CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

PERFORMING ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

Name: Tina Matthews and Richard Bradshaw

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Place: Bondi

Interviewer: Margaret Leask

TRANSCRIPT

0.00  ML: This is an interview with Tina Matthews, puppet maker and children’s book author and illustrator; and Richard Bradshaw OAM who was the artistic director of the Marionette Theatre of Australia in Sydney between 1976 and 1984. This is an interview about the Marionette Theatre of Australia for the City of Sydney Performing Arts Oral History Project. The interview is taking
place at Tina Matthew’s home in Bondi, Sydney, on Thursday the 6th of June 2013. The interviewer is Margaret Leask and this is the first track of the interview.

Tina and Richard, thank you for taking part in this project. You’ve both had very busy and diverse careers and there’s no way we can talk about these today so the focus will be on your work with the Marionette Theatre of Australia, particularly in Sydney. I should flag up, however, that Richard has recorded an extended oral history interview for the NIDA archives and this is accessible for researchers at the NIDA Library. But before we talk about the Marionette Theatre please would you start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about how you found your way to puppetry. Tina, perhaps you could start.

TM: I was born in Wellington New Zealand in 1961 and when I left school I started working on a project run by the Arts Council in Wellington which was community arts - working in schools, parks in the summertime, performing - and a friend who had been a mask maker and hadn’t done that much puppetry, but he did all the heads for the big Christmas parades in town every year, also joined the scheme. His name was Peter Chester and he taught us all how to make puppets and how to make good, strong papier-mâché and we started performing really knowing very little about puppetry; none of us really did but soon got interested and started finding out more about it.

So that was probably for the best part of a year I worked in puppetry in New Zealand, teaching myself as I went, or teaching one another and then when I left New Zealand I travelled in England for a time and went to some puppet theatres over there and when I came to live in Australia in 1982 I went to the Marionette Theatre to have a look around and introduce myself. And I had made these rather grotesque puppets called germ puppets and there was about to be a show at the Opera House, I think, an exhibition, and Beverley Campbell-Jackson said “Oh, well, you can put your puppets in if you want” so I did. Yes, they were sort of strange fantasy puppets and so I put those in and that was how I started working with the Marionette Theatre which was when I really started learning about puppets and how to make them.

ML: Great. So, Richard, where and when were you born and how did you get into puppetry?

RB: I was born in Anzac Parade, Maroubra Junction and I had a school friend. He was a year ahead of me at Kensington Public School and Sydney Boys’ High School who had joined the Puppet Theatre in
Clovelly and he persuaded me to go along in 1952 and so I went along for my school years, was attached to that theatre and although I kept up friendly connection with it I didn’t do any puppetry while I was at the university. I acted with SUDS [Sydney University Dramatic Society] productions and didn’t take up puppetry again till I was teaching, living in a boarding school, and because I’m a very messy person most kinds of puppetry were beyond me then, but at least I could cut out cardboard so that’s how I started doing the shadow puppets. I had done a little bit earlier but not much.

4.09 ML: Can you talk a bit about your starting to work as a puppeteer or touring your shadow puppets which are now world famous. You’ve been all over the world with them and have a particular humourous and affectionate quality about them.

RB: Well, it was a hobby and Edith Murray who ran the Clovelly Puppet Theatre went to England in 1963 and insisted that when I came a year later that I brought some shadow puppets and on the way I got a letter from her in Tahiti and another one in Mexico, because the ship was calling in these ports, saying we’d been invited to perform in Czechoslovakia at an amateur festival. Someone said to me at the festival “I liked your show because it was really amateur”. And I was doing something sort of fairly fresh because I got invited to a festival in Germany the following year, but it was still a hobby. And it wasn’t till I came back to Australia – that was in ’66 – and was teaching, Joan and Betty Rayner who had toured the Bussells Puppeteers that I’d seen in Sydney in 1952 at the old Empire Theatre just when I was joining Clovelly Puppet Theatre, they were looking for an Australian performer to tour and Edith suggested me and so that’s how I got caught up. And so for two years I toured for them, then I organised my own shows and then in 1972 Jan Bussell came to Australia partly because I had suggested the Marionette Theatre contact him. They were looking for an adviser and they did contact him and he said “I’ll be the adviser” so he came out and brought a marionette production with him, something that had been done in 1952, I think, at the Lyric in Hammersmith and this was the Charles Kingsley story.

6.13 ML: ‘The Water Babies’?

RB: The Water Babies, that’s right, thank you. And while they were here, he and his wife, Jan and Ann, came and watched a show I did at a school. They watched it from behind sort of almost leaning on my shoulder it was so cramped, and liked the show. And thanks largely to Edith Murray again I was going to perform at an international festival in France in 1972 in Charleville-Mézières and Jan said “Oh, there’s a
festival in America a month before. You should write to them” and so I
did and so on the way I performed there. And immediately after the
Charleville one got invitations to perform in Sweden straight away and
then back in Paris and then in Denmark and so I had a few months’
doing that which was nice.

ML: And you also, I think actually before you went overseas,
performed a season or a couple of seasons at Nimrod Theatre in
1971.

RB: Yes, that’s right. That’s after I had left Joan and Betty. Nimrod Theatre,
can you remember when it opened? Was it ’71, I think, perhaps?

ML: It was about the time it opened, yes, early ’70s.

RB: And the first production was ‘Biggles’, which is quite wonderful – that’s
in the old Stables Theatre.

ML: At the Cross [Kings Cross).

RB: And then the second production was to be directed by Ken Horler. It
was ‘End Game’ and a couple of the Beckett mimes and the fire
department said they couldn’t use the Stables so we used the St
James Theatre in Phillip Street and I did some shadow puppets for that.
So that was the first association with Nimrod and then later on they
allowed me to do Saturday shows.

8.01 They didn’t charge me for the theatre. Lilian Horler was very generous
and all that and so I did shows there. You couldn’t get away with it now.
I’d have to be covered with public liability, I’d have to properly employ
ushers and things like that but in those days it wasn’t necessary and so
I ran for several weekends there.

ML: And good audiences?

RB: Yes, yes, they were quite reasonable audiences. It’s not the best
theatre for me because with a flat screen. It’s much better if the
audience is sitting in front of you but that’s “theatre in the wedges” Ken
used to describe it, so I tended to play to one half of the Nimrod
Theatre. I remember one day the wind was so high it lifted the whole
roof up about a foot.

ML: What, off the theatre?

RB: Off the theatre, yes, in daylight. It was quite wonderful.

ML: That’s rather awkward for shadow puppets.
RB: Yes, it is a bit.

ML: Those sort of things seem to happen to you, Richard, I have to say.

RB: Yes, yes.

ML: Before we get onto the Marionette Theatre of Australia – and I'd like you to give a little history of it – you were the artistic director of the Australian Puppet Festival in 1975. Can you talk a little bit about – was that in Sydney or was that in Canberra?

RB: It was in Melbourne and Carol Long from the Elizabethan Theatre Trust was the organiser of that. Now, I'm trying to remember. Yes, I was on the puppetry committee – it was called the Puppetry Panel - the Australian Council for the Arts as it was then had set up as part of the theatre board and we were well treated. I mean, we were flown around Australia to our meetings and met at our home by Commonwealth cars; those were great days. And then they found they weren't properly constituted, I think, and then the Australia Council was properly set up and there was no more Puppetry Panel.

But from the Puppetry Panel I got onto the board of the Marionette Theatre so I was on the board when they found out they were looking for an artistic director and I volunteered as such, so I came in from the top. But back to that festival. I would have been in the Trust Building and met Carol Long and it's probably because of the Puppetry Panel that Peter Scriven had probably recommended me and it's actually quite a nice place. I've still got brochures for it if you'd like to see one. We had the Tasmanian Puppets, puppeteers from all around Australia coming and over a hundred, something like a hundred and fifty people. And Carol was a wonderful administrator. We were mostly living at University House in Melbourne and she walked to the venues and timed how long it would take us to get there. And it was the opening also of the new Tintookies, that coincided, and that was at the Princess Theatre, it would have been, so that was part of the festival, all went into that. And I had seen Albrecht Roser, the German marionettist, perform and so he was a guest puppeteer that the Trust toured. He only did one show, I think, in each capital city because he was quite expensive, actually, and then he was part of that festival and also did a workshop there. He had one marvellous Aboriginal girl from the Northern Territory - I can't remember her name for the moment.

But Bill Nichol [?] who had introduced puppetry into the Melbourne Teachers College and had written a book on puppetry and had started a puppetry guild in the 1940s, he was very big and had helped Clovelly Puppet Theatre establish itself and had examined Peter Scriven for the
Intermediate in Puppetry and failed him because he didn’t keep a good record book. But Peter obviously forgave him because Peter had him on the Puppetry Panel. But Bill had worked up in the Northern Territory with Aborigines at a college where they were teaching Aboriginal art teachers and this girl came down and represented Aborigines and she was wonderful: she actually had some very strong ideas and suggestions.

ML: And was there a lot of activity in puppetry at that time?

RB: It was beginning to change. With the Marionette Theatre you had a rather traditional marionette form of theatre and Peter Wilson in Hobart had set up the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre and they were doing stuff which was more like what was happening in Europe, the new stuff, where you would have actors on stage with the puppets, where you’re using rod puppets and different kinds of puppets; I think he really was breaking the new ground. Otherwise, we tended to think of puppets in the tradition of glove puppets, marionettes, shadow puppets, rod puppets and these days you don’t think in that way.

ML: Interesting. I wonder if you could just give a little potted history of the Marionette Theatre of Australia before you became the artistic director. It was set up by Peter Scriven in 1965 with the help of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and the Arts Council.

RB: Yes. Well, Peter was an enthusiastic puppeteer himself. He wrote quite well about puppetry even when he was a teenager because I have an article that he had written and he had inherited some certain amount of money which helped. But it didn’t at first. I think before he inherited that money he had played at the Theatre Royal in Sydney and I think it’s 1953/1953, I can’t be certain, twice, very successfully, got a lot of publicity. Some of the puppets I think he’d borrowed or bought from Bill Nichol’s group, so there is that link there. And then in 1956 at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown the ‘Tintookies’ opened. The Elizabethan Theatre had not long been open as a new theatre venue looked after by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and when Peter was setting this up, just as he was thinking “I'll do a large marionette show in a big theatre” – because it was a big theatre, [it] had been the Newtown Majestic – as he was embarking on this Igor Hitchka [?] who was a Russian born in Poland and had been working with Podrecca, a great Italian company in the Argentine where it was stuck during World War II – and this was after the war Igor had joined them – Igor came to Australia because his sister had come here and was a doctor in Marrickville and Igor turned up and said “I've worked with Podrecca” and, of course, was immediately grabbed and so they had some very
good puppet technique introduced into the company and it did take off. Interestingly for us, tape recorders were fairly new in those days and the whole dialogue, the whole soundtrack was on tape and this was a new thing.

16.03 It had a very good soundtrack but we as puppeteers were a little bit conscious that it couldn’t react to the audience: if they were appreciating something or clapping too loudly the voice would just run on. And in fact on the night that I saw the Tintookies the tape broke and the kookaburra who had wooden wings was flapping around and you could hear the clack, clack, clack of the wood which robbed the image a bit, detracted from the show. For many people in Australia, this was their first taste of theatre because it toured very extensively up to places like Kalgoorlie, Northern Queensland, all ‘round the place, and a lot of people have very fond memories of the Tintookies. And the first show was called ‘The Tintookies’. The Tintookies in those days were like a European community; there was a mayor and so on; it was like a British village really. But in the next production, ‘Little Fella Bindi’, the Tintookies were black. So Peter had invented the word but claimed it was an Aboriginal word “little people that live in the sandhills”. I'm not quite sure of the order of things. There’s Little Fella Bindi, which was the nicest story, actually. It’s a little Aboriginal boy who’s friendly with the animals that is growing up to be an adult and has to part company with them. And so it’s a sad ending and people didn’t like the sad ending, a lot of people were very unhappy about that; it’s very sad. And then there was ‘The Explorers’ which survived the big fire that they had at the warehouse in Botany in 1964 because it was out on tour, that show, and the others weren’t.

18.01 But he also did ‘A Magic Pudding’. I've looked at the script of it and I actually think it’s quite a reasonable adaptation. I didn’t see Peter’s version but Norman Lindsay hated it. And those puppets were lost in the fire and then it was redone for the Expo in Japan 1970, about that time, and Peter wasn’t allowed to direct it. He did a show with large rod puppets called ‘Tintookies 2000’ which had a mime artist and was an attempt by Peter to break away from the marionette thing, an attempt which displeased a lot in the Trust. I'm not sure, I didn’t see the production. Edith thought it was quite interesting – interesting is a weak word - she was impressed. I don't think it was wonderful but it was an interesting break from the marionette tradition but Peter didn’t win over the funding bodies with it. The Magic Pudding went up to Expo ’70 with it and that was directed by Peter Batey who is in charge of the Bald Archys as a councillor in Gundagai. That’s wonderful.

ML: Richard always knows the extra bit.
RB: So Peter then got the help of the Arts Council of New South Wales which seems to be forgotten and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust to form the Marionette Theatre of Australia, which was still called by everybody ‘The Tintookies’; that was the name that stuck, Marionette Theatre of Australia didn’t. And so it wasn’t really until we broke with the marionette tradition that I think the Marionette Theatre of Australia became a name separately from it because always it was ‘Tintookies – Peter Scriven’.

20.06 If you said “puppets” to someone in Australia at the time it was ‘Tintookies’. But anyway he set up this company to help to tour to Southeast Asia. Peter had a very strong feeling for Southeast Asia and felt that we should be involved there and the very first tour with Little Fella Bindi and something else I think but anyway – I think Magic Pudding may have been part of it.

ML: Yes, I think it might have, yes.

RB: That toured for over six months to over a dozen countries around the place and had great impact and then there was a later tour of ‘The Explorers’, I think. Am I right?

ML: I think so, yes. I'm not absolutely sure of all the detail.

RB: But the Trust was looking after it at this stage and it became one of the three companies that the Trust – besides the drama things they did. They had the ballet, the opera and the marionettes and the opera and the ballet separated; the marionettes were still part of the Trust. Peter was frustrated by the Trust. He did try to get himself on the Trust itself with a lot of proxies and he upset a lot of people but the Trust had dealt with him fairly badly, especially considering the amount of his personal investment that he put in. So he left and went up to Asia and living in Singapore at first and then he came back to Australia in about 1973 and was the adviser to puppetry for the Australia Council and set up that puppetry panel and that’s when I really first met him.

22.01 I met him as a kid; I got his signature in 1953 but I didn’t get to know him till ’73. And he came back to the Marionette Theatre when Terry Divolo [?] was administrator to do the ‘New Tintookies’ and he used the soundtrack of the old Tintookies for the first half and then got a new soundtrack with new music, electronic music, very different, and tried to be a bit fantasy, sort of fantastical I suppose might be the word, and it didn’t quite work, it didn’t quite gel. The publicity was good but if you look at the reviews the enthusiasm is gone. And whether he’d even brought back the original production of the Tintookies and done it there sort of twenty years later, whether it would have been anywhere near
the success of the original production I couldn’t tell you because people change.

ML: Yes, of course. So just tell me a little bit more about how you became the artistic director. You were on the board.

RB: Well, as I said earlier, Jan Bussell came back when they were looking for an adviser and that was in ’72 – that was before Peter came to the Australia Council – and he did the Water Babies with marionette puppets and they had the puppeteers in view, which was an interesting thing for the audiences to see and I think a very good idea and it was a reasonably successful show, a young Barrie Kosky, four years old saw it and thought “I want to be in theatre”. So that’s a pretty good recommendation, isn’t it?

ML: That’s pretty good.

RB: And then Lesley Hammond [?] who was administrator of the Marionette Theatre at that time – Tony Gould had been the administrator earlier during Peter’s day – Lesley had taken over and she was administrator. In fact, she’d employed Jan as artistic advisor in ’72. Then they worked on a production 'Tales from Noonameena' and they used Hal Saunders who had written songs, I think the script, for the Tintookies and Ramsee Mishrikian(?), Egyptian puppet maker, and an Australian designer working in London did the sets and things but it was done at the Opera House which was fairly new, not a great success. Then Lesley left and Terry Divola came in as administrator and he teamed up with Peter and they did the New Tintookies and then Peter left, went back to Asia and at that time I would have taken over as artistic director. There is one person there who I inadvertently left out as artistic director between Peter and me and that was Michael Salmon who did the sets, which were very nice sets, for the New Tintookies and some of the puppet designs. And he was officially called the artistic director for a while but I don’t think he initiated any project that I’m aware of. Michael’s still around but I haven’t seen him for a while.

And then Terry and I parted company. Well, it happened while I was away; I came back and Terry had been asked to go - we ended up friends. And that’s when Stuart Thompson came in, a young Stuart Thompson came in as administrator and he was a wonderful administrator to work with, breaking ground for himself. He is now one of the top fifty Broadway producers; he is the executive producer for ‘The Book of Mormon’ and he really is very important now, so important that when I wrote to him I didn’t get an answer. So we worked with Stuart. I can keep going for the moment. We separated from the Trust
under Stuart and I was looking for a place where we could perform. We were frustrated in getting venues that suited us for the marionettes. We’d had a problem using the Drama Theatre at the Opera House because we had to fit in with the sets that the – what was the theatre?

ML: Not the Sydney Theatre Company?

RB: The Old Tote.

ML: The Old Tote, yes, of course.

RB: The Old Tote was doing productions in the Drama Theatre and we would have to fit in with their sets which weren’t always sort of backdrops, the things like intruded into the acting area so it was a real problem for us to set up anything.

ML: Sorry, can I just ask was this because you were doing daytime performances and the Tote was performing at night?

RB: Exactly. We were doing holiday performance, school holiday performances, during the day and there would be a show in at night and even once when we got the first booking we still had to make way for the Drama Theatre; they had clout and we didn’t.

28.10 So I was looking for a theatre, a centrally located theatre and the Sailors’ Home was available and it was really biting the bullet because I don’t know that we were quite ready to do it but it seemed a good idea at the time and Stuart went to America and that’s when Phillip Rolfe became administrator. So we had moved across into the Sailors’ Home. The floor was rotten and had to be replaced and a whole lot of things had to be done and Stuart wasn’t interested in being involved with that and Phillip was actually quite good in getting things organised and the change to the building.

ML: I’d like to go back a little bit before you discovered the Sailors’ Home and talk about some of the productions that you did from the mid ‘70s when you became the director. The company at that stage had some works in the repertoire but wasn’t still doing those but you approached it.

RB: It had big marionette shows but they had a show called ‘The Wacky World of Words’ which was going around. I think Graham Mathieson who had been one of the leading puppeteers with the Tintookies and went back for ages - Graham’s still around somewhere up the Gold Coast and I think he still occasionally works as a puppeteer there – and Graham had directed this. Roger Goss [?] had written it and designed it – he was a designer himself. Joy Economos, now Joy McDonald,
with whom I'm working at the moment on something, she was one of the puppeteers and she had worked with the Tintookie shows, with the Tintookies.

30.10 So this was a small show that was touring to schools. The big shows had become rather uneconomical and so without a huge amount of subsidy it was very hard to move them around, especially since there were new demands on living away from home allowances and all these things. So when I came in I wanted to get away from the marionettes because it's become a rather decadent form of marionettes; they weren't working the marionettes well.

ML: These worked with stringed puppets?

RB: Yes. They were very long strings, worked from a high bridge and there wasn't Igor around to discipline them and make sure that they were doing the right thing so puppets sagged and it was a bit uninspiring, really. And so we did two shows. One was 'Roos' with a different form of members of the kangaroo family were worked by the puppeteers very close behind and it was like this, Tina, because we went to New Zealand with it and it was all about the Palmer Wallaby which was thought to be extinct in Australia and it was found to be living on Kao Island and so it was exported to Australia. And after they did that they found that it was living up near Barrington Tops, that's right, Tina, in numbers and not threatened at all so the story had to change at the end. So I didn't want black theatre so we dressed the puppeteers – they looked like blue beekeepers because they had hats with blue veils in front of it so you couldn't see their faces and worked against a blue backdrop. So you could see them but I'd hoped that they weren't too obvious. I think we broke fire rules because that material we used was flammable. I inquired about it and they said “Well, if you keep it wet and hose it all the time” – so we didn't do that.

32.05 ML: I was going to say the puppeteers got chilled.

RB: So we did that show. The other one I'd seen, Yves Joly, a wonderful French puppeteer who just began with the gloved hands and did things and then did puppets with bits of paper and so on. And I decided to do a show called ‘Hands’ where we started off with hands and they became animals, just looked like animals. What's the man's name? A man who’s written an opera, a New Zealander.

ML: Don't worry.

RB: He did the music for it, musique concrete. It was great stuff, actually. He composed it, we recorded it out at Channel Seven. I really enjoyed
that and I wish I had a tape of it somewhere. It was a series of items where it got more and more complicated, the puppets, but you could still identify the hand in the puppet. There was a cow where the hand was the udder so it picked up the bucket as it went on and finally there was a large character called ‘Hands Off’ – the item was called Hands Off – and it had the head worked by one set of hands and one set of hands for the feet. And the music, I wish I could remember who wrote the song but it's the man who wrote the music for the ‘Four Corners’ [current affairs television program], the theme for Four Corners. He was a friend of Alan Highfield who was one of the puppeteers. And I was so nervous about this show that a month before it was to open at the Opera House I called them all together and I said “It's off. We are not going to do it. I'll do ‘Shadows’ for half the programme. We won't do ‘Hands’, we'll just do ‘Roos’”. And Jeffrey Dorrington-Smith (?) said “Don't be so hasty. Let's come and have a look at it”.

So we had a little audience and there were a couple of the old marionette people whose faces were very long at the end. Jeffrey thought “I don't think that's too bad”. Anyway, we did Roos and Hands at the Opera House and Norman Kessel(?), he was writing for The Sun [evening newspaper], the critic for The Sun, was writing about Roos and Hands and he didn't mind Roos, but Hands, he said “Was the most original bit of puppetry he'd seen for a long time”. So it was quite a lesson for me, actually, it was a very good lesson to have at the beginning of the show because when you get very close to something I think it's very hard to judge how it's working and often the initial idea is the spark you should remember.

ML: Where was the company based at this time, where were you working from?

RB: We were working just below where they made curtains and costumes in the Trust building.

ML: And that was in Dowling Street?

RB: Yes. I can't quite remember the number.

ML: 153 Dowling Street.

RB: 153 Dowling Street, thank you, Margaret.

ML: Kings Cross, or Darlinghurst.

RB: Yes, in the same building. It wasn't very good for us because we couldn't rehearse anything there; the ceiling was too low. We sometimes went up – there was a room with large mirrors where the
dancers rehearsed and we could sometimes book that. We had a very angry man in charge of building sets, Don Hume(?), down in the basement. He was a bit difficult, I found, to work with. I crossed him very early, unfortunately, and he hated the puppets anyway; most of them hated the puppets. I remember once saying to Colonel McCaffrey who I liked, “I think it would be good to have some of these puppeteers meet the board or meet the Trust board”. He said “They don’t want to meet these hippie types”. There they are supporting theatre.

36.21 **ML:** How long did it take to put a show together like that in terms of the rehearsing and creating it? Because you wrote and directed it.

**RB:** Yes. Well, rehearsing you usually had four weeks. Sometimes if there was a luxury you had six weeks and the puppets were supposed to be ready by then. That was a rather arbitrary amount of time, how much you had to build the puppets, but it’s an unsatisfactory way of working, it’s not a way I would want a puppet theatre to work. I think you should be able to build and change the show as you go along, which is what we did with ‘Smiles Away’ and I think it’s why Smiles Away was a reasonable success. I remember someone calling in on Philippe Génty in France, in Paris, one day and Mary was in a bit of a flap, saying “Oh, we’ve only got another nine months to get this show ready so everyone’s a little bit stressed”. You can’t do puppet shows in the same way you do plays, where you have the set script and you present the actors with it and four weeks later you put on the show; it’s not a way for puppet theatre. You have to discover what the puppets can do and what they’re capable of and what they don’t do very well and work around that.

**ML:** And the puppeteers, where did they come from, what were their experiences before, do you know?

**RB:** Sometimes they’ve been in theatre, sometimes in dance, particularly if they’d worked with the Marionette Theatre in Peter’s day because all the dialogue was recorded they didn’t need to have voice work.

38.05 Because I needed the puppeteers to speak, that was one thing I wanted, and so most of our shows – we did do a couple of shows to tape - most of them were live actors so I wanted actors that could work puppets, really, and so we threw the auditions open to anyone. They didn’t have to have a puppeteering background but one thing they had to do was to pick up a puppet and you could see very quickly some people just didn’t relate to the puppet and some immediately started exploring to see what that puppet could do and separated themselves
from the puppet and they were the actors that I would have gone for. So when we did ‘General McArthur in Australia’ I think only one of those people in the cast – there were four – had had any experience working with puppets, Ben Franklin - and I can’t remember their names – the others were just actors and I think they did lovely work.

ML: Can we just talk about a few of the other shows in the ‘70s before you headed for the Sailors’ Home, things like ‘Alichee [?] in Wonderland’ you designed and performed or was that your own show?

RB: No. I wanted to do a large shadow show with the company and it’s not a great success, I don’t think, Alichee in Wonderland. A book had been written, ‘Alichee in the Dreamtime’ which was ‘Alice in Wonderland’ in Pitjantjatjara and it had been illustrated, drawings based on Northern Territory bark paintings whereas the Pitjantjatjara people, of course, are South Australia, further south, and it had been started off by a chemical engineer from the USA who was in the Lewis Carroll World Society or something and an enthusiastic Alice in Wonderland man. And I got some very nice music composed by Dinty [?] Blom, Diana Blom, who’s now teaching out in Western Sydney, I believe, and we did it at the Nimrod Theatre. Paul Isles [?] was the manager and Stuart sort of arranged with him for us to do it as a nighttime show. It wasn’t awful although one or two – Taffy Davies, he was a critic, he hated it and a little girl had vomited near him and he claimed it was the show that had caused it but I don’t think that was it.

ML: How wonderful.

RB: Yes. So we’ll say no more on Alichee in the Dreamtime.

ML: What about ‘Wacko the Diddle O’ [?] subtitled ‘A Funny Kind of Puppet Show’ which you did at the Opera House?

RB: That was about the second show. Yes, we did it in the music room which is now the Playhouse [theatre].

ML: At the Opera House, yes.

RB: Yes. And for the opening we had an audience waiting to get in, we were ready to perform and there was a union dispute between the electrical people and stagehands as to who was to plug in the plug that connected the bio box at the back to the stage manager that was behind and we were about half an hour late going out. We had to get the general manager, Lloyd Davies, to come running and he did soon sort of get things moving but the audience, of course, blamed us; they
said “They weren’t ready”. It was a revue; it was in three pieces. We did a mime called ‘The Tramp’ like a silent film and it had been preceded by variety based on nursery rhymes, that’s right.

And then the second half was ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ that an American puppeteer, Steve Hanson, who did a wonderful ‘Punch and Judy’, did and I wasn’t as enthusiastic about it as I now am. I actually think he was doing some good stuff but it was really very new to me what he was doing. He used music from ‘Jaws’ [movie] so Jaws must have preceded it. He did it like a horror film where the beanstalk was this huge monster and eventually met a sort of gum tree in Sydney Harbour and they went off and had lots of jellybeans or something – jelly babies, that’s right.

ML: I should have flagged up very early on that it’s Richard’s humour in fact.

RB: No, that was Steve.

ML: That’s Steve but you’re embracing of it then. O.K. Look, we’ll go through quickly some of the other shows like ‘Puppet Power’.

RB: Puppet Power was a school show.

ML: A school show.

RB: We wanted to keep the puppeteers working originally with Roos and Hands we had two shows that four people could do and the idea was these could tour separately to schools and in fact Roos began as a school show and then costs reduced us to doing two-handers upset a lot of the puppeteers because that was almost what you could do without grants, without funding, so we annoyed the puppeteer community there. So it looked like we were only going to do the occasional theatre shows plus these little school shows touring around and that became the pattern for a while. I was hoping that if we got the theatre of our own that we could do most of the things in that theatre and not do as much touring, also that we could do the occasional big show in the Drama Theatre.

The Drama Theatre, which we used a couple of times, a few times, is not very good for puppets: it’s a long, wide stage. So when we did Smiles Away it was actually built for that theatre and it worked very well because we used even the very – were you around, Tina, for Smiles Away?

TM: No, just before.
RB: We used the sides, little side platforms, and we had this wonderful animal that Ross built, the Diprotodon, which is a large sort of wombat and I didn’t want people to break their backs and so they stood erect and so they could stand for hours inside this wombat, Diprotodon, because it wasn’t heavy but it could go through doorways that were sort of half the width of the Diprotodon; it just sort of squashed as it went through the door and came out. Then Ross brought it from the workshop to the Sailors’ Home. They went out into the street at George [St] and there was a police car going by and there was an old policeman and he was nearly going mad, trying to ……… …….. ……. ……. 

ML: Sorry I missed that. So we’ve flagged up that you did a lot of touring to schools. And at what point did you find the Sailors’ Home and how did that come about really?

RB: Well, it was when we were looking - we had separated from the Trust so we were looking for separate premises – and it was whether we had premises where we just made the puppets or whether we had premises where we made and performed and I liked the idea of having a theatre. It is always tough and I remember various people talking about the “edifice complex” but it was either whether we were going to be a continually touring company which takes its toll of the puppeteers – it meant that you have a young company but you’ve got to replace puppeteers all the time.

I remember once with the Tintookies or one of the shows – it was the New Tintookies – one of the puppeteers lived in Kalgoorlie and so you’ve got to get someone over and you’ve got to rehearse those puppeteers with the new person and it becomes a very expensive operation. So while I could understand why he might have wanted to leave it did cause problems and, yes, I wouldn’t want to go there again.

ML: So the Sailors’ Home, what, came up for sale? It’s down in the bottom of George Street in The Rocks.

RB: It did. It was empty. It had been a place where people stayed, originally sailors but eventually it became a place where it was cheap accommodation in The Rocks. There was little cells, sort of, on several levels, on three levels, I think, and I noticed pinned to the board which said “In case of illness call Mrs Such and Such and a priest”. So it had come to the end of its life as a seamen’s mission – well, the seamen’s mission was further up – but as a place for sailors to stay and The Rocks SCRA as it was, Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority – and SCRA begins a lot of words like scratch, scrawny, nasty words – SCRA
wanted to knock the building down. They wanted in fact to make a place where buses could have a turning circle for the ships that came in there, tourist ships there.

So they didn’t want the building so they really didn’t want us to go in it and turn it into something that worked. But it was fairly expensive, the renovation, because we had to remove these columns that supported the different floors so that we had a space in which to put a theatre and we wanted to keep something of the old rooms, the little cells that the sailors had, so we kept the top floor and this had to be suspended from huge girders, H-frame girders, that were brought in and put into the roof and so they hung from that and then that gave you an open place in which to put the theatre and, of course, after we left they put it all back.

ML: Really?

RB: So it’s still got its girders but they still put all the little rooms back; they built them back in. That was when it was the Tourist Bureau. They said nothing in anything about the history of the building that it had been a marionette theatre for a while.

ML: And it’s still there today?

RB: I felt we weren’t particularly welcome, I did. It was an impossible situation because we paid rent to SCRA which was a government quango and so we would get funding from the state government to pay this rent but then in the meantime the rent would go up.

ML: It was hard work, yes.

RB: Yes.

ML: So you moved in in terms of office space in 1980 or around about that time and the renovation went on?

RB: ’80.

ML: You took it on in 1980 but maybe you didn’t physically move?

RB: 1980, yes, that’s right, because Smiles Away was 1980 and we rehearsed it in there, sometimes on a floor which collapsed underneath us so we were mainly downstairs when we rehearsed.

But we did lots of workshops with people, the puppeteers that worked on that. Stuart had managed to get funds for various tutors to come in, voice coaches, movement coaches, and I wanted it to be directed for a show and so gradually Smiles Away, finally I had to impose a sort of story onto it but most of the ideas had come from the puppeteers and
the tutors. And one of the things we played with in Smiles Away, there were puppeteers in view, working the puppets but they couldn’t speak for themselves. They did speak to each other but you couldn’t hear that. They only ever spoke for the puppets as far as the audience was concerned but they would share the puppets. So I think all four puppeteers – there were three blokes and a girl – worked the queen at some stage and spoke for her and it didn’t really shatter the illusion at all; it worked amazingly well; I was very happy with that.

ML: And where was that performed, Richard?

RB: That was in the Drama Theatre [Opera House]; that was the one where we used the full Drama Theatre. It was the only show, I think, that we made that really fitted the Drama Theatre but it did go on tour because it was rather a flexible sort of thing.

ML: And before that you directed a production of the Magic Pudding, this time with rod puppets.

RB: That’s 1980, yes, the same year, that’s right.

ML: Yes, manipulated with rods rather than strings.

RB: So this was the third Magic Pudding, I think, I think the third Magic Pudding. There’s Peter Scriven’s one, then Peter Beattie’s [?] and those two had been marionettes but the Magic Pudding has lots of chasing, a lot of fighting and marionettes don’t do that very well.

52.04 It’s very hard to race ‘round with marionettes and chase and rod puppets work quite well because ultimately the legs of the rod puppet are the legs of the puppeteer so they are running ‘round underneath so we had a fairly wide set for these puppets and they were reasonably small rod puppets. They were on show not so long ago at the public library; they did a Magic Pudding exhibition. And there’s a very nice doco on the ‘Puppet Pudding’ that Michael Creighton made. It’s the first time you’ll see “Stuart Thompson Productions” at the end as he got ready for Broadway. It was, I think, a show that worked quite well though. Lindsay’s daughter came – I’ve forgotten her name now – but she was very happy with it. Helen Glad? No, Helen Glad’s the granddaughter, yes.

ML: I don’t know Lindsay’s daughter, no.

RB: Joan Glad, I think it could have been. Is that all? But I think it was a fairly honest Magic Pudding and it got nice reviews and toured quite a lot. This is quite interesting and I’ll say it as quickly as I can. When the Bussells did the Water Babies they did a soundtrack that the
puppeteers rehearsed to and then got the people who were to do the voices to come in and watch so they saw a show and they knew what they had to do and pauses were timed. So I did the same thing with the Magic Pudding. I did a tape for the whole show that we rehearsed to and we could alter that tape and time the gaps that we wanted for business and then when the actors came the first thing they did was to see a run of the show with my voice on it and then they had some idea of what they were doing the voices for.

And it does work better that way. At least you're not getting an immediate show but you're getting something that fits the action of the puppets better.

ML: I'm going to bring Tina in in a minute.

RB: Yes, please, please.

TM: That was a good soundtrack too, wasn't it? The Magic Pudding was a good soundtrack, wasn't it?

RB: It was a nice soundtrack, yes.

TM: Great music.

RB: What was it, the Bushwhackers?

TM: Was it, the music?

ML: Was it the Bushwhackers band, was it?

RB: Yes, really nice music.

TM: Great songs, weren't they?

RB: And that was Di Manson who'd been our publicity lady, she suggested it. Yes, about that time we did the 'Captain Lazar and his Earthbound Circus' and two of those puppets are in the Museum of Democracy in Canberra at the entrance of the Prime Minister's Gallery. How about that?

TM: I've still got a Captain Lazar T-shirt.

ML: Have you?

RB: I've got Captain Lazar.

ML: O.K. Well, we won't make this a competition. Since you've raised it, tell me some more about Captain Lazar.
RB: Di knew Patrick Cook who had written a strip for the Nation Review or was it the National Times - anyway, one of those magazines – called ‘Captain Lazar and his Earthbound Circus’ and suggested this might make a good show. And so we were living in Randwick at the time and Patrick would come and dictate and I would write down. It was quite bizarre stuff, bizarre character but it was basically a plot where Captain Lazar was trying to get this circus together and first he’s recruiting characters but it is undermined by two characters, one the Great Orlando who looked very like Sir John Kerr, the governor general, the former governor general, and the other was a koala tamer called – now Patrick wanted to call him Martin Bormann but the board so “Oh, no, you can't do that”.

56.34 And I remember one of the board members said “Anyway, Martin Bormann’s a German name and he comes from a good Scottish family” so he called him Morton Barnum [?]. And the upshot of that, finally we had Malcolm Fraser come along to a fundraiser for the Marionette Theatre and he was photographed working this puppet and it went all ‘round Australia. He looked quite happy as he worked; it was a nice photo. So we did it for the Adelaide Festival where I suppose we divided even the critics. One critic wrote “Well, they were laughing but I couldn’t see why” but others did enjoy it. We did also at the Recording Hall which wasn’t a very good venue for us. Di Manson felt we should have drapes around it and we should have, but I couldn’t face the expense of closing off all that space around the theatre. The music was great; it was Robyn Archer, she wrote the songs. We did it live and there weren’t radio microphones like there are now where you can have each member with their own radio mic so we used shotgun mics which didn’t work very well so it was often hard to pick up the dialogue. We had a live band, which was very good, including a tuba.

58.02 ML: And this was for adults, this was not a children’s show?

RB: It was for adults, yes.

ML: So the company was starting to diversify?

RB: We were trying to get an adult following which is very hard with puppets.

ML: Indeed, yes.

RB: It’s much easier if you don’t call them puppets. Mind you, ‘King Kong’ is about to open and it’s got the biggest marionette in the world.

TM: And warhorse doing a dance. [Reference to stage play 'Warhorse']
RB: And warhorses, yes, and it's mainly the horses there, isn't it?

TM: Yes, yes. I haven't seen it yet.

RB: Oh, you should. The horses are wonderful.

TM: Yes.

ML: Just by 1982 while the building work's going on, the renovations are going on, the company is, I think, doing about twelve hundred plus performances in primary and infant schools around the country and I read somewhere that you'd decided to phase this down somewhat by 1983 in order to focus on the Sailors' Home.

RB: To use the Sailors' Home, exactly, because we were competing with people like myself, unsubsidised people, who were doing shows in schools with a company about the same size.

ML: Were you still doing your own shows when you had a moment?

RB: I used to do some overseas touring but not very much in Australia. I did do some shows in Gulgong, Gilgandra, Trangie and Trundle in 1979. Isn't that wonderful? I did some shows beforehand in London and Belgium and they said “Where are you going to next?” and I was able to say “Gulgong, Gilgandra, Trangie and Trundle”.

ML: So, Tina, you came to this company and put up your hand and said “Here I am”, a very hardworking company. Where did you start to work with the company, where did you go to?

TM: I came in to see if I could do some voluntary work there and it was very timely.


TM: Oh, yes, that's right.

RB: A New Zealander and you were going to Australia.

ML: So that's where it started.

TM: Yes, I'd completely forgotten that; that is how it started. So then I found the Marionette Theatre and, as I say, the exhibition was on, 'Puppet Stars', at the Opera House but also ‘Bottersnikes and Gumbles’ was being produced and there were an awful lot of Bottersnikes and Gumbles, weren't there? And I spent many, many weeks with my head inside them.
ML: Can you explain what they were and you were making them, were you?

TM: Yes. And the Bottersnikes were big, sort of bumpy rubber sort of monstery things, weren’t they?

RB: They were the nasties, the villains.

TM: Yes. And they were being made with a sort of a hooped calico method that Ross Hill and Beverly Campbell-Jackson had perfected and a rubber sort of skin over the outside as far as I recall. And then there were little fluffy Gumbles that were like little - - -

RB: Gumbles are a little happy thing.

TM: They're covered in fur.

RB: They're supposed to be stretched – it was a children’s book.

TM: Who did the - - -

RB: Sam Wakefield.

TM: And Digby.

RB: Yes, Desmond Digby did the designs.

TM: That’s right. So they needed volunteers and I stepped in and did a whole lot of making and I think by the time I’d finished they worked out that I was prepared to work hard and put in a grant, I think, and got me another three months’ work.

RB: It wasn’t just hardworking; it was good quality work which is also what we wanted.

TM: I took directions. I had some pretty good puppet makers. Well, Ross Hill and Beverley Campbell-Jackson both were very experienced and very good teachers and there’s still many things that I teach my NIDA [National Institute for Dramatic Art] students that they taught me.

ML: So do you remember what you worked on after that?

TM: We went onto – what was the one that was like Smiles Away, what was that called?

RB: ‘Aussie Rules’.

TM: Aussie Rules, that’s right.

RB: It was very similar in style to Smiles Away.
TM: Except the puppeteers didn’t change characters, did they?

RB: They didn’t change character but the puppets had masks on for one thing and I was interested to see when you put a mask on a character what came through stronger. There was still the character underneath; the mask didn’t change it which if funny.

TM: Yes. So we worked on that which was, yes, the puppeteers in full view, slippers in the back of the feet of the puppets. Then we did ‘Rapunzel in Suburbia’ which was pretty interesting in terms of puppetry because there were some pretty amazing images from those poems.

RB: This is Dorothy Hewett’s poems and Kim Carpenter’s design.

ML: And this was the adult show for the opening of the Sailors’ Home Theatre?

TM: Yes.

RB: Was it the first adult show? No, I think we did ‘Bear Dinkum’ before.

TM: Was it?

RB: I think so.

TM: No, I don't think it was. Oh, maybe it was, maybe it was.

ML: Not from my chronology but I might be wrong.

TM: No.

RB: Well, I might be wrong but, yes, it wasn’t part of our programme, really. Kim had got some funding for this - - -.

TM: Kim had done it, yes.

RM: - - - and asked if we would come along.

TM: Yes.

RB: And it sounded a great idea and it was in fact. Unfortunately, the season, I think, was short a couple of weeks and only at the end was it beginning to sort of get out to people.

TM: Yes. It was a real shame, wasn’t it?

RM: So the last show was packed with theatre people.

64.01 TM: Yes. And they were really good puppets. Ross and I worked incredibly hard on those puppets and there were some beautiful – there was a
little child chasing a ball through the sky and there were a couple of old women and was it Jennifer Clare [?] who was in it too.

RB: Jennifer Clare was the actress who was in it.

TM: Yes. It was a really good show and great variation in scale. There were huge masks, yes, enormous masks and tiny little characters like Kim has gone on to do, real contrast in size.

RB: It was a fascinating show. The puppeteers hated being in it.

TM: Yes. Well, they were sort of manipulating props is what they felt.

RB: Because Kim got them to do exactly what he wanted so they weren’t able to act.

TM: Yes.

RB: But that didn’t matter as far as I was concerned because it was ultimately the show.

TM: And there wasn’t much lip synching or anything, was there? It was a lot of sort of moving objects and a very sort of ………

RB: Yes. To someone else it was possibly they felt they were competing with a live actor.

ML: I want to go back to the opening of the Sailors’ Home Theatre because I’d love you to talk about the preparation for that in terms of it happened, I think, in August 1983.

TM: Yes, that’s right. And for me I’d come in in 1982 and so obviously the Sailors’ Home was being used but we were working in Sussex Street. We had a great workshop in Sussex Street but by that time the Sailors’ Home and SCRA were both sort of a headache for everyone, a nightmare for everyone already, really, because there was this huge job to do to sort of pull the building into line and try and cope with SCRA.

RB: So the opening was put off.

TM: Yes.

RB: So we were ready to do it much earlier and we had to wait.

66.01 TM: Yes. So, I mean I was so busy learning my craft, really, and I hadn’t been with the company very long but I knew that people like Richard and Ross it was a real headache for them.
ML: Tina, can I ask you - the designs were by the cartoonist, Patrick Cook, as you've already flagged up – I just wonder how you make them three-dimensional from a flat design. What's the process of puppet making?

TM: Well, that's where Ross Hill was really good. I mean, he used to insist that we got a really good profile and a front-on from each designer which we didn't always get, did we?

RB: No.

TM: So Ross was great because if you only had one design to go with, the front-on – I mean, I'd do these delicate little designs and he'd come along with a clay …… and ……. and just dig into my sculpts. It was sort of heartbreaking but he was a really good teacher, actually, and obviously really experienced in how the light falls on a puppet and what materials are good to cover it with. So they were great lessons and he was sort of fearless in what he'd do with a clay sculpt, wasn't he? He was just really experienced and there was always slight disdain for the designers because they'd never provide quite what you wanted, in the workshop there was, really; we were the makers and we were going to really make it how we wanted anyway. That said, I think we did actually represent the designs pretty well but it was always funny what the designers said about how things are going to work and what they wanted them to do and what in fact you came up with yourself. I mean, really a lot of the designing was done by us as we went. And Richard, I remember in Bear Dinkum Richard coming in and devising the rod, remember?

68.03 RB: For the hand turn, yes.

TM: Yes. Richard sort of went into a corner and fiddled 'round with some pliers and some wire as he used to do and sort of arrived back with a rod that actually allowed the puppets to turn their hands from palm up to palm down in the most brilliant, elegant way that made all these ballet movements possible. So that was great. There was a lot of collaborative invention going on in the workshop, actually; it was a really productive place.

RB: Yes, I have to say I was happier at the workshop which unfortunately was miles away from the Sailors' Home for a period.

TM: Yes.

RB: We had this old building with dead pigeons in it. Well, they weren't dead at first; they were dying while we were there up in Sussex Street.
TM: Yes, yes, in Sussex Street, three floors of it.

RB: And to get there. It’s only one end of George Street to the other but it’d take hours.

TM: Yes, yes.

ML: What were some of the materials you most liked working with and can you describe some of them? Did you work in clay or fabrics?

TM: Used a lot of clay, a lot of mould making, rubber, sort of slip casting with rubber essentially. So that was all new to me; I hadn’t worked with those materials. We did vacuum forming which at first I think we got done somewhere else and then Peter Chester who worked with us built a vacuum former out of an old vacuum cleaner. So we did a lot of vacuum forming which was very light, brilliantly light for puppeteers to operate.

RB: I don’t know if you know that you start off with a sheet of thin plastic – it’s often a while plastic – but the covers that you get when you buy things in shops have been vacuum formed and you pull it into a mould, don’t you?

TM: Yes.

RB: You warm it so it becomes flexible and then you suck it into the mould.

TM: It sucks down. Like a chocolate tray is vacuum formed too.

RB: It is great because you get a very light shape.

TM: And for Bear Dinkum – which I can’t remember what year that was; maybe that was 1983 as well, was it, or ’84 - - -

70.04 RB: Yes, ’83.

TM: - - - that was mass producing koalas in Y-fronts, wasn’t it? And we used the vacuum former to make their skeletons and then we put rubber over the outside for their heads and hands, not their feet; we vacuum formed their ballet pumps. So, yes, but there was also a lot of just using foam, plywood, tape, all these things which it’s interesting, very simple construction and it was interesting seeing the Warhorse TEDx talk, where they talk about the construction, and it’s such basic materials and they work so well and it did remind me a lot of Ross’ puppet making technique which was to really concentrate on the movement of the puppet, make sure they were light, just making movement and the character of the material’s the essential ingredient in them. It really worked brilliantly.
RB: If I might interrupt, I'm sorry, but with Warhorse they are performing puppeteers who made these puppets and Ross was an excellent performer for puppets. In fact, sometimes when we couldn't work his puppets we'd say "Ross, you come in and do it" and he would. He'd make us all look useless.

TM: He was fantastic, wasn't he?

RB: And it is very important, I think, that people working with puppets really have a pretty broad knowledge of puppets and some idea of how to work them.

TM: And we played with them endlessly in the workshop, actually. Ross, he did actually perform in Bear Dinkum, didn't he?

RB: Did he? No, I don't think so. Did he?

TM: I think he did.

RB: We certainly got him in 'Mysterious Potamus'.

TM: I think he did the kangaroo that thumped. Remember, it was ........

RB: He may have, yes. I think he was the Laughing Walla [?].

TM: I think he did, with that thumping.

RB: They did one night down at the Sailors' Home; they just played 'round with the puppets. There was a scene where Bedding [?] whose father has died and gets rid of a body or something and they tried various ways. Sometimes they'd push the body and it'd keep on going and it was one of the funniest nights I've had and unfortunately you can't use all that in the show.

72.10 TM: I know. It was brilliant, yes.

RB: But that's why I say it really would have been better if we could have developed more shows from that sort of activity, that playing around. After all, it's called a play what you do, isn't it?

TM: Yes. So anyway the materials were various and, as I say, most of them new to me but a lot of them were very simple materials and things that someone like Ross could teach me which I still use are really good invisible stitching for the arms so that you wouldn't see the joins of the fabric and the ingredients for mixing rubber in with the paint when you sprayed them so it didn't crack and really kind of basic recipes for puppet making that continue to be useful.

RB: And they have to be quick too.
TM: Yes, yes.

RB: That was the other thing about Ross: he worked very quickly and you got a lot of puppets made in a short time.

ML: And do you remember the opening night of what I think was called the ‘Meadowlea Theatre’, because it was sponsored by Meadowlea?

RB: Meadowlea put a lot of money into the change of the building; they paid for the girders that I talked about earlier that came in. It’s something like six hundred thousand, if I remember – that’s a figure that I’m plucking from memory – and I don't think they really got their money's worth because it was called the Meadowlea Theatre briefly but I don't remember the name sticking.

TM: It’s not that great a name.

RB: I still buy Meadowlea margarine in honour of their support.

TM: I think we were probably all so exhausted by the time it opened – I know I hadn't had time to wash my hair, so I was wearing a platinum blonde plastic wig and no one that I worked with recognised me.

74.12 ML: That’s great. Well, I gather it was opened by Paul Whelan(?) in LA and Richard Tulloch described it as a “boots and all, rough, dinkum OZ show using half-sized puppets walking on the puppeteers’ feet as for Smiles Away. The show was group created to some extent but it bears the unmistakable mark of Richard Bradshaw's insane whimsical humour”.

RB: Thank you, Richard.

ML: Richard Tulloch, of course, worked for or did a number of scripts and things.

RB: He was actually working in Western Australia when we did the Magic Pudding and we got him over to see some of that because we looked for an artist in residence and he came over, aiming to do the script for Bottersnikes and Gumbles; that’s what we employed him first to do. He sort of smiles as he remembers the show because in fact it’s a show we should have been able to work on and work on to get better with Richard; we were caught out by time. I think it could have been a really very successful show. It wasn't quite there and Richard, I think, blames himself but wrongly.

TM: There was a grotesque baby in Aussie Rules. Remember that?

RB: Wonderful. Someone stole it.
TM: Did they? Do you still have photos?

RB: We had this baby which could wet itself which had to be minded by someone in the audience. We involved the audience so we did the ‘Snake Gully Swagger; written by Jack [O’Hagan] – who wrote ‘The Road to Gundagai’.

ML: Don’t worry.

RB: I wish I could remember it but he was still alive at the time. And we had the puppets dancing and got the kids up. Yes, there was the blowfly too; the blowfly, they had to whack a blowfly there.

TM: Oh, the huge blowfly, wasn’t it?

RB: Yes, but the big blowfly came later. I remember once when Steve was doing the show picked out three kids from the audience. They were sitting together and he said “What’s your name?” and the kids said something like “Hairy”. He said “All right, Hairy. What’s your name?” “Lairy” and the third one was Bairy or something and they were American triplets and it was Harry, Larry and Barry but what bad luck.

ML: That’s a great story.

TM: And the baby got stolen. That was completely carved out of foam; I carved it.

RB: It was a wonderful baby because its face could be pulled in: as they took it to the audience it would pull its face. It was very funny.

TM: Yes, it was, it was.

ML: How did you make something like that to be so pliable?

TM: That was really just starting from a big piece of foam and snipping away at it, I snipped with scissors. So it looked great but I knew it wouldn’t last that well and I did these little fat arms as well, fat arms and legs, and I suppose it was in a nappy, I think, because it had a little bare chest - I’ve got a photo of it here, actually. But then I remember Ross saying “You’re going to have to reinforce it so that every time it cries it doesn’t rip the sides of its mouth” so I then had to sort of work backwards to make a structure inside that allowed you to make it cry without tearing and it sort of just made the season, it just got through.

RB: Well, it certainly did survive because it also had to crawl along a fence, didn’t it.

ML: And the baby got stolen. That was completely carved out of foam; I carved it.

RB: It was a wonderful baby because its face could be pulled in: as they took it to the audience it would pull its face. It was very funny.

TM: Yes, it was, it was.

ML: How did you make something like that to be so pliable?

TM: That was really just starting from a big piece of foam and snipping away at it, I snipped with scissors. So it looked great but I knew it wouldn’t last that well and I did these little fat arms as well, fat arms and legs, and I suppose it was in a nappy, I think, because it had a little bare chest - I’ve got a photo of it here, actually. But then I remember Ross saying “You’re going to have to reinforce it so that every time it cries it doesn’t rip the sides of its mouth” so I then had to sort of work backwards to make a structure inside that allowed you to make it cry without tearing and it sort of just made the season, it just got through.

RB: Well, it certainly did survive because it also had to crawl along a fence, didn’t it.
RB: There were cats and things performing on the fence.

TM: Yes.

ML: Tina, did you have any disasters or times when you had to redo a puppet because it didn’t last the season or it got bashed about?

TM: No, no, I think because Ross was so experienced that durability was one of the most important sort of foundation things in the puppets so we always started by making sure that they had really strong joins so nothing would fly off so I didn’t. Maybe Ross had had some bad experiences before I joined and things flying off but he did really good rods on the hands with a lovely pivot on them so that they were very expressive but also really strong. We’d test them, road test them pretty thoroughly by the time they actually were being used for rehearsals and it was a process of tweaking them all the time; after rehearsals they’d come back and we’d make changes so there were none that I remember.

RB: There is a toll taken on puppets. Some of the puppets, for instance, were covered with towelling, terry towel.

TM: Terry towelling stretch.

RB: And after a while it gets dirty and about the only thing you can do is paint over the dirt. So if you look at the set of the Magic Pudding which really did do a lot of kilometres the puppets look a bit scruffy close up.

TM: Close up but it’s remarkable how good they still look under lights.

RB: Yes, it’s funny that.

TM: It’s incredible.

RB: Like costumes in the theatre, they can be quite dirty and not appear so on stage.

TM: Yes. I mean, they were good lessons to learn, actually, from Ross, both that you can be quite extreme in your painting of them if you’re sort of touching them up because the lights kind of bleach a lot of that out but also the thing of making them to last and I really used that when I went on to work on the ABC for TV puppets. I mean, they had to be more sort of – they were scrutinised so close up with the camera but they had to last such a long time and I thought of Ross a lot when I made those puppets because they did last a season and were pretty seriously abused.
ML: Did you have to make either special stands so that they didn’t lose their shape overnight as it were or for packing for touring?

TM: Yes. The shows that I worked on didn’t tour that much, I don’t think, but there were travel boxes, I think, and we always worked with them on stands and the stands for working on them and the ways of storing them are really important. We really start with a stand that you can put your work on in between sessions working on it, otherwise they’d get distorted. Yes, so right from the beginning, right from the clay sculpt, really, Ross was really thorough about something you’re sculpting, “Make sure you have a good armature, make sure you wrap it properly overnight so things don’t fall off, so things don’t dry out”, all those things. And Beverley too, actually mould making so the moulds would last and not have bubbles in them. All those things are things that I learnt really well; it was a real apprenticeship in a way; they were both really good craftspeople. And it’s interesting when I teach students now it’s very hard in the time they’ve got at NIDA to actually learn those skills really thoroughly. You have to make hundreds of moulds to get good at it and we did and it’s really handy because then you make moulds that really do last; if you make a mould of some good hands you can use them over and over and over again.

ML: And were puppets, as it were, recycled, used for other things?

TM: No, but we did have a sort of a bank of hands and feet and, yes, we’d see if we could manage to reuse them.

ML: And what’s the story of the puppet that we have sitting beside us today?

TM: She was from, was it Smiles Away, I think. That’s a Patrick Cook one.

RB: Is it?

TM: It’s a Patrick Cook cartoon and Ross made it and it predated my time there but she’s got the most beautiful movement and I don’t think she was in Aussie Rules.

ML: She’s a rod puppet with a wonderful hat.

TM: Yes, and a great blink.

ML: And a beaky nose.

TM: She did have a great blink; she had a really good blink. She’s got a great Ross mechanism in here with a blink and a mouth on one rod, made of Silastic, Silastic eyelids.
RB: Really, I can't remember it, can't place it.

TM: This came from Ross Browning: when all the puppets were sold off he bought it. And her wings are just two bits of dowel and the fabric does the rest.

RB: Isn't that great?

TM: Yes. Isn't it brilliant and it's really beautiful. And she can do all sorts of stuff.

ML: She's wonderful.

TM: Yes, she really is but, yes, she's a bit worse for wear but it's interesting she's got all those signature things of Ross'.

ML: Tina is manipulating this puppet to raise its arms and turn its head.

TM: And latex rubber feet covered in terry towelling and painted up, which I'd say that the rubber has just sort of crumbled away inside.

RB: The rubber perishes after a while. Tina made a rather nice portrait puppet of me when I was at the Marionette Theatre.

TM: Yes, that's right.

RB: And I don't think I've thrown it out but its face has just sort of - - -

TM: Oh, is it Dorian Gray?

RB: - - - gone and melted away. Yes, I remember Philippe Genty staying with us once and it was in the room that he was staying and he came out with this and moved its mouth and “Aww” and it tore apart as he did it.

84.12 TM: Gee, it's pretty old now, isn't it?

RB: Well, yes. So am I.

TM: Thirty years.

ML: Now, we're getting to the stage where there's changes afoot because, Richard, I think you left the Marionette Theatre of Australia, Marionette Theatre, at some point in the '80s and I don't know how much you'd like to talk about this.

RB: Well, it was a surprise. I had been on tour in Japan and before I'd left I had suggested to the board that everyone was very tired and I don't think we could continue working at quite the rate we'd been working at.
I had privately indicated to Phillip Rolfe that I was very frustrated in the job at the time, not very happy, and I'd also hoped that I could get an associate artistic director – I was touring overseas and getting invitations - so I wouldn't have to be there all the time. And Michael Creighton was going to be the likely one because he already had been doing film work and then Michael pulled out at a late moment so that had happened before I went off to Japan. Then when I came back I found that I had been replaced as artistic director. Now, I didn't have a contract with them right from the beginning because they wouldn't give me one to begin with and then I thought “Well, I'm not going to have one to work with them” but I should have; Stuart was always pushing me to have. And I suppose I could have challenged it. I left the Marionette Theatre, it turned out, one month before Jim Henson [of ‘Muppets’ fame] came to the Sailors’ Home to record my whole show.

86.06 I suppose the board thought “Oh, now he's going to go off and do those sort of things” which I couldn't have done, I don't think, at the time. So it was an unhappy situation. I would have been happier if the board had allowed me to come home and then discussed who might replace me and what the theatre might do but that didn't happen. Michael and I had to put a programme together for '84 and I was at a bit of a loss which way we should go and Michael had this idea we should do the Smiles Away/Aussie Rules style puppet which was a fairly easy kind of puppet to work and the actors work in view and in those shows we used to have bits of straightforward puppetry. In Aussie Rules there was a bit of rod puppetry that happened on a fence at night, cats singing and the baby crawling out on top of the fence, and there was also some shadow puppetry in the second part, some Greek shadow puppets and there were bits of Punch and Judy and various other puppet references in Smiles Away. And I actually think that was a great idea of Michael's and I think we could easily have had a basic programme like that because it was fairly easy to do and the puppeteers had a lot of chance to put their own stuff into it and then occasionally do a different kind of puppet show but that didn't happen.

ML: So what was the last show you did for the Marionette Theatre?

RB: It was Bear Dinkum, I think.

ML: It was Bear Dinkum.

RB: Yes.

TM: Which lost money, did it? It's hard to know, isn't it, what you add?
RB: Yes. You're funded and so you're often funded to lose a certain amount. It didn't take off and my replacement – in fact, while I was up in Japan he was supposed to be working on tidying up the Opera House, demolishing, at the end of Bear Dinkum, that I wasn’t happy with and in fact he did a completely different show.

And I have since seen the application for the grant next year which rubbishes the black theatre technique that I had used and said “This is old European stuff” and so I got very angry as I read off that.

TM: How'd you get to see that?

RB: It's in the archives now. The ‘Marionette Papers’ are all available, accessible, some in the library, Mitchell Library, and some at the Seaborn Foundation.

TM: There were some beautiful moments in the black theatre version. Overall, I thought it worked really well.

RB: Well, we had Torvill and Dean's choreography and Anders Topp [?] - afterwards, he became the choreographer for Torvill and Dean – and we bumped into him at the Art Gallery of Manchester one day. Isn't that unbelievable?

ML: How did you recognise him or did you know him anyway?

RB: Yes. He worked with them after he worked for us and so he was an experienced ballet dancer. There was quite an exquisite bit of dancing by Bear Dinkum himself and the ballet there.

TM: In the moonlight?

RB: Yes.

TM: And beautiful music, wasn't it?

RB: He went up into the air and just floated, didn't he?

TM: Yes. With that great movement.

RB: It was David Collins who was a quite brilliant manipulator of puppets.

TM: He really is.

RB: And is now working, I think, in a patisserie or something to do with that in Noarlunga in South Australia, I think quite happily but he really is a great loss to puppetry.

TM: He is, he's brilliant; he was working on the ABC thing I did too. And Peter Dayson’s music, which was beautiful.
RB: Yes, Peter Dayson. I was hoping we would get some sort of electronic – because it was just beginning to come in. There was the machine – I've forgotten what it was called – the Fairlight [?], I think, is the machine that people could compose directly.

TM: Yes, that's right.

RB: And I was hoping to get music like that and we were a bit stuck for music and Tina suggested Peter and I was delighted because he did some very nice stuff.

TM: Yes, it was great. Yes, it was a beautiful show. I suppose we needed a bit longer on it or the end needed to be worked out. I don’t know that I even saw the next version of it. Did you see the - - -

RB: Oh, yes. Margaret and I went to see it and it was a very different approach in that the puppeteers had red noses. They did use some of the puppets and it was open stage and full lights, certainly not black theatre, but the scene that I had been unhappy about – perhaps mine was too literal, the destroying of the Opera House – but they had just paper hats of the Opera House which they tore off each other’s heads which, yeah, not perfect.

ML: So, Richard, what did you feel most proud of in relation to the Marionette Theatre of Australia, what was the production that you were happiest with? Is there one or there may be more?

RB: I was happy to do a good Magic Pudding even though it is best as a book. It is written as a book and it is best as a book but I felt we were fairly faithful to that. Smiles Away I think had a lot going for it but it's not perfect and when I saw it after it had been on tour for a while I just felt we had to tighten it – it's a rather loose form of theatre.

The Mysterious Potamus, which was based on a Russian show we'd seen with wonderful puppets that Ross had made to Norman Hetherington’s designs, I really liked the look of that; I felt it was a handsome show but it was done to a soundtrack. We did a very happy, funny little Aesop's Fables where we did about thirty fables in half an hour or something. I remember Peter Hall liking that very much.

ML: Was that with rod puppets?

RB: They were glove puppets.

TM: They were knitted, weren’t they, some of them?

RB: And it had a Superman reference because there’s the lion and the mouse. You know that story about the lion and a farmer throws a net
over and then the mouse comes in and says “Don't worry” and just then the farmer comes back and puts a great metal cage over it and what are you going to do? And that's when the mouse said ‘I'm not just an ordinary mouse. I am Super Mouse’ and we had Superman's music and this Super Mouse came in and lifted it off and it was very funny.

ML: Richard, humour has always been really important in your puppetry and you have now for many years toured.

RB: Yes. I think it's just difficult to be serious.

ML: I think that's probably what I mean, yes. And we're not going to be able to talk about your work since the Marionette Theatre because it's been amazing.

RB: Well, it's not relevant.

ML: But I would like you just to talk a little bit about ‘Pure Puppet Adultery’ which you did in 1985 for the Sydney Puppet Theatre because that is a company based in the city and just tell us a bit about that.

RB: That was a spinoff. The four puppeteers - we had what we called the core company - and they were David Collins, Sue Wallace, Steve Coupe and Greg Howard and we were going to guarantee those four people full time employment and employ others for particular shows. So they were in Bear Dinkum - and they were also in Rapunzel, weren’t they, and not in Aussie Rules?

TM: Yes.

RB: And not long after I left the Marionette Theatre they did work with - - -

TM: Terry?

RB: - - - Terry, Terry O’Connell who was a fine director - - -

TM: Is he?

RB: Oh, yes, he is.

TM: Is he in Australia still?

RB: I don’t know where he is now. So they worked with him but I don't think it was necessarily puppetry that was his forte. They left and formed their own company which was called the ‘Sydney Puppet Theatre’. Now, that still exists but it exists only as two people, as Steve Coupe and Sue Wallace. And Steve at the moment is in charge of the puppetry of King Kong.
TM: Is he?

RB: Well, he’s supervising the manipulation. I think Peter Wilson, Peter J [?] Wilson has directed the puppet. I’m not sure, I haven’t got the latest. So they formed their own little company and they did a show, an ‘Alice in Wonderland’ show, which I didn’t see; I was away when they did this. And then they wanted to do another show and they invited me to work on it and that was Pure Puppet Adultery which was supposed to be an R-rated puppet show.

It wasn’t very R-rated, really, but it was basically about a man and a woman and you realise both of them have been having an affair with emus. Finally there are two eggs; I think - I've forgotten now – which are hatched and they're sort of half-human, half-emu.

TM: I never saw it.

RB: But granny who stumbled in realises what to do and puts the two human halves together so it’s all happy in the end. But we did a little sequence where granny did this entertaining children’s program and we did the ‘Three Billy Goats Gruff’ and the Three Billy Goats were hammers of different sizes. The troll was an electric drill on the other side and the hammers eventually just smashed the electric drill; that was the end of that. And we used the same hammers for a song based on a Sesame Street thing, “One of these things is not like the others”, and it was three hammers and a dead cat.

TM: And that was all in this show.

RB: Yes, yes. There were a terrible lot of puns based on eggs and emus. As Queen Victoria said “We are not emus”.

TM: And where was the show on?

RB: It was done in Broadway – not Broadway in New York. In that area sort of back of Broadway there was a little theatre there that they hired. And it got actually quite nice reviews but I don't think it got enough audience to justify; it was a reasonable audience.

ML: Tina, you continued on at the Marionette Theatre after Richard left. What other puppets or productions were you working on, do you remember?

RB: I think I sort of came and went sort of on a contract basis for quite a few shows although it’s a little bit hazy I must say because I think Terry might have gone and Michael Creighton came back in or something like that.
ML: Yes. Terry O'Connell was the artistic director for '84/85 and the theatre became The Rocks Theatre at that time and then Michael Creighton took over in '86.

TM: There was a show called 'Sydney Cove'.

RB: Sydney Cove, yes, and those puppets are wonderful puppets. They're out at the Seaborn Foundation; they weren't sold at the auction.

TM: And who made those because I didn't make them.

RB: Joe Gladwell [?] used to direct that, I think, and Richard Tulloch wrote the script and Michael Fitzgerald – does that sound right? No, no, they were designed – I can't remember. I do know the man but his name doesn't come to me offhand. He was a good theatre designer who designed for the Independent and he did the designs but they are very nice puppets.

TM: I think Norman Hetherington might have done some designs for it.

RB: Norman did the … 'Pinocchio'.

TM: That's right, Pinocchio.

RB: And the 'Wind in the Willows'.

TM: Yes, and I think I worked on both of those. I remember making a lot of weasels and stoats when I had small children.

RB: Right. Well, it'd be for the Wind in the Willows.

TM: Yes.

ML: O.K. And they also did another version of the Magic Pudding and an adult show called 'Kakadu'. Any memories of those?

TM: I think it was just Wind in the Willows.

RB: Yes. Ross certainly worked on Kakadu, I think.

TM: Did he?

RB: No, maybe not. No, that might be Michael Fitzgerald. But there was also the 'Jungle Book'. Was that after it?

TM: That's right, yes.

RB: Was that the Marionette Theatre or it was after?

TM: Yes.
Because I think Michael still did some puppetry after the Marionette Theatre finished.

Finished in The Rocks Theatre, as The Rocks Theatre.

Was it? That I don’t know.

Yes. I think it all sort of stopped in 1990 with the auction of the puppets but, Richard, can you kind of talk about just briefly the shutting down of the company? You were aware of that?

Well, I wasn’t closely associated. Before Michael had become artistic director I was approached at a secret venue by one of the board members to see if I was interested in coming back and I said I’d go back and I would re-direct something for them while they looked for another artistic director, I would help with the interviews, and Michael was also to be on that interviewing panel. Then I got a call from Michael at one stage, saying “I’ve decided to throw my hat into the ring and be one of the applicants” and I thought that was an interesting thing. So we had a couple of good applicants and Michael just got it. Yes, I have to admit I favoured Michael; I thought it was good to have that continuity and he knew the company. But what was the -?

He was appointed in ’86 as the artistic director.

And why did it fade down? Well, it’s a matter of money. Michael had the idea and I think it’s certainly defensible that if you did the classics you had solved part of your problem of getting an audience along. If you did something called Smiles Away, people had no idea what they were going to get.

If you did the Wind in the Willows they would come along but this didn’t delight the Australia Council which was the main funding body. And I don’t know about Kakadu, what the reaction to that was because it obviously was a very Australian thing as was the Magic Pudding. But I suppose in the long run it was the fact that the Australia Council had limited funds and was losing its enthusiasm for the Marionette Theatre and it did almost stop funding the Marionette Theatre about the time that I joined. In fact, it was before Peter decided to do the New Tintookies the funds were very much in the air and then when they decided to do the New Tintookies people supported, the council supported Peter’s taking that up, and so the Marionette Theatre was revived. But it’s a matter of money and obviously the Sailors’ Home wasn’t making the money it should have.

My memories of going back to work on shows, sort of contracted for each show, is that there wasn’t actually the core sort of heart group of
people running – I mean, I'm sure there was still a lot of people who put a lot of time into it but to have information that was being passed around a core company and a permanent puppet maker, it didn’t have a style particularly any more, did it?

104.09 RB: No. That was the problem, I think, with the company, why Michael’s suggestion, doing the Smiles Away thing, we would have had a company style. I'm thinking of permanent puppet theatres elsewhere. They are hard to keep going and in 1980 after the Washington Puppet Festival in the States we visited Bill Baird. Now, Bill had a very successful puppet theatre going in Greenwich Village and he was a well-known puppeteer. He did the puppets for the 'Sound of Music' and he did big puppets for Macy's Parade and he was known for television; that was a well-known name. But ultimately he said it was the unions because I remember writing to him when we were getting the puppeteers into a union because when I first joined they weren’t in any union and the technical employees, theatre people – I've forgotten what they were called but the theatrical employees – they wanted them and I wanted them to be in the Actors' Union and fortunately it's all the one now but in those days there was some rivalry. But Damien Stapleton from the Theatrical Employees Union said “These people are backstage shifters of props”. Ooh. And I said “No, they're actors”. But Bill claimed that he had a number of different unions in the States that it was even more complicated. You had children's theatre union, you had technical union, it had actors’ union so he had to deal with this and also it was too expensive for him.

TM: So his theatre didn’t keep going?

RB: So, yes. When in 1980 he was taking the theatre apart we called in and he was packing it up, which is very sad. He lived in his own private block in Greenwich Village and he lived upstairs and he had a great story, wonderfully neat; it looked as if it should have been a great success. So it’s very hard to run a permanent puppet theatre and we were ambitious.

106.18 ML: And did you go to the auction of the puppets?

RB: Yes.

ML: Were they auctioned at the Sailors’ Home Theatre?

RB: No, no. They were auctioned somewhere else in The Rocks but Lawsons auctioned them.

ML: And who bought them?
TM: Ross Browning bought a lot, didn’t he?

RB: Ross Browning – this is a sad story but I’ll go there – Ross Browning got ..... Captain Lazar and bid against me. We were both bidding for it until it got to something like four hundred dollars and I thought “Oh, well”, pulled out.

TM: You can make them.

RB: And straight after the auction Ross said “They wouldn’t mind if I sort of took the moustache off” and I said “You’d be murdered, Ross, you’d be murdered”. And some months later we got a telephone call – Margaret answered – and said “You know that puppet, Lazar?” and I said “Yeah”. “I'm willing to sell it if you'd like to buy it from us”. So I thought “Oh, yes, all right, we'll buy it” so that’s how we have it. But Ross died, Ross Hill died, and we went to the funeral and Ross Browning was there and he said “You know that puppet of Captain Lazar? I've got it in the car”. And Ross’ family was there and so I said “Well, we’ll transfer it without anyone seeing” so we had to take this bag from one car and shove it in the back. And then there was a wake and I offered to take Ross’ family in the car in Coogee Bay Road somewhere and as I opened up the back of the car to rearrange the seating there was this puppet’s foot sticking out of a bag and one of Ross’ brothers said “Oh, that’s a puppet .......... It’s not many of us that will attend the funeral of our maker”.

108.20 ML: Indeed not. Did you go to the sale?

TM: I don't think I did, I don't know, I don't think I did. I think I sort of didn’t want to - - -

ML: Buy any of the puppets you'd made?

TM: And I'd sort of seen them over the years and I knew that they wouldn’t be in – you know, they were sort of well-worn.

RB: They were certainly battered around.

TM: Yes.

RB: And some, of course, were latex and you knew they weren’t going to last.

TM: Yes.

RB: David Jones bought the principal characters from the Magic Pudding - - -
TM: Which were beautiful puppets.

RB: - - - and somehow they’ve ended up with someone else.

TM: Yes, because some of them were on display at NIDA recently.

RB: Some of the ones that were on NIDA were from my show.

TM: They were from you?

RB: But this was from Michael’s show, the bigger ones that they brought, and Peter Alovich(?) said recently – when I say “recently”, in the last couple of months – that someone has approached him with what he thought were Peter Scriven’s puppets from 1960 or something but they weren’t. They were the ones from Michael’s show which David Jones had had in ……. …….

TM: And who made those?

RB: I don’t know. I can find out but offhand I don’t know.

TM: No, the ones that Ross made, the actual Magic Pudding with that beautiful mouth mechanism was - - -

RB: They were the ones that were on show.

TM: At NIDA.

RB: But also at the Mitchell Library, the State Library.

TM: Yes. They were fabulous.

ML: Tina, I just wanted before we finish for you just to talk a little bit about how your career has developed since and what the influence of making puppets on things like the baby mobile that you’ve made, the children’s books that you write and illustrate now.

110.11 TM: Well, I think that, like I say, the lessons I got in puppet making from Ross and Beverley and Peter Chester in a way and on top of that the work with Henson’s which I got through Richard, through Jim Henson coming out - and Ross and I both went over there and worked on ‘Labyrinth’ - I worked with such good people who taught me such simple lessons about construction, they really are things that I used a lot in constructing puppets for the ‘Ferals’ and ‘Bananas in Pyjamas’.

RB: That’s an ABC series.
TM: Yes. And Bananas in Pyjamas and various other ABC things I worked on and I guess with Kim Carpenter I kept on making puppets for him for many years.

ML: What do you do with ‘Theatre of Image’ or what have you done with Theatre of Image?

TM: Puppet making, really, over the years, all sorts of bits and pieces for that - I haven't for years.

ML: And the Bell Shakespeare Company you worked for.

TM: Did masks for those, actually, which were incredibly simple, beautiful, simple papier-mâché. I have gone back to papier-mâché, I must say, because it’s non-toxic and such a pleasure to do.

ML: And what was the production for the Bell Shakespeare?

TM: I think it was for ‘King Lear’, I think – I think it was.

RB: What, for the Barrie Kosky one?

TM: Yes, yes. I did some for that which were like huge sort of helmet heads.

RB: Yes. And there were a couple of Punch and Judy things.

TM: Yes, there were. And I did another thing for the Opera Company. And, yes, it's a long time ago so I can't quite remember what I did except I know that my main lessons were “Make things sturdy”. You know, it’s funny, one of the best lessons from Henson’s was how important it is to use enough safety pins and to actually use safety pins to attach arms and stuff.

112.05 RB: And that's ordinary.

TM: Well, just the fact that a brilliant thing like a safety pin – like why attach an arm on a light puppet in any other way when it’s the most convenient and brilliant little mechanism.

RB: Yes and it doesn't all come undone.

TM: No, no, it was brilliant.

RB: When you say “papier-mâché”, is this the layers of paper or is it actually mashed up paper?

TM: No, it’s layers of paper.

RB: Layers of paper.
TM: I think I've actually still got - - -

ML: Don't go away. No, don't go away. This is audio.

TM: I'll do this after, I'll show you after.

ML: You have to tell us, yes.

TM: No, it was just little – I wish I could remember the name of the designer – it was just little pieces of paper but using the colour of the newspaper to actually create a sort of a mosaicy effect and enhancing that with paint. So, super simple. Yes, and I guess it also taught me how to make, really, the simplest – well, looking at Richard’s show too – how the simplest materials that move well actually are enough. Often when I'm teaching, I guess, people start from the look of it and forget about the movement of it and I always try and strip it back to what you can do with a piece of card and some masking tape and a paper bag, that you can do amazing stuff with that and do a great performance with it and if you start with that and gradually build up. Those were definitely things that I was very pleased to work with people who could teach me the benefits and pleasures of working that way rather than starting with sort of the special effects, amazing look, Servomotors and that sort of thing; I'm glad I didn’t come into puppetry that way, really.

ML: And you're now handing that on to NIDA students?

113.59 TM: Yes. And I'm always really pleased that the students embrace the project so whole-heartedly. The construction, they always seem to get very attached to the characters they're making, they're happy to perform with them and build sets for them, so it's a huge project for them to do in a very short amount of time and very little time with me but a lot of them have come out of there and gone on to work in puppetry. It's hard to have a career in puppetry but a lot of them have had an interest in it and gone on to do quite a bit and there's quite a few of my students that I'd recommend if people ring me for a puppet making job. I'd pass it on to students, definitely, even though their main training is in props really embrace it. The baby mobile that I made was really just making something to entertain small babies, my own, which worked, which I've continued to sell; I've now sold about twenty thousand of them over the years.

ML: That's amazing.

TM: A cottage industry all folded in that room, usually by some teenager earning money, earning pocket money. And books, I guess, the detail I go into in books is certainly something that I did for the puppets for TV, that really you can put an endless detail in it, yes, it's really valuable for
television performance. For theatre not so much: you're painting for a
distance but the detail in construction, I think, really pays off, yes.

ML: Great, O.K. Richard, is there anything else that we should include
here today? You're still working and still touring and you work
from your garage in Bowral.

116.04 RB: Yes.

ML: The creative hub.

RB: Well, at the moment it's so full of rubbish that I can't get into it.

TM: Are you still making new puppets?

RB: Well, I've been working – years ago I did ‘Villikins and his Dinah’ and
for the ghosts in the version of the song I do I had a cut-out from Black
Stick on plastic, contact plastic on Mylar so that I could reflect the
shadows and bend the Mylar so the shadow inverted and did things –
but I've been working on a small thing which will have a small bulb
behind it so I can project the shadow and I've been able to get a little
bit of movement into it. It's terribly complicated to make white figures in
a space move.

TM: Yes, yes.

RB: But I'm quite happy. They only move a fraction but at least - - -

TM: It's enough.

RB: - - - people will say "How's he doing that?"

RB: Yes.

ML: So you're still creating and still working?

RB: Oh, yes, yes, but often it's going back to something I did years ago and
doing it better.

RB: Yes. That's good, eh.

ML: Tina, is there anything else that you would like to say?

TM: No, not really, except that I'm very pleased I spent the years I did
making puppets in such good company.

RB: For the most part it was a very nice group to work with.

TM: Yes, it was, it was great.

RB: We did have good times.
TM: I mean, I really felt I came into the Marionette Theatre quite a long way into it. Some of the people you’ve mentioned like Igor, like Ross would still talk about Igor so much and it was like a visit to Igor was …….. It was something I never did but Ross still talked about it.

RB: Igor ended up at Cardinal Moran [?], I think, retirement home. He was Russian Orthodox but his sister got him into there. But he had lived in Liverpool Street in Darlinghurst and he used to copy icons – we’ve got a couple of them – and also old masters and they were very nicely copied and so some of his paintings are hanging ‘round still at Cardinal Moran place on the walls, these old masters.

118.14 But in Buenos Aires he had a friend who would display them in the shop window, saying “They may be genuine and then they may not be”. But he made John the Baptist’s head for Joan Sutherland.

TM: Really?

RB: He did props for the opera. That was his last employment, really, was props maker for the opera.

TM: Yes, it was a good time to work there.

ML: Well, thank you both very much. I’ve had a good time.

Interview ends