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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:** Rogers  **Title:** Mr  **Interviewee’s forename(s):** Malcolm ‘Mac’  **Gender:** M  **Occupation:** Retired Actor | |
| **Date(s) of recording, tracks (from-to):**  **Location of interview:** Cambridge Arts Theatre  **Name of interviewer:** Dale Copley  **Type of recorder:** Zoom H4N **Recording format:** WAV  **Total no. of tracks:** 1 **Total duration (HH:MM:SS):** 00:28:23  **Mono/Stereo:** Stereo | |
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| **Interviewer’s comments:** |  |
| **Abstract:** | Malcolm Rogers performed onstage at Cambridge Arts Theatre in the 1950s. He describes a life in the theatre, his run-ins with luminaries such as Alan Ayckbourn and Peter O’Toole, and the difference between theatre and television acting. |
| **Key words:** | *Twelfth Night,* Oxford Playhouse, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* University of Leeds, RADA, Peter O’Toole, Alan Bates, John Stride, Richard Briers, *Under Milkwood,* Dylan Thomas, Edward Burnham, *Quiet Wedding,* Gary Raymond, Roy Kinnear, Carol Jenner, Frank Hauser, Alan Ayckbourn, Belgrade Theatre, Brian Bailey, *Vivat! Vivat Regina!,* Sarah Miles, Eileen Atkins, *After the Rain,* John Bowen, Frank Hauser, Clifford Williams, Edgar Allen Poe, Grantchester, Rupert Brooke, ‘The Old Vicarage, Grantchester’, King’s College, *Look Back in Anger,* HM Tennent, Binky Beaumont, *Casualty, War and Peace*, Anthony Hopkins, *Joan of Arc,* Luc Besson, Faye Dunaway, John Malkovich, Charles VII |
| **File** | STE-000 |
| **00.00** | Malcolm ‘Mac’ Rogers worked at Cambridge Arts Theatre in the late 1950s. He says that he hardly recognises the front of the Theatre or stage door. He notes it has changed a lot over the years. |
| **00:52** | **What was your first experience of Cambridge Arts Theatre?** |
| **00:53** | Rogers first came to the Arts as an actor in 1955, he believes, for a production of *Twelfth Night*. The Arts was linked to the Oxford Playhouse, and as an actor Rogers enjoyed working at these venues as he was able to spend a fortnight in Oxford before coming to Cambridge. He notes the play was well-rehearsed by the time it came to Cambridge. Rogers recalls thoroughly enjoying his first night at the Arts. He notes their days were completely free because the show was ready and working. |
| **02:07** | **Where did you stay when you were in Cambridge?** |
| **02:08** | Rogers recalls staying in the house opposite the stage door. He notes it was a popular place for the actors to book. The owner of the house was Mrs Pillsworth. Rogers recalls she would always try to be fair and not disappoint anyone and she would not take the booking until she was written to by the actors. The letter she opened first would have the booking. He recalls Mrs Pillsworth as relaxed, which was why the actors wanted to stay with her. |
| **03:37** | **How did you get into acting?** |
| **03:38** | Rogers was keen on sport in his youth. He remembers learning 20 lines of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* he was given [and recounts them] and enjoyed doing so. At University of Leeds, he swapped the games room for the rehearsal room. He played 18 lead roles throughout his time at university whilst studying for a degree in English. |
| **05:24** | **What did you do after you finished university?** |
| **05:31** | Rogers took a scholarship to RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art), where he studied for 6 terms. He praised his contemporaries as “a vintage year” which included his good friend, Peter O’Toole, who he would travel from Leeds with every term. Other contemporaries included Alan Bates, John Stride, Richard Briers. He was reminded of RADA and those early days when his son, Dafydd Rogers [Cambridge Arts Theatre’s Executive Director], went to see a performance of *Under Milkwood*. Rogers was in the very first ever stage performance of the show, which was chosen as their term play when Dylan Thomas wrote it in his fifth term. He recalls being downcast when the director, Edward Burnham, shared the news. Burnham had heard it on the radio and bought the rights as he liked it so much. *Quiet Wedding* was offered as an alternative, which encouraged a trial of *Under Milkwood* – it was a fantastic cast. Peter O’Toole had a one-line role as the Undertaker. Alan Bates played Cherry Owen, Gary Raymond and John Stride were the two voices. Roy Kinnear also featured. Rogers comments that he wishes he had an autograph book with him at the time – he didn’t realise the significance of the cast! Rogers played Mog Edwards (and still remembers the lines). It was a cutting-edge production. He notes the play moved to the West End within months of his performance. |
| **09:45** | **What happened after you finished at RADA?** |
| **09:51** | Rogers recalls travelling the country with Carol Jenner, “taking theatre to theatre-less communities”, playing in village halls. He discusses life on the road, moving props, and life as an actor. He would eat his meals with people who wanted to hear theatrical stories in exchange for rooms along the way. |
| **11:36** | Rogers notes spending the next few years at the Oxford Playhouse and the Arts. He recalls the privilege of the link between the theatres. Rogers praises Frank Hauser, who ran the Oxford Playhouse, as he was always looking for new material. |
| **12:38** | Rogers recalls there was an ASM (Assistant Stage Manager) at Oxford called Alan Ayckbourn – and Frank Hauser never even asked if he was a writer, he just shouted at him most of the time! Rogers recalls sharing digs with Ayckbourn as a young man. He notes the last time they met was when Richard Briers played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. |
| **13:09** | **Do you think there was evidence of Ayckbourn’s future success at that time?** |
|  | Rogers remarks that there wasn’t really. He recalls Ayckbourn was an “agreeable young man” but was “bullied” as a member of the stage management team at the time. He has photographs from the time. He notes he played one of the drowned in *Under Milkwood*. |
| **13:42** | **Did you audition for the company or for any specific roles?** |
| **13:48** | Rogers explains the actors would audition for a particular role and be kept on if they were good. He recalls this being a great period – having Oxford and Cambridge working together. |
| **14:13** | He moved to Coventry when the Belgrade Theatre opened under Brian Bailey. Rogers was there for 3 years and would commute to Oxford for shows. |
| **14:32** | **Can you talk about some of the productions you were in?** |
| **14:40** | Rogers recalls being in *Vivat! Vivat Regina!* with Sarah Miles and Eileen Atkins in the West End. He also recalls performing in *After the Rain* by John Bowen, which he notes only lasted six weeks. Rogers has also acted in films. |
| **15:23** | **Were you playing to a full house in the 1950s?** |
|  | Audiences liked the university set up and new and interesting plays. Directors from that time were Frank Hauser and Clifford Williams but there were no others which stood out. |
| **16:26** | Rogers returns to Mrs Pillsworth’s digs in Cambridge. She used to keep a visitors’ book of those who stayed with her which they all had to sign. All the comments were excellent, although he recalls seeing one comment “… quothe the raven” [Edgar Allen Poe] meaning they weren’t going to come back! |
| **17:08** | **You said you had your days free when you were in Cambridge. Can you talk about an average day when you were here?** |
|  | Rogers recalls a great sense of companionship. One day they undertook a trip to Grantchester (you could travel by boat, walk or cycle). They chose to go by boat. The clock stood at “ten to three” at the church in Grantchester [reference to a Rupert Brooke poem, ‘The Old Vicarage, Grantchester’] but there was no honey for tea! Walking round the colleges and the wonderful chapel at King’s College. He recalls carols being a real privilege. |
| **18:31** | **Could you speak about the Theatre more generally at that time?** |
|  | It was an exciting time – there were translations from abroad, there was *Look Back in Anger* which he saw the very first production of. “Kitchen sink drama” suddenly appeared. |
| **19:50** | **Could you tell me more about the HM Tennent Productions?** |
|  | Rogers was in *Vivat! Vivat Regina*! They were a powerful producing house under Binky Beaumont [one of the most successful and influential manager-producers in the West End during the middle of the 20th century]. He recalls them “ruling the roost in those days”. |
| **20:41** | **When did your career as an actor end?** |
|  | In his later life, Rogers did television work and appeared “on the wards” regularly in *Casualty* etc [over 60 appearances]. It was an entirely different way of acting – e.g., there was no need for projection. The audience reaction was also different – immediate in Theatre, whereas one had to wait for the television responses. Rogers particularly enjoyed *War and Peace* which attracted a large TV audience with Anthony Hopkins in the lead – the most talented man he had ever met. Rogers played a foot soldier in the film who ended up being shot in the head and left in the snow. |
| **24:30** | **Your son Dafydd now works here at the Theatre and you have come back to visit. Can you describe what is different?** |
|  | The architecture is different – it looks very different from the front. Rogers’s son was particularly good as an actor at school and initially went in other directions but returned to Theatre and fulfilled his talent as a producer. Rogers recalls attending many first nights with his son. |
| **26:28** | **Would you like to share anything else with us?** |
|  | Rogers recalls an exciting episode in cinema when he appeared in *Joan of Arc* produced by Luc Besson [1999]. He performed as Bishop with Faye Dunaway which was hugely exciting. He recalls arriving on set to be told that John Malkovich [playing Charles VII] had just finished on set and had done his scene for the 64th take! Luc Besson was a perfectionist and got the shots he wanted. Besson described Rogers as having “medieval face so the cameras were on me an awful lot” |