



Cambridge Arts Theatre

Interview data sheet: Behind the Scenes Project

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Interviewee's surname: Zeitlyn

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's forename(s): Alice

Gender: Female

Occupation: Retired

Date(s) of recording, tracks (from-to):

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Name of interviewer: Akshita Anand

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None

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**Interviewer's
comments:**

Although the interviewee was not aware of the content and expected length of the interview, she seemed happy to talk about her recollection of the theatre.

Abstract:	Alice Zeitlyn, a long-time theatregoer and member of the Supporter's Circle, reminisces about her love of theatre. She recalls her first memories of music and the arts in London and describes the shift in pace between the London and Cambridge theatre scene. She also discusses how theatre has changed over time, talking about the developments and shortcomings of current theatre. Alice also explains the importance of theatre and opera to her and her family, and the role that has played in her long-term membership with Cambridge Arts Theatre. Lastly, Alice talks about her first experiences of Cambridge Arts Theatre, recollecting her favourite performances and discussing its importance to the city itself.
Key words:	Footlights University, Golders Green Hippodrome, Bernard Shaw, Richard II, Shakespeare, The Doctor's Dilemma, Michael Tippet, King Priam, Covent Garden, Turandot, Opera, Leoš Janáček, Royal Court Theatre, Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, Arnold Wesker, World War II, Glyndebourne Touring Opera
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00.41	Alice recollects her first memory of Cambridge Arts Theatre. Her family first moved to Cambridge in 1957 from London. They have always been theatre-lovers, so they were pleased about how much there was going on in the Theatre. They were especially pleased that the Theatre would show previews, meaning they could see productions before they were shown in the London theatres. They soon became regular visitors of the Theatre. She really enjoyed Footlights but as she and her family got older the Footlights' audience stayed the same age. They eventually stopped going to see Footlights. She and her family became Friends of the Theatre early on. Alice has now been a Friend of the Theatre for a while now.
02.05	Alice summarises when and where her love of theatre started. Her parents were very keen on the theatre. Her first memory of the theatre was the Embassy Theatre, where she watched a pantomime of 'Cinderella'. She enjoyed that they used a real-life pony to take Cinderella to the ball. Then, as she got older, she saw performances at the Golders Green Hippodrome. They were showing lots of Bernard Shaw plays. Her parents would encourage them to queue for the pit of the theatre to see the Shakespeare plays they were studying at school. She specifically remembers a performance of Richard II. Also, whilst they were queueing for their tickets, buskers would play with spoons and other instruments. She made sure to encourage her children to go to the theatre just like her parents did with her.

04:34	Alice talks more about the Richard II play she loved. She talks about the revolutionary nature of Shakespeare's historical play as it describes the rise and downfall of a king, which for Shakespeare's time was rather radical. She describes reading Shakespeare as a dry experience, yet when she saw it on stage it seemed very real and was an immersive experience. She talks about the dramatic nature of the play and how it could happen to anybody. Her favourite thing about the play is the contrast between the beginning and the end of the play.
05:57	Alice discusses her favourite Bernard Shaw plays. She recalls 'The Doctor's Dilemma', a famous play about a doctor's relationship with a patient and the problems it causes. When asked about her favourite aspect of the play, Alice relents that she married a doctor and trained as a nurse, she was aware of the issues raised. She also liked the drama of the arrival of the widow in a beautiful dress – not in mourning - which was very unexpected.
08:09	Alice talks about the previews at the Arts Theatre. She liked that there were previews as it allowed her and her family to form their own thoughts on the play before the critics could influence them.
08:47	Alice talks about the difference between London and Cambridge theatres. She says the main difference was the number of theatres available, there being a wider range of theatres in London. But she says the program the Arts Theatre offered was still very good. Also, the journey to the theatre in London was forty minutes whereas in Cambridge it was only ten minutes. She believes the main differences between attending the theatre in the two cities is size and accessibility. Although Alice recalled there being specialised theatres in London, given the Arts Theatre did everything she feels that she did not miss out. She also liked the easy distance of the Theatre in Cambridge and found that her family made friends there quickly.
10:38	Alice talks about Footlights and its audiences. She says that after more than ten years of attending Footlights, she knew what to expect. She recalls that it is simply part of the aging process. She felt that the audience staying the same age whilst she was getting older and older was becoming more apparent. Alice remembers when she first started watching Footlights. She loved the originality of it. It was also the place where she would realise how talented some performers were. She could tell that some of them were going to be huge in the industry.
12:23	Alice recalls the most memorable performance she saw at Cambridge Arts Theatre. She remembers 'Waiting for Godot' and opera as being key performances. She recalls 'Waiting for Godot' being an ear and eye opener. Her

	<p>husband, being a psychiatrist, found it very intriguing. She and her husband found it revolutionary. Her favourite thing about the play was how different the interaction between the characters was compared to other theatre performances – it was very unexpected. She and her husband loved seeing a new, exciting and different way of presenting a play. Alice also recalls opera in general. Her and her family were keen operagoers. She does not recall anything particularly outstanding but liked seeing a different presentation of something she had already seen.</p>
15:15	<p>Alice tells an anecdote about seeing Michael Tippett's 'King Priam'. Her family had seen the original performance of 'King Priam' in Covent Garden and they were very impressed with it. Especially because they knew 'The Trojans' which covered a similar plot. So, when they saw that it was going to be at Cambridge Arts Theatre years later, they were delighted to have the chance to see it again. After seeing it, she said to her husband "I don't remember seeing so much blood in the London performance". Someone who had overheard her saying this said "You're quite right. Covent Garden vetoed the amount of blood and asked Tippett to tone it down". But in Cambridge they kept to the original with all the gore Tippett asked for. Alice was more shocked by the Cambridge performance and feels it made the performance more dramatic than the Covent Garden production. It just re-enforced her family's love for the opera.</p>
17:56	<p>Alice talks about where her admiration for the opera started. She recalls Gilbert and Sullivan operas, whose performances she was taken to at a very early age. She also reminisces about the amount of music there was in her household as her parents encouraged them to listen to it on the radio. On her honeymoon in 1949, she went to Italy and saw opera in the Italian style which was quite different to English. They saw a performance of 'Turandot' where Alice recalls a long interval between acts. When her and her husband asked "why?" they said the tenor had a cold so they had to wait for a new tenor to be found before the performance could be resumed. Alice also recalls the excitement and applause between each aria, so they never stopped seeing opera. However, they never went back to Covent Garden. Alice also remembers when they went to the Colosseum, where there was a season of the operas by Leoš Janáček. They saw all of them which Alice recalls being an ear-opener.</p>
20:45	<p>Alice talks about growing up surrounded by music and theatre in her household. Her mother had an ambition of having a quartet in the family. Alice was assigned to the cello and piano; her brother played the violin and another</p>

	<p>brother also played the piano. But her oldest brother was tone deaf, so he did not have to play any instruments. However, despite their early efforts, the family quartet never materialised as the war intervened and halted all efforts. But there was a lot of music on the radio and her parents would often tune into the German opera before the war.</p>
22:00	<p>Alice talks about moving to Cambridge from London, where there was a wider range of music and theatre. Alice says there was still a lot of music in Cambridge. She recalls the old music school at the university. Her family got subscription tickets to the Chamber Music Concerts in the music school. Music also came to the Regal Cinema. Also, she could drive up to London and see performances there. She would often drive up to meet her husband after work there, then they would go straight to the London theatres and be back in Cambridge before midnight, so it worked well for them. She kept in touch with what music was on. After her husband died in 1979, she was given a large sum of money. She gave £10,000 of this to the music school to pay for a professional quartet to come to Cambridge and give regular recitals; these quartet recitals still carry on to this day and it was something she started.</p>
24:31	<p>Alice talks about when and why she first started getting subscription tickets. She says it was an easy way of getting a reduction in a price, an assured seat and it was something to mark off in the calendar. She says she has been a Friend of the Theatre very soon after moving to Cambridge. Alice also believes that by getting these subscription tickets and becoming part of the Supporter's Circle (as it is currently known as), she could say thanks to the Theatre and help keep it running.</p>
26:11	<p>Alice talks about whether COVID affected her theatre-going experience. Alice says that it was old age rather than COVID that stopped her from going to the Theatre as much. She had already reduced her theatre-going and she would go to more matinée productions than evening ones. Another thing was that she has already seen most of the plays put on by the Theatre and did not want to see them again. Overall COVID did not make much difference. When asked about how this made her feel, she said it was an inevitable process. Although, when the Theatre reopened with their new program Alice wanted to see 'Four Quartets' by T. S. Elliot, but there was no matinée show so she did not purchase for a ticket.</p>
28:19	<p>Alice talks about what she thinks Cambridge Arts Theatre means to the city. Alice thinks Cambridge is lucky to have a theatre like this as not many towns this size has such an innovative theatre. And although Cambridge has grown a huge amount since she moved here, it is still</p>

	<p>very small. But Alice feels the size of the Theatre fits very prettily within the city. Although it is not that present in the current program, new plays would come to Cambridge first making it a rather innovative theatre. But due the decline in that type of touring theatre before and after the war, not as many new plays are showcased anymore. Alice feels that this is a sign that times have changed and perhaps she has not kept up and is expecting the old style.</p>
30:31	<p>Alice discusses the biggest changes between theatre now and theatre from when she was younger. She says there was more new work being produced then than there is now. This is because the cost of producing a play used to be a lot cheaper. So, there was a wider variety in theatre then than now and even if it did not last very long at least they were there. Especially after the war when the Royal Court produced a lot of new plays which Alice found exciting.</p>
31:44	<p>Alice recalls her favourite 'new play' she saw when she was younger. She names Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' and plays by the playwright Arnold Wesker. She says the immediate new plays that the Royal Court were producing explored themes that would not have been seen on stage before the war.</p>
32:47	<p>Alice talks about theatre before and after the war. She says that people were keener to see new ideas and themes being played on the stage. They no longer needed to be historical or over-dramatic. People wanted to see things they hadn't experienced on stage before.</p>
33:57	<p>Alice says her favourite about Cambridge Arts Theatre is its accessibility. She says it is easy to get tickets. She also likes that a lot of new stuff had been seen at Cambridge Arts Theatre for the first time. Although, she does miss how big the London theatres are. She says the Arts Theatre is rather intimate.</p>
35:20	<p>Alice recalls her favourite directors and writers that she has seen at Cambridge Arts Theatre. She names Beckett again. But other than that, she cannot recall any other directors and writers.</p>
36:15	<p>Alice wants to know if there are any touring companies left. She would like to see the Glyndebourne Touring Opera come back. She is also curious as to whether the Arts Theatre would be interested in sponsoring a new playwright and producing a play from scratch.</p>
37:11	<p>Alice talks more about Glyndebourne. She says they are a famous opera company. She felt they supplemented the summer season of Glyndebourne well. She thought it was exciting to see what they did as they are a rather</p>

	innovative company. Whenever they came to Cambridge, she went to see them.
37:50	Alice says that if the Arts Theatre were to write and produce and play from scratch, she would sponsor and support it.
END	