artists who feel that their language has
761 been given equal status on the page to the English words, I suppose.
762
763 [45:05]
764
765 Igloo Hullabaloo is actually quite funny; I'll tell you a little story. We were
766 working with the most amazing another wonderful artist called Anna
767 Nabirye, and what we did with that show was ensure that they journeyed,
768 but their journey wasn't just about…it moved away from discovering
769 language together, it was all about discovering the culture that came with
770 the world to which they were part – and that's a really sweet show
771 actually, I like that show – I can't think of anything else to say
772 about…[inaudible 45:46] should I say anything else?
773
774 F: Do you want to talk about Icicle Bicycle? Ah, no, you've just said that.
775
776 CE: Oh, Icicle Bicycle, yes, I forgot. Yeah. So the final piece that we formally
777 did within… So Icicle Bicycle was the last piece of the canon of work that
778 we used to explore BSL work. We changed designers, Ruth Finn this time
779 round, and a new composer called Bruce Nockles. What we really tried to
780 do there was actually really let the BSL lead, and we worked with Paula
781 Garfield from the Deafinitely Theatre to be the consultant or the assistant
782 on that piece. And it really was led from the BSL point of view. And I think
783 in many ways the play, which was about loss again, my plays are about
784 loss in some ways, tried to do too much, it tried to be about the world of
785 circus, and there was an amazing circus soundtrack, without actually
786 being in a circus; and I think in a way by not placing the world of circus in
787 the arena with the best will in the world the most brilliant and integrated
788 BSL and English text wasn't going to work, because actually it relied too
789 much on the visual aesthetic and the language. And it made me realise
790 that actually with young people's work you do need to ensure that there is
791 a recognizable world in which you place the story as a whole. And it was a
792 complicated story, it was all about really how a little character goes to the
793 circus and meets a clown and meets a trapeze artist and so on, and each
794 of them fails in their success of entertaining the crowd, and it becomes a
795 metaphor for death actually, because every time that the character tries
796 to…feels they've found their mother, in fact, they realise that actually

797 they've failed by falling off the trapeze or what have you. So I think it was
798 quite a complicated story.
799
800 I: In 2004 you piloted an art form development initiative called The
801 Exchange for Change, this resulted in a Paul Hamlyn funded programme
802 of work; can you tell us about this?
803
804 CE: Well, yes. So Exchange for Change is, as you say, an art form
805 development programme, and the aim of it was to look differently at the
806 way in which we created work, because I think I've described previously
807 that we had an approach whereby we place writers or artists within school
808 context, within a community centre, wherever it might be. But we just felt
809 through Exchange for Change the idea was to give artists and companies
810 somewhere just to experiment and do new things.
811
812 So what we chose to do also was then to really touch different types of
813 artist who did different art forms, so if you were a spoken word poet or you
814 were a Kathak dancer, or whether you were a MC, or contemporary
815 dancer, or whatever it might be, we actually found a space for those
816 artists to come together in many ways.
817
818 And also without the pressure of an outcome, so the idea was that you
819 could work together and share what you've got after a number of days
820 without the worry of it having to become a full production or a full
821 commission. Of course the aim was that those pieces did develop into
822 something tangible that went on a tour, for example.
823
824 In the early days we experimented that with companies that were perhaps
825 able to sort of explore that methodology quite well, but then by 2009 when
826 the Hamlyn money kicked in we [inaudible 50:00] decided to look at
827 disabled artists, black and minority ethnic artists, again because what we
828 were finding is that not only was it that the art forms were not mediating
829 and coming into the genre of young people's work, but also again the
830 diversity of it, and the aesthetic that they bring; and because diversity
831 brings resilience to the art that one makes, the product one makes, not
832 because it brings particularly a black experience, although that is
833 absolutely key, it just means that different voices and different people
834 come together, and that can be dangerous and interesting and
835 challenging and exciting, and…well, you know, it really makes people
836 think differently, because if you're not careful you would work with the
837 same people all the time, the same type of people all the time, you tend to
838 end up creating the same type of work all the time, which is fine, but it isn't
839 really in the long term because it's not contemporising itself, it's not
840 thinking about where we are now, now at this point, so to speak.
841
842 [50:59]
843
844 So we did, over the three years we did early years [inaudible 51:03] 2009,
845 '10, and '11, which were the big years. In the first year, 2009 we looked at
846 early years, maybe because actually that was an area that I already felt

847 quite rooted in. That I meant to say that we were very clear about models
848 that existed, so therefore when you brought artists in you could then
849 actually feel safe at being difficult and dangerous and challenging,
850 because if we had never done early years before we would have been still
851 exploring what early years is, rather than saying we know what early
852 years is, how can we then throw that up in the air in order to change the
853 nature of the work that came out of there.
854
855 So the collaboration, as I say, involved different types of artists. So for the
856 early-years year we worked with…one of the pieces I worked on which
857 became Rip Fold Scrunch, a play that then went on tour for many, many
858 gigs actually, well over a hundred gigs. We had a theatre artist, actually
859 called a physical theatre artist, called Maria Thomas. We had a jazz cellist
860 called Ayanna Witter-Johnson. And then we had a Kathak dancer. And
861 what we did, we then came into the space and we started playing with
862 paper; which doesn't sound that radical now, but it seemed at the time
863 something that people hadn't really thought about, going back to play,
864 back to the medium of paper as a medium to do that.
865
866 And we created the characters of Rip, Fold and Scrunch, and each of
867 those characters brought their art form to it. So although there were no
868 words, apart from rip, fold and scrunch, it was their art form that spoke. So
869 the Kathak dancer did the most amazing Kathak movement and
870 physicality in a narrative; and the jazz cellist created an amazing score
871 that was telling the story of these three characters coming together. And it
872 was very simple to do, but also very challenging to do because although
873 the theatre artists had obviously worked with theatre before and young
874 people before, they other two artists had never been anywhere near
875 theatre let alone the audience that they were going to work with.
876
877 So one of the key aspects of Exchange for Change, indeed of all the work
878 I've done over the years, is that you place the young people at the heart of
879 that art form. And so we paired up with a local nursery on the Isle of Dogs,
880 and we literally went in and played with them, played with paper, explored
881 work with them and so on, and that really informed the narrative that came
882 out, and then they all came to see the show in the scratch performance as
883 a whole.
884
885 Now that was a successful collaboration because actually there was an
886 outcome to it, so Rip Fold Scrunch was the part of the new wave of early
887 years work that we then took on after the BSL work sort of came to the
888 end of its potency, if you like. And it was simple, Rip Fold Scrunch was
889 simple, it was like a white canvas of paper, which was on the floor, and all
890 the actors – not actors – all the characters, all the performers, started off
891 in black or white with paper, they played with the paper, they ripped the
892 paper, they scrunched the paper, they made objects of paper, they told
893 the narrative through that; and as they therefore become contented and
894 happy and safe together, then their play has changed how they are as
895 people, if you like, as little characters they've been playing. And one of
896 them makes a rip in the floor by mistake, and it's a shock, everyone goes,

897 oh, my God, they've ripped the floor, what shall I do, what shall I do; and
898 then the children are so excited by that, watching, and the adult
899 performers are like trying to think of what should we do now; well, what
900 was the obvious thing to do, it's just you just think, well, never mind, let's
901 just rip it all up; and they literally then ripped the floor, and then what
902 happened underneath we had a beautiful colour paper, the floor cloth
903 beneath.
904
905 [55:09]
906
907 And not only did ripping the white paper away reveal the colourful floor,
908 which I guess is a metaphor really for rebirth and regeneration and
909 excitement and colour is brought into the world, but also all the objects
910 they'd played with were ripped and therefore they became colourful, and
911 then we had the colour fall at the end.
912
913 And then, which is something that came out of Exchange for Change, was
914 how do you engage with your audience above and beyond the
915 consultation; we then break the fourth wall and then in come the audience
916 and they play and they rip and they scrunch and what have you.
917
918 And in that year was a successful year, which I do think was because we
919 knew what early-years work was, we then created another piece which
920 eventually became called Plum and Pickle, and that was a hip-hop artist
921 and a dancer, and a most amazing music maker called James Grant who
922 created a most incredible…he's more of a producer sort of DJ-type MC I
923 guess; and the three of them, artists, collaborated and created the play, a
924 piece called Plum and Pickle, and that it was all about shapes, and they
925 played with shapes; so the same concept happened, and at the end the
926 children came on and played with shapes.
927
928 And it was also one of the things that Exchange for Change was, was
929 there was an adult writer, I say and adult writer, all writers are adults we
930 work with, but a writer who'd never worked for young peoples before, but
931 actually were quite successful in their own right. So for that year it was
932 Tanika Gupta, who is known for her very hard hitting in your face rather
933 shocking pieces of work; and she wrote us a play which, through that
934 process, which going into the nurseries playing with ideas. And that
935 became Moon and Genie, and that the concept of that play was food. And
936 so the idea is that the story conjured was that of a gathering together to
937 make food for a grandma who's not so well, by the central character. And
938 again by breaking the fourth wall in come the children and then we all sit
939 around together in a community eating fruit at the end. So Exchange for
940 Change, the early years, was extremely successful.
941
942 The following year we did teenagers, again because we were really safe
943 with that, we felt very safe with teenagers, and we really pushed the idea
944 of that, so we worked with spoken-word artists, and architectural
945 designers, and video makers, and so on. And we created a couple of
946 plays, and one piece was called Glass Knickers, which was all about how

947 two best friends fall out when the brother…that one of the best friends
948 realises that his mate is trying to take the virginity away from his sister,
949 that tension that created on that, a very hard hitting poetry piece.
950
951 We felt because we were breaking the boundaries of theatre making, that
952 a play like Glass Knickers was able to be quite controversial actually for
953 an adult audience, for the young audience it's actually hit exactly where
954 they were at, where young people were experimenting and exploring their
955 sexual awakening I guess, and when you chose to have sex or not, and
956 the impact that had upon you and so on; that was quite an interesting
957 piece.
958
959 Look to the Sky, by Courttia Newland, came out of that year, that became
960 a play that went on to be one of our teenage shows a couple of years
961 later; extraordinary piece about the sort of dystopia of how young people
962 lose their identity and their value because society tells them that they are
963 not worth anything. And it's looking at that way in which young people are
964 completely pushed aside, not considered to be important and so on. And
965 that was the play that he wrote, a very…he's a novelist actually, Courttia
966 is a really amazing novelist, and he wrote a super play, that was.
967
968 And the one that I particular remember from that year was The Closer I
969 Get The More Distant I Am, which was a collaboration, again with a
970 Kathak dancer, a male, a contemporary Kathak dancer, an older dancer.
971 Older, I say, he was probably in his 30s, which is quite old, he was coming
972 to the end of his dancing career. And amazing…called Vipul Bhatti, and
973 an amazing music artist called Nick Tyson, and an amazing spoken-word
974 artist called Concise One.
975
976 What was interesting about that piece is that we worked with that, created
977 that piece in collaboration with Limehouse Youth Club, which it actually it
978 runs all the time, it actually is a PRU really, a Pupil Referral Unit. And so
979 we took the work we were creating into the PRU.
980
981 [1:00:14]
982
983 And the first session that we had we had young women basically not
984 wanting to come off their phones, looking endlessly at their phones; and a
985 bunch of young men who, they actually just that what the hell are
986 they…idiots doing; they didn't really…they didn't know what we were there
987 for; maybe they were, but they just thought, what is this arty-farty rubbish,
988 really.
989
990 And we performed an extract of The Closer I Get the Distant I Am, which
991 is basically a story of how, again how modern technology desensitises the
992 need for there to be real interaction and communication. And so we took
993 the piece in and there was all this dancing around and music being played
994 live, and the poetry artist talking about how she was feeling about how
995 she was unable to make relationships with people because people didn't
996 want to speak to her, so therefore she was falling into the trap; and in fact

997 she self harmed in fact, that's part of her release for that. But by going into
998 that centre the young women started not looking at their phones, and the
999 young men started listening and watching, because it completely…it sort
1000 of touched them, because no one had really touched that topic before
1001 [inaudible 1:01:38] because they suddenly realised that what we were
1002 presenting to them was about them; and so it made us realise, it upset us
1003 all actually because it made us realised that we devalue young people just
1004 because they are caught up in the technology of the world of which they're
1005 part; that they again don't have a voice or a role. But the point is that you
1006 have to give young people permission to have a role in society.
1007
1008 And as a result we created that play, which was an amazing piece of
1009 work. And we never actually…we decided in the end not to take it any
1010 further because it was just too raw and too short really, it was only 20
1011 minutes; and I think it did its purpose which was to remind us all that
1012 actually theatre needs to really touch the individual, and we as artists
1013 must always consult and engage with the people that we are wanting to
1014 talk to, because if you don't it becomes at best boring, and I guess at
1015 worst not [inaudible 1:02:55] at best boring, at least worst patronising,
1016 most worst depicting and telling an untruth about people's lives; and I
1017 think that show did explain that to us a little bit, if you like.
1018
1019 So yeah. And then on a lighter note, what was so good about Exchange
1020 for Change, and it continues to this day, is that those artists that we work
1021 with then come back and work with us on different projects. So
1022 subsequent to that we created a piece called When Snow Falls [NB:
1023 production referred to is actually called When Spring Comes]. And When
1024 Snow Falls [NB: When Spring Comes] is a really interesting piece
1025 between a jazz trumpeter and a dancer and an animator called Amberin
1026 Huq, she created a [sic] animation that set the piece, the performance,
1027 completely, as it was like a rolling animation of the seasons changing from
1028 summer through to autumn through to winter, to when the spring comes.
1029
1030 And it's the story of a little boy who experiences those seasons and meets
1031 different animals, and he's expressed through contemporary and in South
1032 East Asian dance through the whole piece. Now all those three artists
1033 never worked together on Exchange for Change but we brought them
1034 together because they're on different projects and we just felt that synergy
1035 between them would really work.
1036
1037 And I do believe again When Spring Comes, which we did a short tour,
1038 not a massive tour, was a little bit ahead of its time weirdly, because
1039 actually it did show the impact of simple animated narrative and
1040 importance to…and the importance of the live dancer, and a simple story
1041 of the relationship between the world of the young person's need to
1042 connect with nature.
1043 [1:04:50]
1044
1045 And I guess, in a way, that show is also…why it's important is it never at
1046 one point did it talk about the environment, but actually it is, it's about

1047 young person's relationship to the environment, and if they don't look after
1048 it it won't be here in generations to come; and even if you're little you
1049 really need to engage with that, and that was [inaudible 1:05:09]. And of
1050 course at the end then the audience again in true style they came onto the
1051 stage and then we all danced together and we played with the butterfly
1052 and…or who were on the animation, and so on. So again…and I think in a
1053 way both those shows – and I think they must touch me because I'm a bit
1054 taken aback by talking about them – I think it's the importance that how
1055 you, when you create work it's really important to touch the human in you,
1056 because if you don't the audience will never remember what you're trying
1057 to tell them.
1058
1059 And you want them to experience a beautiful experience, and whatever,
1060 but you also want them to go away and say, that means something to me;
1061 so even if you're five years old you will recognise the importance of the
1062 cycle of nature. And what happens – which happens in When Spring
1063 Comes – when nature is broken, and the impact that has on the individual
1064 in the case of the little boy who was upset or sad by that experience, and
1065 how he needed spring to come, the regeneration, the renewal of life to
1066 come to allow him to continue in his life as a whole really. So yeah, it's
1067 Exchange for Change.
1068
1069 I: Your job before Half Moon was as a lecturer at the Central School of
1070 Speech and Drama; does this explain the long-term relationships with HE
1071 centres?
1072
1073 CE: Absolutely. HE centres are really important, particularly drama schools,
1074 because I found when I was working in them that actually the training that
1075 they were given was mainly to train them to go into the mainstream, for
1076 whatever we say the Half Moon is a representation of a minority art form
1077 young people said to us that's not necessarily given the status that it
1078 should, although it's doing and has done for many, many years, not just
1079 here, many companies have done some really, really important things.
1080
1081 So what we've done over the years, and our Rose Bruford connection in
1082 particular, is connect with students at the point of their training; when you
1083 give them an experience that changes their perception of theatre can be
1084 and who the audience can be. And if you look at the two or three shows
1085 that I've done with Bruford and other places, not only does it allow me to
1086 do a cast of, like, 14 all singing and dancing – which is incredible because
1087 now I mainly do one-handers, two-handers, three-handers if I'm lucky,
1088 that's the nature of small-scale touring – it gives you that breadth of
1089 opportunity to have a large cast doing some really beautiful work; but it
1090 also makes the young audiences and the young performers realise that
1091 actually improvisation into script, detailed rehearsal off script, in script, in
1092 rehearsals [inaudible 1:07:46] the importance of close proximity of
1093 audience, the importance of young people, little people, big people,
1094 whatever they might be, in that equation is really important, and actually
1095 it's one of the hardest type of work you can do. And to give you a passion

1096 about that it's also about understanding what audience is and who they
1097 are and the importance of engaging with audience.
1098
1099 And seeing the whites of the eyes, and seeing…because often the young
1100 audience are horrible, if they don't like it they'll just tell you, by being noisy
1101 if they're little, by screaming, by running on the stage maybe, if it's for the
1102 wrong reasons; but at the same time to hold an audience in stillness. So
1103 that's why I do it, because I don't think… That's untrue, I think training in
1104 higher education isn't necessarily conducive towards upskilling and
1105 creating a pool of young artists of the future who will take theatre aimed at
1106 young audiences seriously.
1107
1108 I: It seems you regard participation as being just as important as the
1109 professional plays in programming; why is this?
1110
1111 CE: Well, I think, as in the conversation I've had so far, that participation is key
1112 to the engagement. I mean participation isn't just about doing a youth
1113 theatre, although that's key, it's not just about working in schools;
1114 participation is about the active engagement with your audience. So that
1115 when an audience is sitting in their seat watching a play they need to
1116 participate in an active way; it doesn't mean to say they're wanting to talk
1117 or get up and perform, although often we find with the young ones that
1118 they do do that and we've encouraged that over the years so they come in
1119 to…they break that fourth wall, but it's actually allowing people to feel as if
1120 they can participate, they're thinking about what's going on, they're
1121 cognitively engaging, if you like, with that as a whole. So that's really,
1122 really important.
1123
1124 Yeah, it's back to…I discussed earlier the idea of the continuous loop, the
1125 idea that you place audience participant, it's part of that loop of creative
1126 activity, that actually participation, be you five, be you 25, is as important
1127 as watching trained actors – for lack of a better word – performing in a
1128 way; and those actors and those artists have got as much to learn from
1129 that encounter as the young people or the audience have to learn from
1130 encountering a [inaudible 1:10:10] performance that may change them or
1131 make them think differently about the world wherever it might be in that
1132 continuous loop idea.
1133
1134 [1:10:17]
1135
1136 I mean audiences are really important, I think when the company, when I
1137 took over the company in the '90s, and even into the early '80s, it was
1138 only when we started working en masse in the children's centres, in the
1139 schools, performing literally a hundred yards down the road, which seems
1140 insane, why didn't they come to the theatre, well, it was because actually
1141 where they were is where the performance to take place; it's only then did
1142 you realise that the community is really, really important in that
1143 participatory dimension of the work that we do as a company as a whole.
1144 Because actually those young people are going to become your artists of
1145 the future, and if you don't instil in them a sense of value and that the

1146 work that they're doing has a value, and the work of a company like ours
1147 has a value, they're never going to come back and feed and experiment
1148 and become the role models and artists of the future as a way.
1149
1150 We did a project, which was quite early in my time, called Oceans of
1151 Stories, which was very interesting because I knew that the way to get to
1152 our young audiences was through the women, and by going to work with
1153 the women's groups in this borough we were able to mine their stories,
1154 hear about their experiences of being women in our community; and
1155 there's a very high percentage of Bengali Sylheti families here, and latterly
1156 Somali families and so on; those women sat around talking, sewing, and
1157 telling their childhood, telling their stories, but it's only through that
1158 encounter were we able to understand what it is to participate in the world
1159 of those people. And as a result of that we were then able, the artists were
1160 then able to frame and shape a piece of performance as Oceans of
1161 Stories, which we then showed back to them; and the women were deeply
1162 moved by it because we put on the stage a version of their stories, their
1163 aspirations, their hopes for their children, the world of which they are a
1164 part of now, and the differences between maybe if they were first
1165 generation, or even the second generation, between their childhood and
1166 what their aspirations were for their childhoods in the future; which
1167 actually, weirdly, ten, 15, almost 15 years on, I can see where those
1168 women have influenced their children now, because those children are
1169 now participating more actively in their world, the world of which they're
1170 part here in Tower Hamlets, and we see them in our youth theatre, and
1171 we see them in the young parents coming back with their little children. So
1172 that's really, really, really important.
1173
1174 I: Can you tell us about some of the youth theatre and projects for schools…
1175 I'll just start that question again.
1176
1177 CE: Yeah.
1178
1179 I: Can you tell us about some of the youth theatre and projects for schools
1180 that you feel were and continue to be important?
1181
1182 CE: Well, as I say, our work, our participatory work is key. I mean I don't think
1183 this company would be what it is today without it, and I'm really lucky to
1184 have worked over the years with a whole swathe of colleagues who've led
1185 on that area. I mean I come from that background as an ex-teacher, I
1186 worked in youth and in community engagement and so on, of course I
1187 would place that at the heart of what the company does, it's key; but I've
1188 been very lucky to work with some amazing people.
1189
1190 Yeah, I mean at the end of the day, the most important thing is the youth
1191 theatre coming in and performing and engaging, and communicating and
1192 being together. And I'm not being horrible by saying this, I don't mean it in
1193 that way at all, but many of our young people aren't particularly talented,
1194 and that's completely fine, because it isn't about being the greatest actor
1195 and being the best dancer and singer, it's about fulfilling your potential,

1196 being able to speak, being able to communicate, to be able to have
1197 opinion, to be able to hold the room, tell stories with other people. And I'm
1198 really lucky, and I always make a point of this, that I go to youth sharing
1199 after youth sharing after youth sharing, not because I have to – but I
1200 guess I do have to as a director of the company – to respect my
1201 colleagues work, to show them that actually what they're doing, which I'm
1202 not always part of, is key to the company and it's our life blood; but it's
1203 also respecting the fact that our young people are the artists of the future,
1204 and without that there will be no creativeness in this country and there will
1205 not be creative people from very diverse [inaudible 1:14:30] backgrounds
1206 participating in that way. I mean who knows where they'll end up, but the
1207 reality is that they are important.
1208
1209 So yes, it's really, really, really important, and youth theatre is the
1210 mainstay of our company really; and we have seven now, and we've had
1211 many over the years, we have specialist groups for young people with
1212 disabilities…
1213
1214 [1:14:52]
1215
1216 We have an integrated system, which is weird because obviously all our
1217 groups are integrated, that means to say that anyone with any need can
1218 come to perform and be part of the group, they can have an access
1219 worker or a care worker or whatever it might be they need. And that's
1220 amazing because you see the diversity of people on the stages and over
1221 the years, and I know people who've come in and talked on this project
1222 about their experiences, like the way in which being part of a group has
1223 meant that they can fill their potential and they don't feel they're barriered
1224 [sic] from attending just because they're a wheelchair user, because
1225 they're Deaf, because they have autism, because of whatever it might be.
1226
1227 But also we have our specialist groups. And in a way they're exclusive,
1228 which is a little bit anti-inclusive, isn't it, but those young people are best
1229 served within those environments where they have the facilitated activity
1230 which is led from them, which allows them to perform and create on their
1231 own level; because if you have profound and multi-disabilities it's very
1232 hard to function within a mainstream group, not that you can't, and many
1233 of our young people do, but within an exclusive group where you have
1234 one-to-one care and support, those access workers can mediate, and the
1235 teams can mediate an experience which allows them to actually perform
1236 in a way, and over the years we've had some amazing performances from
1237 our…a disability group, through some university programmes over the
1238 years through to the Human Garden and so on, some really pioneering
1239 disability work which shows that it doesn't matter how unable you are and
1240 how – by society's terms anyway – you can perform, you can achieve, you
1241 can have a voice and you can communicate to an audience. And those
1242 performances are often the most profound things that I can ever
1243 experience, in a way.
1244

1245 And then we have our schools works, projects like Transitions, which I
1246 also had the pleasure of working on in the early days, where it was about
1247 looking at the transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. And again we didn't just go
1248 in with a play and say, hi, guys, here's a play about moving from Year 6 to
1249 Year 7 – that really important year – we worked with initially with Bethnal
1250 Green, what is now Bethnal Green Academy, which is an interesting
1251 place, it was called Bethnal Green Technology College. We worked with
1252 young people in that school who were in Year 7 talking about what it was
1253 like to move from Year 6 to Year 7, and we took their stories, we mediated
1254 their stories, translated their stories, and then presented it back to them.
1255 And then that project has continued in that way for a long time, it's actually
1256 unpacking the fears, trying to make that transition into Year 7 a positive
1257 one.
1258
1259 And then we have Lyrical Laps, which is about Key Stage 1 and poetry
1260 and story making through poetry, which is a really amazing project. And
1261 more recently Dramatic Maths, where we teach maths through the
1262 medium of theatre.
1263
1264 I think what's interesting about all of those is that it's where you place the
1265 creative within the learning. We use drama to teach maths, the young
1266 people remember equation and measurement and so on because we
1267 haven't sat down and said, here is…and what is a centimetre, what is a
1268 metre, whatever it might be, we've used story and the experience of play
1269 for them to come to terms and understand the concepts of what it is that
1270 maths becomes; and therefore we know that they remember it. They see
1271 it as not something I can't do, they see it as a journey of exploration that
1272 they can do, and as a result they feel more competence in the work that
1273 they then do in their classrooms.
1274
1275 The same with Transitions, if you can understand and unpack what it
1276 might be to move from Year 6 to Year 7, when you come to Year 7 you're
1277 then able to arrive at that point on an equal playing field, you're aware of
1278 the anxieties, you've unpacked the myth of the anxieties, you've got the
1279 strategies to deal with the difficulty so that you can get on with your
1280 learning rather than dealing with not achieving and not understanding in a
1281 way; so I think that's really important.
1282
1283 And the one thing I haven't really talked about at all yet is Careers in
1284 Theatre, which has been going since…well, in fact 1997, when I first
1285 came. Careers in Theatre is our major signature project with secondary, I
1286 think almost every Year 10 in this borough over the last 19 years, and
1287 teachers, doing drama has been to the Half Moon to create a play in a
1288 day. It's significant because we place professionals that are designers and
1289 theatre makers and music makers, with those young people, and we allow
1290 them through using a very simple script [inaudible 1:19:52] a play that's in
1291 commission, maybe developing, as the beginning of a journey over that
1292 day where they make choices in every way, they make the music, they
1293 stage manage it, they do the lighting, then they do the sound, they act in
1294 it, they decide how they're going to present that extract, they could

1295 present it truthfully, they could [inaudible 1:20:11] all the words on the
1296 page, they could unpack it and make into something completely different,
1297 something abstract, something whatever it might be, they design it; they
1298 go through the whole process of making a play in one day.
1299
1300 [1:20:21]
1301
1302 Not only is it about teamwork and it's all about collaboration and all those
1303 things which are key to theatre making, it also shows them there is a
1304 career in theatre for you ordinary people of…in your schools, because
1305 actually it's not just about acting, it's about all those art forms and all those
1306 ways of thinking.
1307
1308 And it's had a huge impact upon the diversification of the workforce in our
1309 own organisation but I hope in the way in which young people engage
1310 with theatre making in a different way. Because you're giving them the
1311 whole thing, you're giving them…you say at the beginning of the day,
1312 here's a script, end of the day you're going to make a play; and they go, I
1313 can't do that; but at the end of the day 50, 60 young people mixing across
1314 different schools, meeting people they've never worked with before, they
1315 create that play. And we do five, six, seven, well, in the heyday we used to
1316 do ten to 12 days in a row, it must have been absolutely killing but really
1317 powerful.
1318
1319 So participation is key to this company, and it should be and has been
1320 probably over the years, but it is really important because without it there's
1321 no future.
1322
1323 I: Half Moon's relationship with buildings over the years has been tricky as
1324 well as exciting, even dynamic; can you tell us about the importance of 43
1325 White Horse Road in your tenure as director?
1326
1327 CE: Yeah. So the company moved into this building, White Horse Road, in
1328 1994, so it wasn't long before I came. The journey of getting to White
1329 Horse Road is complicated and I won't go into it too much because it's
1330 sort of outside of my time. But the idea was when the main company went
1331 into administration in the '90s, that there was a home for the Young
1332 People's Company, and this building was identified; it had been identified
1333 before 1990, but ultimately over a period of time between '90 and '94 the
1334 building was identified.
1335
1336 Money was identified too because it was when the Docklands was being
1337 built and as a result the building got money from European money to
1338 make it sort of vaguely fit for purpose. Like any building, when you move
1339 into a building people don't realise the drain on the resources that it does,
1340 I mean not just as money – although that's key – but also human
1341 resources; opening the doors every day, the toilets to be cleaned, the
1342 electricity bills need to be maintained, the lights, everything else and what
1343 have you. So moving into 43 White Horse Road was an important step
1344 because it gave identity to the company [inaudible 1:22:42], but also it

1345 was a bit of a burden between '94 and '97, mainly because they didn't
1346 know how to use it. And they didn't, in fairness, have the resource
1347 necessarily to run it properly.
1348
1349 So when I first came, as I said earlier, I moved everyone downstairs and
1350 we all worked on the first floor, so the doors could be opened, how can
1351 you have a building that's not open, doesn't make sense to me. We then
1352 decided that if we're a young people's theatre surely we should be open;
1353 so in '98 we got the licence to make it into a theatre; changed the
1354 configuration of the auditorium slightly, got its licence, got all the fire stuff
1355 sorted out. And we started with, started a play of seasons so people felt
1356 that they could come and visit; it was going back to what the Half Moon
1357 had been in the '70s and '80s, a place where people came to watch plays,
1358 not just our own plays – although many were – but a whole series of plays
1359 from other companies, other really interesting companies.
1360
1361 [Inaudible 1:23:50] did their first installations here, and they're now
1362 famous for that. [Inaudible 1:23:54] did their first work here, and they're
1363 now famous for that. Not only important for the audiences, communities
1364 that come on a Saturday, on a Thursday evening, whatever it might be, to
1365 watch plays, but also for artists, artists outside of our genre, out, in the
1366 genre itself to recognise that here is a space that we can use. And that
1367 was my main aim in the early days of the late '90s, to make it a public
1368 venue, but also a space where people, artists and audiences, would
1369 recognise there's some quality work going on, and place to come and
1370 watch and engage. I mean admittedly sometimes some of the work wasn't
1371 great, but it wasn't ours so that was okay that it wasn't so great.
1372
1373 But over time people want to come here now, mainly for two reasons: one
1374 is because it's a small intimate 80- to 100-seater space, but also because
1375 of the diversity of the audience. I mean I get people still saying to me, I'm
1376 amazed at the diversity of your audience; and I say to them, why are you
1377 amazed, because if it wasn't diverse, i.e. it doesn't reflect the communities
1378 in which we sit, we wouldn't be doing the job we should be doing.
1379 Unfortunately many times when you go to the theatre, even young
1380 people's theatre now, often to do with price, because socioeconomically
1381 you're defranchised [sic] because the tickets are too expensive, but also
1382 because people feel theatre is not for me, is that many ordinary people
1383 who would see coming to the theatre as a bit of an experience, don't
1384 come, and as a result we're playing to ourselves, or playing to people that
1385 look a little bit like me more than anything else. And that is not helping in
1386 terms of the long term, I suppose.
1387
1388 [1:25:30]
1389
1390 But the building, yes, so it became clear with the building that it really
1391 wasn't that fit for purpose, it's all very well having hundreds of people
1392 coming in and watching plays, but actually it was ramshackle and the
1393 foyer was tiny, and the world was changing out there. Other venues
1394 started to be programming young people's work, so it wasn't quite so sexy

1395 to come here, if you like, because others were starting to do it. So we
1396 needed to think about what can we do to make the space more fit for
1397 purpose, make it more accessible and so on.
1398
1399 And at the same time, although the company had had a peppercorn rent
1400 on the building for many years since moving in in '94, the politics were
1401 changing, the world was changing, and we were told that we needed to
1402 pay more for our rent; so our rent went from £300 to £60,000. Admittedly
1403 we negotiated it down in the instance, but it became very clear to me and
1404 the trustees that, well, what, it doesn't make sense, why would we want to
1405 pay all this money, why don't we buy the building, why don't we own the
1406 building so it has a legacy for ever. So we started the long journey of
1407 buying the building from the local authority, which we did after about four
1408 years of…negotiation, but also the local authority were very positive about
1409 us doing that, they felt that we had a role and a function in the community
1410 to fulfil. I think probably they didn't really want the building any more
1411 because it was falling down, it was starting to fall down and they would
1412 have to start paying to make it fit for purpose, I suppose. That's a bit
1413 cynical.
1414
1415 But also they started to value that, and I remember going to the final
1416 council meeting where I had to stand up in front of the councillors and
1417 explain to them why they should sell it to us at its market value, for what it
1418 was worth, which was quite a lot of money, rather than, I don't know,
1419 maybe put it out and sell it to commercial house development or
1420 whatever, whatever it might be.
1421
1422 And although to this day it was probably the hardest thing I'd ever done in
1423 my life, because I had literally five minutes to justify why we should in fact
1424 in the long term survive, because without the building we wouldn't have
1425 survived, it was…it's all [inaudible 1:27:47] the building was our focus, it
1426 was that the community knew we were there. Eventually I must have said
1427 the right things and they said, okay, you can have it. And then we bought
1428 it through raising quite a lot of money.
1429
1430 And of course once you've bought it you're then able to access money; so
1431 this is when the Heritage Lottery – that's right – the Lottery, arts Lottery
1432 really started kicking in, and so as a result there was pots of that we could
1433 go to. So over a period of time we then started to raise the money to do
1434 the renovation which we needed to as well. It's all very well having the
1435 building, which we…and we needed to make it fit for purpose, change the
1436 configuration of the interior, clean up and replace much of the outside,
1437 and so on and what you got. So it was at that point that we…or that point
1438 my colleague Jackie Ely arrived too, that she was a fundraiser. And
1439 together, and I have to say mainly through her, we've raised that money,
1440 which was a lot. I think it's 1.3 million.
1441
1442 I: Wow.
1443

1444 CE: Which you think, when you think about what that means. Okay, a lot of it
1445 came from the lottery, but a lot of it came from £20,000 here, £20,000
1446 there. And I feel to this day a little bit…I'm glad we got the money and I'm
1447 not ungrateful to the Arts Council for giving it to us, but unlike maybe
1448 some of our bigger friends on the South Bank we had to raise our
1449 matched funding first, and then they gave us the lump sum that came with
1450 it. Whereas it seems sometimes the bigger companies could get their
1451 lump sum first and then raise the matched funding to go with it. So yeah,
1452 so we then started the renovation and we employed an architectural
1453 company called Roderick McLennan Associates, who were sympathetic to
1454 the heritage of the building and created the plans that created the foyers
1455 and the space that we have today.
1456
1457 [1:29:58]
1458
1459 And the most important thing was that we put the sign on the roof. I
1460 suppose we sort of reclaimed the name The Half Moon Theatre; because
1461 actually it was such a long time ago since the Mile End Road closed that
1462 actually the majority of the people didn't even know what that was, but
1463 also it reclaimed the name because actually it's made a statement, as the
1464 communities say, we are here, the theatre is important. It touched the
1465 heritage of the Half Moon and all that went with it, but also it reconnected
1466 with the past, why in the '70s the artists created the theatre they did; it
1467 was for the people, about the people, communicated the people working
1468 with local artists to create the work they did; and it's almost as if we've
1469 sort of come slightly full circle by reclaiming that name.
1470
1471 I: Why do you think the Half Moon continues to thrive? Especially given the
1472 socioeconomic context in which it operates?
1473
1474 CE: Well, I think it's because we survive because we are a business. We're
1475 not for profit, of course, I'm not here to make money, but I am here to use
1476 public money and trust money, and all the money that we raise through
1477 box office and donations and so on, to give back to the stakeholders that
1478 ultimately are the ones that through their taxes, in the case of our Arts
1479 Council grant or the local authority grant, have paid, pay us really. So it's
1480 important that we do that.
1481
1482 I think it's because we have over the years shifted and responded to the
1483 agendas of the time. It's tuning in to the priorities which equally connect
1484 with what we're about, about social inclusion, about entitlement of course,
1485 and finding a way to tap into not just the financial resources but also the
1486 human resource and aspiration and ambitions of the communities we
1487 work with; I think that's why. I think it's because I have over the years had
1488 and continue to have, even today particularly, particularly today, a very
1489 strong team who are way over-dedicated for what they do, and commit to
1490 the very ethos that I believe in and drive, and the trustees that follow that
1491 as well of course.
1492

1493 But, yeah, I think also it's to do with the fact that young people are
1494 important, and I think if we articulate that clearly enough to the people in
1495 power, the funders and so on, that actually we will continue hopefully to
1496 survive, you can't guarantee it. Because actually what we do is represent
1497 a sort of underclass, young people can't vote, young people don't pay
1498 taxes, young people aren't consulted on particularly well, they are the
1499 hidden percentage of the community that aren't necessarily engaged with
1500 from the people in power. And we articulate and owe it to our young
1501 people to make sure that we as adults are able to say, what about the
1502 children, what about the young people, what about them in the equation;
1503 because at the end of the day they represent a massive percentage of the
1504 population, and yet… And they are our future, they're not what people
1505 say, artists of the future, they are artists now, but they are our future, they
1506 are going to be the ones who will look after us in years to come, and we
1507 do owe it to them; and I think we survive because we articulate that again,
1508 and again, and again, young people are important, young people are
1509 important, young people are important. We help them have a voice, we
1510 help translate their voices to the communities that make a difference to us
1511 as a whole. So yeah, I think probably that's why, and we adapt.
1512
1513 I: You mentioned Half Moon Presents that was established in 2013; can you
1514 tell us about this is shaping the artistic and management choices being
1515 made?
1516
1517 CE: Yeah. Half Moon Presents really is part of the cycle of change because in
1518 2010 the government changed inasmuch as the government changed in
1519 '79, and then in '97, in 2010 it changed again. And the language of the
1520 world in which we live is much more about collaboration, about working in
1521 a way, a fiscal way, that means to say that we have to be seen as a
1522 thriving business; it doesn't mean to say you don't engage with the values
1523 of your charity and the ethos of the continuous, that's a given; but you
1524 have to look more entrepreneurially about how you're going to survive and
1525 how you're going to be more resilient as a company, that's key.
1526
1527 So Half Moon Presents comes out of Exchange for Change actually, we're
1528 working with all these artists doing really interesting things, poets, MCs,
1529 whatever it might be; what happens to them; so we spend all this time
1530 working away, beavering away with them, and then what's the point of
1531 then saying, off you go and do this performance at somewhere else; what
1532 Half Moon Presents offers is the structure which allows them to thrive
1533 once you've done that investment, all that interrogation, all that
1534 development, all that dialogue; it allows you to benefit from it, not only
1535 because it allows you to keep changing your practice offering your
1536 audiences different types of work, different new plays and so on, but it
1537 allows you to maximise the potential of it.
1538
1539 [1:35:43]
1540
1541 So Half Moon Presents, through the shows that we have done, have
1542 come out of those collaborations, artists have gone away and come back

1543 as their own companies and said, I'd like to work with you as a company
1544 now on exploring this or that, or whatever it might be; it keeps the
1545 company, our work fresh, keeps the company fresh; it means our reach
1546 has increased, so therefore we can tour; we tour six or seven shows a
1547 year, eight shows a year now, and that means you can really touch
1548 communities and locations and venues that it would be impossible if it was
1549 just us touring one show a year, or two shows a year, it would be
1550 impossible.
1551
1552 But also, like through the Papertale, Rosie Harris and poetry trilogy, for
1553 example, there's no way that we would have been able to instigate that
1554 trilogy about migration leading to the piece – which I can't remember the
1555 name of at the moment – Map of Me, sorry, I'm sorry, my mind went
1556 blank; you could never have got to a piece like Map of Me, which is about
1557 asylum seekers' experience of coming to the UK, without the hard work of
1558 those poets, that poetry company, who are part of our portfolio, part of
1559 Half Moon Presents, and are now working looking at emotional literacy of
1560 boys for secondary schools and how the exploration through poetry, of
1561 theatre [inaudible 1:37:09] to create Boys Don't Cry, for example. We'd
1562 never have had that diversity of work.
1563
1564 And an amazing piece called How High, which was about the last troll
1565 and…troll baby, and how they were misunderstood and it's all about
1566 community and who they are.
1567
1568 I mean plays like Guantanamo Boy, with our friends Brolly, or Her, that
1569 we're working with them now, which is about sexual violence against
1570 women in war-torn environments. The breadth and diversity of it is key.
1571 But also that we give them the structures to experiment, it would give
1572 them structures to safely; so I could be working with them dramaturgically,
1573 I might direct the piece, we might just simply give them their tech specs
1574 and help them tour. What it is it's just giving a framework within which to
1575 thrive themselves, and if they're thriving we're thriving as a business, and
1576 that's why Exchange for Change is really…Half Moon Presents, which
1577 comes out of Exchange for Change, is important.
1578
1579 It also allows us to do collaboration, our co-productions, our recent work
1580 with Tangled Feet, a most extraordinary company, never worked with
1581 young people before; I mean they have because their audiences are full of
1582 young people, but they hadn't thought about that way, need a little help
1583 about the young carer experience, a most exquisite piece of work; they
1584 were generous enough to come to us and say, we want to learn from your
1585 company; and I was saying, come, we want to learn from your company to
1586 create the synergy between what is an outdoor physical-style company, I
1587 guess, working with a specialist young people's company. We worked
1588 with Paines Plough, we commissioned and created a Dennis Kelly play
1589 called, Our Teacher's a Troll, which we worked with them on in the last
1590 couple of years. It allows us to change who we are, to respond to and be
1591 part of the bigger world; because young people's work is slightly
1592 marginalised and we need to be on the top table with the big guys. And

1593 they need to recognise, and the partners we have do, that we do have an
1594 expertise and an understanding of the genre, which is based on years and
1595 years of work, my colleagues before even I was at the Half Moon, about
1596 that methodology of working with young people to create work for young
1597 people and the families and communities; they have a lot to learn from
1598 that process. And we equally have a lot to learn from them too.
1599
1600 I: Has anything in the past 19 years surprised you in any way?
1601
1602 [1:39:46]
1603
1604 CE: Well, apart from – 19 years is a long time, isn't it – and what surprises me
1605 is I'm still here, I guess, and that's because I've worked with some brilliant
1606 people, and every time I think maybe it's time for someone new something
1607 new happens, we work in a different way, we really get into teenage work,
1608 then we get into bilingual work, and then we do Exchange for Change,
1609 and then we do the building, and then we do… It surprises me but excites
1610 me that I haven't…I feel in the last 19 years there's enough going on to
1611 keep me and my colleagues excited about moving forward, that surprises
1612 me, particularly in the fiscal and political world in which we operate; it's
1613 very easy to become cynical and difficult very quickly. That has surprised
1614 me, I guess.
1615
1616 The recent heritage project, which this is, has surprised me because – in
1617 two ways – people actually don't even know we're here, and that's
1618 surprised me because I thought the people did know we were here; but at
1619 the same time it's surprised me how people do know we're here, and
1620 speak very eloquently about the function and the role and the impact that
1621 it's had upon it. People don't know we're here, it's not because…they're
1622 just they're not in our genre, our world. And I suppose what's surprised
1623 me is that it hasn't changed a lot, the young people's world is still a bit of a
1624 Cinderella.
1625
1626 We treat spaces like this, places where people go regularly because it's
1627 where you go, it's your community, it's something you want to go with. We
1628 beaver away doing our stuff but we get…the world forgets that it's not just
1629 about the treat spaces, that the Matilda's and all the great children's
1630 shows that are on in the West End, they're fantastic, when the reps do it,
1631 the Young Vic does it, whatever it might be, they do these one-off shows
1632 with young people, and they're brilliant; but it surprises me that there isn't,
1633 apart from a handful of companies that we've worked with over the years,
1634 that there isn't that recognition and mutual respect in a way, that that
1635 surprises me. I think that disappoints me a bit too, if I'm honest, but there
1636 we are.
1637
1638 I: What was the impact of the work upon the audiences who saw or
1639 experienced the plays from your point of view?
1640

1641 CE: I think I've talked about that, if I'm honest. I don't know why that question
1642 is still there, I think you must have left it in by mistake. I think I've talked
1643 about that, so I don't want to talk about that any more.
1644
1645 I: Are there any other memories of your time, or people you worked with at
1646 Half Moon you would like to tell us about?
1647
1648 CE: Well, 19 years is a long time, so I feel that this will be lodged in the
1649 archive and then in ten years time someone will go, he never talked about
1650 me and I worked with him. But there are so many people, I've mentioned
1651 some of them, I can't remember everyone.
1652
1653 Memories of my time? It is the communities that come in through the door,
1654 and the people that I meet in the street, and I don't know who the hell they
1655 are, and they know who I am and they know what we do; and that's really
1656 important. And that sounds terrible, that I don't know who they are, but
1657 they know who we are; that's a really important memory of my time here;
1658 I'm still here, I'm not going yet.
1659
1660 When you meet someone who came here as a child, and happened to do
1661 work experience, 14, 13 years later and then come back with their child
1662 themselves, saying, do you remember me, I came to see a play; those
1663 people are really important; they're anonymous people, they're the people
1664 that are the legacy of companies. Because what has surprised me over
1665 the years, and it's something that I've learned very, very much to
1666 embrace, is that many people work in the arts, it's all about the I, the ego,
1667 and I guess in a way you have to be slightly driven and you have to be
1668 really clear about what you want to achieve. But the best work, I believe,
1669 are with people, be they [inaudible 1:43:52], be they designers, whoever
1670 they might be, who put the ego to one side, that actually in the room you
1671 wouldn't think they were there, because they empower the communities,
1672 the audiences to engage in a way in which is really, really important. That
1673 surprised me that [inaudible 1:44:12] is still full of people full of ego who
1674 talk about I, I, I, and move on, they don't care about the legacy of their
1675 companies, I would say.
1676
1677 Yeah, and all the people that I've worked with over the years, it's really, I
1678 mean I don't know. I'm still here, so I'm not going, so…
1679
1680 I: Are there any other things you want to talk about, such as the support
1681 from local and national funders?
1682
1683 CE: Yeah, I mean, yeah, they're important because actually they have been
1684 really supportive of the work we do. We navigate them very well, and at
1685 times find them tricky and sometimes bewildering, and sometimes not
1686 quite sure what they're talking about.
1687
1688 [1:44:58]
1689

1690 But we've had over the years a number of people, the Arts Council and
1691 the local authority have really understood what we are doing and really
1692 championed what we have done and are continuing to do, they really
1693 understand the value of work, the gateway, the beginning spaces of
1694 places like this, and have been very respectful of the work we've done.
1695 And they've been very respectful of the experimentation, and sometimes
1696 you don't always get it right; and that's I think is important. And yeah, over
1697 the years we've had increases in our funding, we've bucked the trend
1698 sometimes. And yeah, I remember in 1998 the woman called Hannah –
1699 Hannah someone, can't remember her name now – who was an Arts
1700 Council officer, and she said…and she just said, what you're doing is
1701 absolutely what companies should be doing. And I've always hung on to
1702 that. Her name wasn't Hannah, her name was Helen, Helen someone, I
1703 can't remember her name now, I haven't thought about her for years. And
1704 she said, hang on to what you're doing because if companies like yours
1705 don't, in 20 years time no one will be; and here we are 18 years later, it
1706 was 1998, and we are still doing it and we are still here. And I think that's
1707 important, but it's not easy. It's not easy.
1708
1709 I: Finally, can you describe what impact your time at Half Moon has had for
1710 you?
1711
1712 CE: Well, I think – the impact – well, yeah, I think I have learned, and I
1713 touched it just now really, the importance of where you place the I in the
1714 equation of making work. You need to inspire and engage anyone,
1715 people, artists, communities, in a way that they feel that they are able to
1716 make a difference, be it in the nature of the style of the work they'd make,
1717 or be it the way in which they can be inspired by watching a play and
1718 going out and thinking differently about the world in which they're part.
1719
1720 And time and time again I have had to remind myself of that, not because
1721 we weren't doing it, but remind myself that that is really important, that's a
1722 big impact upon me really; and the impact is a way, that hopefully the way
1723 that you engage and manage people and deal with people as well. That
1724 actually I always say that if anything goes wrong it's always my
1725 responsibility, always. But when things are really successful, that you
1726 need to make sure that other people take the credit for that work, and you
1727 sit back and you think, well, that's fine because actually I'm providing,
1728 overall I guess, the structure that allows people to shine and develop and
1729 be, and so on; and that has had a big impact upon me, to remind myself
1730 again and again and again that that is something to really hang on to; it's
1731 a bit old-fashioned but really, really, really hang on to really.
1732
1733 And I guess I ought to be able to remember those small things as they
1734 move up on the ladder, and this heritage project has brought in voices that
1735 have really talked a lot about the impact that they've…that's had upon
1736 them, in my time, and therefore that has had an impact upon me to say
1737 [inaudible 1:48:39] it's worth it. Because it's not easy. And it shouldn't be
1738 easy, I mean if it was easy therefore we weren't doing the right job, but
1739 you do have to give so much, and that's the impact it's had upon me

1740 really; and that's fine, I don't mind, I might have a lot more grey hair than I
1741 did when I first came here, and that's fair enough. But the impact is that
1742 it's permeated my life, how can it not, because I've cared about it, I
1743 suppose. Yeah. And the people that I've worked with, I mean
1744 they're…that's…and the audiences that come, and that's really important.
1745 I mean, you know, as it's really…you know, and you do a youth sharing,
1746 when you do stand up at the end – and I said this before – when you
1747 stand up at the end and you thank the parents and the carers for coming,
1748 and you thank your teams, you know, that's really important to remember
1749 to do, because what they've done has had an impact upon me because it
1750 means that actually it's been worth it really.
1751
1752 And, yeah, I mean I think also everyone is important [inaudible 1:49:50] is
1753 important. I think the impact is also that art forms change and you need to
1754 go…the impact is I need to change, i.e. you can't sit still, and that's a
1755 really important thing to learn, and you need to know when your time is
1756 up, you need to know when it's time to let other people make the
1757 decisions, so you need to know how to do that; and that's a big impact
1758 upon me.
1759
1760 [1:50:15]
1761
1762 But I think also it's about the…that you've realised it's about being
1763 yourself, and being nice to everyone. Always be nice to people. The
1764 impact, I've worked with some great people, and I've learned huge
1765 amounts from people. I remember when I didn't work here, I worked for
1766 another organisation, and my boss, I worked as a head of department,
1767 head of education for a national flagship; she said to me, don't ever cross
1768 me, don't ever do anything that I don't…don't do things, she said, that I
1769 don't want you to do. And actually that isn't how you manage a company,
1770 you let people do the things that surprise you and engage with you in
1771 different ways, because actually I'm not…I don't know; and some of the
1772 best work has been work that I would never have dreamed that we would
1773 have done; and I have learned from that and I have changed as an artist
1774 or as a maker or as a manager, a manager, whatever you call it, as a
1775 result of that; and again that would be a big impact upon me as well.
1776 Yeah, and you give, you know, you give 19 years of your life, and that's a
1777 big thing.
1778
1779 **End of transcript**