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| **Interview data sheet:** Behind the Scenes Project |
| **Ref no:** THM/258  **WAV files ref:**  |
| **Collection title:** Behind the scenes: saving and sharing Cambridge Arts Theatre’s Archive**Interviewee’s surname:** Baker **Title:** Ms**Interviewee’s forename(s):** Terry**Gender:** Female**Occupation:** Dressmaker |
| **Date(s) of recording, tracks (from-to):** **Location of interview:** Cambridge Arts Theatre**Name of interviewer:** Katherine Moar**Type of recorder:** Zoom H4N **Recording format:** WAV**Total no. of tracks:** 1 **Total duration (HH:MM:SS):** **Mono/Stereo:** Stereo |
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| **Interviewer’s comments:** | Terry Baker, a self-employed dressmaker, talks about the memorable productions she has seen at Cambridge Arts Theatre and describes her work in the Wardrobe Department of several Pantomimes. She recalls meeting Vanessa Bell, a painter and Virginia Woolf’s sister, and Lydia Lopokova, a Russian ballerina and John Maynard Keynes’s wife, in the late 1960s.  |
| **Abstract:** |  |
| **Key words:** | Cambridge Arts Theatre, Combined Actors of Cambridge, *Mother Courage,* Ely Cathedral, Marty Kane, *Snow White, Stepping Out,* Rose Bruford College, John Maynard Keynes, Lydia Lopokova, Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, *Cinderella, West Side Story,* Ayckbourn, Noel Coward, Caryl Churchill, *The Play That Goes Wrong, An Inspector Calls,* Mark Passey, Luke Pack, |
| **File** |  |
| **00.00** | Terry introduces herself. In 1968, aged 14, Terry moved to Cambridge. Her earliest memory of Cambridge Arts Theatre is attending a Pantomime sometime after that. She remembers seeing Cyril Fletcher. Terry explains that they did not come to the Theatre often so “it was always a real treat to come”. Her father was a very keen amateur actor who always loved the Theatre. The family came regularly to the rooftop restaurant on a Saturday – her father’s way of getting “a slightly cheaper fix of being in the Theatre”. She has lots of memories of “lemonade on a rooftop terrace”. Terry’s father appeared onstage at Cambridge Arts Theatre with the Combined Actors of Cambridge in a production of *Mother Courage*. Terry remembers being much more impressed by the interior of the Theatre than the interior of Ely Cathedral, where her father also performed.  |
| **02:05** | Terry recalls seeing Marty Kane, “a television personality at the time”, appearing in a Pantomime wearing an extraordinary red dress. It may have been *Snow White*. Terry says it was clever how the beautiful red dress contrasted with Kane’s villainous character. Terry thinks this may have inspired her to spend the rest of her life sewing and, an on amateur level, making costumes for theatre. Terry has been part of a local group for the past 30 years that put on two shows a year. Terry has mostly been involved in the costume side, but occasionally props and stage management. Though she has not made costumes for any productions at Cambridge Arts Theatre, she has loaned costumes. Terry learnt to sew when she was nine. She was self-taught and “scraped” an O-level in Needlework in Sixth Form. She trained initially in catering and then moved into early years teaching. In 2000, she became a self-employed dressmaker. |
| **04:40** | Terry’s father moved away when she was 19 and sadly died 10 years later. He acted at school in Ireland. Terry says he would have loved to have done more, but circumstances did not allow it. He was very active in the amateur acting scene in Cambridge. Terry is involved now in the same group that her father was a part of. She says that doesn’t have any real memory of being involved in the Theatre in her teens, although her younger sister was, appearing in a few plays with her father. Looking back at her own family archive, Terry discovered that she designed programmes and props when she was 14-16. She never thought she would appear on stage. She eventually did, however, after seeing *Stepping Out* at Cambridge Arts Theatre. Terry performed in an amateur production of the same show two or three years ago. Terry describes it as “a brilliant play for everybody with amazing parts for women”.  |
| **06:37** | Recently, Terry has worked as a Wardrobe Assistant for the annual Pantomime at Cambridge Arts Theatre which she describes as “a real treat and a real surprise”. The amateur group that Terry is involved with, based in Haslingfield, has a youth section. Terry remembers two twin girls who joined the group when they were about 8. In Sixth Form, one of the girls – Phoebe – decided that she didn’t want to be involved in acting anymore and wanted to work with Terry in costume. For two years, Terry and Phoebe worked together on four shows. After that, Phoebe attended Rose Bruford College and studied for a degree in Theatre Costume. One of her first big jobs was as Wardrobe Supervisor for one of the Pantomime at Cambridge Arts Theatre in 2016. Phoebe was advised that she would need an assistant, and she asked Terry to help. Terry describes this as “the highlight of her working life” and calls Phoebe “the best boss she’s ever worked for”. Terry recalls “the terror and excitement” of being in the wings on the opening night of the Pantomime, next to Dawn Hope. Terry remembers feeling “consumed with imposter syndrome”. She describes working on the Pantomime as a real team effort, as people spend a lot of time away from their families and work extremely long hours.  |
| **08:50** | Terry notices the painting of John Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova. She remembers that before the renovation it used to hand downstairs by the Box Office, which was at that time ‘a bit of a back entrance by the Stage Door’. She recalls ‘we used to wander round there when we got our interval drinks’. Terry ‘used to absolutely love that panting’, ‘partly because it’s a beautiful painting’ and partly because she had a memory of meeting Lopokova. Before Terry moved to Cambridge, she briefly lived in Leeds and was friendly with Virginia Woolf’s great niece (also called Virginia). Her friend Virginia’s family later moved to Sussex and Terry went to stay with her over the summer when she was 13 or 14. One day, they visited Virginia’s grandmother and Woolf’s sister, the painter Vanessa Bell. As they were going up the drive, they met Lopokova, who was ‘one of the Bloomsbury lot’. Terry was astonished when she visited the Theatre a year later and saw the picture of her. She is ‘very fond of it’ and regrets that it is no longer visible to everybody. She thought Lopokova was ‘elegant’, ‘exotic’ and ‘very friendly’. She describes the portrait as ‘a couple of feet squared’, ‘quite dark’, showing ‘Keynes and his petite, elegant wife both smoking cigarettes’. Terry, though not a dancer herself, could tell just from the way that Lopokova ‘walked and held herself’ that she was a dancer. Terry says that she must have met her in ’67 or ’68. |
| **12:05** | It was Virginia’s mother who first encouraged Terry to sew. She had a cabinet called a tallboy and Terry and Virginia were allowed to use the contents of the bottom drawer, which were off cuts from fabrics the mother had used. Terry remembers thinking to herself at the age of 10 ‘one day I’ll have a stash of fabrics like that’ and now she has managed to. |
| **13:00** | Terry has seen the Theatre through various stages and iterations. She remembers the ‘sparkly’, ‘theatrical’ lights on the staircase which were set off by motion sensors. They were certainly a wow’ and ‘it was worth checking up to the loo just to set them off’. She remembers the restaurant, which was ‘always lovely’. Her sister-in-law worked there at one point, possibly as the assistant manager. Terry and her husband came several times when she worked there.  |
| **14:15** | There are ‘so many amazing productions’ that Terry has seen. Her husband is one of eight and when he was a child his parents would save up for months to buy tickets for the pantomime. It was ‘a real treat’. Years later, his parents would buy tickets for the grandchildren to see it. Terry recalls taking her 9-year-old son, 6-year-old daughter and some of their cousins to see *Cinderella*. Her daughter Ella ‘absolutely idolised’ her older cousin Becky. Becky told Ella the story of *Cinderella* when they went to the loo before the show and Ella returned ‘terrified of the ‘Rugly Sisters’. She made Terry promise to warn her when the ‘Rugly Sisters’ were about to come on.’ She crouched behind the seats and wouldn’t watch. In the second scene, the Ugly Sisters came on and Terry kept quiet. Ella finally worked up the courage to peek over the edge. Then the Sisters went off and Ella crouched back down, telling her mum again to warn her when the ‘Rugly Sisters’ were coming on. So Terry told her ‘those were the Ugly Sisters!’ and from then on Ella watched the show happily. The family still call them the Rugly Sisters.  |
| **16:40** | Terry absolutely loves ‘the spectacle of the Pantos’. They’re ‘so full of life and joy’. At the Panto Terry saw recently, ‘half the audience were weeping’. It’s ‘just amazing and that’s always the case with the pantomime.’  |
| **17:40** | She saw *West Side Story* and other big-scale musicals. She has seen ‘the usual accessible Ayckbourn and the wonderful Noel Coward’ but also some other, ‘much less obvious things’. She saw something by Caryl Churchill, which she ‘didn’t really understand’ but thought ‘brilliant’ and ‘extraordinary’. Because she has some background knowledge about sets, it’s ‘always fascinating to see’. She was particularly impressed by the sets of *The Play That Goes Wrong*. A recent disappointment was that the production of *An Inspector Calls* was pulled due to COVID. She had seen it before at the Arts Theatre and wanted to come again because of the ‘jaw-dropping’ set. The play opens with the facade of a two-storey Edwardian house; but the ‘really incredible thing is that there’s torrential rainfall’. She had been invited by Mark Passey, the technical manager, and Luke Pack, the pantomime crew manager, to see how they do it on the day. She also recalls seeing a play about the D-Day landings with ‘an amazing rain sequence’ and says that it is ‘such a privilege to come and see so many amazing things’. |
| **20:55** | The pantomime Terry worked on in 2020 was the last thing she saw before he pandemic hit. As a result of having worked at the Arts, she got job dressing for the Corn Exchange for Priscilla Queen of the Desert. Phoebe worked on the costumes for the 2021 panto and Terry came to see that before it was pulled. It was ‘just an extraordinary achievement’; ‘the cast came to read the script one Friday, and they were on stage the following Friday.’ Everything happened in less than a week. Terry provided some last-minute props because they didn’t have time to get them through the usual channels and some props suppliers were probably furloughed. Terry thinks it is wonderful that opportunities are given to amateurs. Her father’s group performed at the Arts once a year and he was ‘thrilled to act on a professional stage; it was his life-long wish’. |
| **23:50** | Another thing Terry thinks is ‘terrific’ is Panto Wheels. She worked for ten years in the nursery and reception class of a Cambridge school (St Luke’s). One year, the whole school was able to see the pantomime as a result of Panto Wheels. The children were very unlikely to have had that opportunity otherwise. There was so much excitement building up to it, for a whole week the kids were completely unmanageable! And for a week afterwards all the talk was about pantomimes and all the artworks and dressing-up costumes. There was a bit in the show when children were allowed to come up on stage and a few of the children from St Luke’s were chosen. The children were each asked which school they were from; one of Terry’s students, ‘and angelic three- or four-year-old, who was really quite a handful’ was finally asked: ‘where do you come from?’. He replied: ‘my mummy’s tummy’. He got one of the biggest laughs of the evening. The children were buzzing. A lot of them would not have come otherwise, either for financial reasons or because they were from cultures which did not have a tradition of pantomimes. Terry says that ‘that should certainly encourage people to throw money in the bucket in the end of the show’ as, for many children, this is ‘their first experience of theatre’. Terry says that even in the amateur theatre world, they say that you ‘have to treat pantomime very seriously because it’s crucial’.  |
| **28:30** | Terry says that she would ‘die to have the costume budget’ that the Arts Theatre has. She points out that the costume department have to be there before everybody else arrives and leave later than everybody else leaves. There is a lot of laundry! They call all the cast and crew ‘part-timers’. It’s ‘hard work but great fun’. On Christmas Eve, all the company dress up in silly clothes and there are lots of ‘sticky buns from Fitzbillie’s’. There is a secret santa and funny award ceremony. It needs to be fun because people are away from their families. Terry feels ‘very fortunate’ to have worked on it. |
| **31:15** | Terry finds the familiarity of pantomimes particularly important during a time of disruption like the pandemic. She is also amazed by the talent of everyone involved. In the panto, Terry was responsible for the costume changes of Wayne Sleep, who played Abanazer. She was able to watch ‘that genius dancing six feet away’ while she stood in the wings.  |
| **33:15** | One year, there were so many technical problems at the panto. The ceiling was leaking into the auditorium, there were power cuts caused by a fault in the wires outside, the smoke machine stopped working – one thing after the other. The technical team sorted everything out. Terry says that ‘the great thing about Matt [Crosby] is he makes sure everybody gets applauded at the end of each show’. |
| **34:30** | Terry says ‘we’re very, very fortunate theatre to have such an amazing theatre here in Cambridge.’ She is saddened that some theatres may not reopen after the pandemic and hopes that the Arts is not one of them because ‘it has a lot of heart’ and is very important to her. Seeing the pantomime made her remember how much she misses the theatre. Her husband asked her hat she wanted for Christmas, and she replied: ‘nothing – I just want to go to the theatre lots and lots’. She loves to take her grandchildren to see the panto and to take them backstage. But she makes sure not to show them how the flying carpet of flying horse work because she wants to preserve the magic. She heard about the oral histories project because she is a supporter of the theatre and was on the mailing list.  |