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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:** Siddall **Title:** Mr**Interviewee’s forename(s):** Stephen**Gender:** Male**Occupation:** Retired |
| **Date(s) of recording, tracks (from-to):** **Location of interview:** Cambridge Arts Theatre**Name of interviewer:** **Type of recorder:** Zoom H4N **Recording format:** WAV**Total no. of tracks:** 1 **Total duration (HH:MM:SS):** 00:26:46**Mono/Stereo:** Stereo |
| **Additional material:**  | None |
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| **Interviewer’s comments:** | Between 1988 and 2005, Stephen Siddall, Head of English at The Leys School for 31 years, directed 15 classic plays for Cambridge Arts Theatre. Siddall recalls his earliest memories of the Arts Theatre, his favourite and least favourite productions, and the joys of directing and collaborating with other talented creatives. |
| **Abstract:** |  |
| **Key words:** | Leys School, Cambridge Arts Theatre, Andrew Blackwood, Young Theatre Group, Supporters’ Circle, Sam Mendes, *Cyrano de Bergerac,* Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* Tom Hiddleston, Hattie Monahan, Christopher Monahan, National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Alchemist*, Ben Johnson, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Devils,* John Whiting, *The Government Inspector, The Comedy of Errors,* Dadie Rylands, Lord Keynes, Marlowe, Ian McKellan, *Richard III, Edward II,* President Pompidou, *The Mayor of Salomé, The Merchant of Venice,* Combined Actors for Cambridge |
| **File** |  |
| **00.00** | Stephen Siddall introduces himself.  |
| **00.30** | Siddall talks about how he started at the Theatre by bringing his pupils from the Leys School to see performances at Cambridge Arts Theatre. Siddall talks about how he met Andrew Blackwood (General Manager for 32 years). Siddall says that he directed a few plays in the early 1970s and then, at Blackwood’s request, Siddall directed a further 12 plays. Siddall also talks about how he co-founded the Young Theatre Group, which involved taking secondary school children to see plays. Siddall also mentions that he was on the committee for the Supporters’ Circle. |
| **02.00** | Siddall goes on to talk about what sorts of plays he would take his pupils to see, not things that were on the curriculum but rather things that looked interesting. Steve talks about the Supporters’ Circle which included people advising the Manager on what ways one could gather support for the Theatre. |
| **02.50** | Siddall talks about all the plays he directed, particularly when he was asked by Blackwood to direct the Marlowe Society in the late 1980s. He mentions that he was in competition with a director called Sam Mendes that ended up doing a great play of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Siddall claims that “it was losing out to Sam Mendes that started [his] Sequence”. Siddall states that he continued to work in the Theatre until 2004-5 with a break in-between when the Theatre was refurbished from 1993-96. |
| **04.10** | Siddall talks about his favourite production that he has directed and remembers getting a rather peculiar order from Blackwood saying: “I want you to do plays by Shakespeare that are not often done”. Siddall says that one of his favourites was *Cymbeline* which was not done much and recalls that he did not know much about the play so he “learnt on the job”. Siddall states that *Cymbeline* had a cast which was full of University students such as Tom Hiddleston who were looking to make “a name for themselves”. Siddall claimed that one of the best actresses was Hattie Monahan (daughter of director Christopher Monahan), and that she went on to do a lot of things for the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. |
| **06.15** | Siddall talks about the other plays he directed aside from Shakespeare such as *The Alchemist* by Ben Johnson and *The Duchess of Malfi*, and a Spanish play. Siddall claims that these plays were Renaissance Theatre. Siddall recalls the first play he did at Cambridge Arts Theatre which was called *The Devils* by John Whiting, as well as *The Government Inspector* and *The Comedy of Errors*. Siddall goes on to talk about Dadie Rylands, who co-founded the Cambridge Arts Theatre, along with Lord Keynes, and Dadie did a lot of Marlowe productions. |
| **07.40** | Siddall states the favourite production he has seen at Cambridge Arts Theatre was Ian McKellan doing *Richard III* and/or *Edward II*. Siddall recalls that Ian was famous as a young actor but was not as famous as he is now. Siddall remembers that on one occasion, Ian joined him on one of the Saturdays of the Young Theatre Group and Siddall states that because he was so well known, around 100 people turned up. Siddall remembers that Ian directed an improvisation of the Queen visiting Paris with President Pompidou which was very popular among the children audience. |
| **09.30** | Siddall expands on the Young Theatre Group and talks about how it was a mix between children from private and state schools. Siddall states that the intention is that they would see more plays and he claims that many of the children became theatre goers. Siddall describes the scheme as a “contribution to the community” |
| **11.20** | Siddall talks about his favourite memory at Cambridge Arts Theatre and remembers that Dadie Rylands came to many of his dress rehearsals and Siddall recalls Dadie’s notes as being very good. |
| **12.25** | Siddall expands on the Spanish production he did, which was called *The Mayor of Salomé* and Hattie Monahan played the lead. Siddall remembered that the speech that had to be performed by the lead lasted 20 minutes so you had to have a very talented actor to be able to do that. Siddall mentions that even very talented actors are afraid of slowness and pauses which audiences enjoy as it enables them to catch up with the play. Siddall claims that it is usually very good actors that do one man/one woman shows as they must be equally confident in speaking as well as not speaking. Siddall believes that the play was well received and remembers one of the performances where Hattie had forgotten a very small part at the end of the play. |
| **16.05** | Siddall recalls a negative memory which was his production of *The Merchant of Venice* which he claimed was not very good. Siddall remembers the designer for this play had designed a set that had a lot of channels which he said looked amazing but were a nightmare for the actors to navigate. Siddall states that this situation was quite common, and it was the director’s job to sometimes restrain the designer’s enthusiasm.  |
| **17.20** | Siddall talks about the gap between him directing plays in the early 1970s and then again in the late 1980s. Siddall says that during the 1970s he was directing for local amateur groups (e.g., the Combined Actors for Cambridge). |
| **19.40** | Siddall goes on to talk about his duties as a director, one of those being to find designers. Siddall felt that the work with the designer was very important as it happened before he started working with the actors. Siddall also said that he had to get on with the designer as well as the designer being very talented. The designer would have to talk to the actors about the set and be very familiar with the play as well as being on hand during rehearsals. They had to be willing to sometimes alter the set.  |
| **20.50** | Siddall talks about his favourite part about being a director is that you work with people who are very talented at what they do. Siddall compares being a director to being the manager of a sports team. |
| **23.15** | Siddall talks about his career as a teacher and that he was able to carry on doing all the things he enjoyed doing at university. Siddall felt that he could combine his hobby with his job.  |
| **24.30** | Siddall ends with talking about the similarities and differences between teaching and directing. Siddall states that one similarity is that you are helping people to fulfil themselves. He does mention that with teaching one has to conform. Siddall also elaborates on the concept of “thinking for oneself”. |
| **ENDS.**  |  |