

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
SYDNEY FESTIVAL DIRECTORS
TRANSCRIPT

Name: Lindy Hume

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Project manager: Catherine Freyne

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0.00 **MP:** This is an oral history project recorded on August the 19th 2015 with Lindy Hume, the Director of the Sydney Festival between 2010 and 2012 for three years. My name is Martin Portus and this interview is happening at the Redfern Community Centre on August the 19th.

Lindy, you ran the Perth International Arts Festival for four years before taking up the job in Sydney. Now, Perth is a much smaller, isolated city but indeed it's, I think, the oldest festival in Australia, older than Adelaide. What did you learn there about running festivals, about your stamp?

LH: O.K. Perth Festival, well of course they were my first ones and I was a much more sort of seasoned Festival Director by Perth Festival number four than I was in the first one. Perth Festival is a really interesting project because it is a smaller city. The Festival proportionately has a more significant role in the city's life, in the city's cultural life, than potentially Sydney Festival does because it is really the kind of biggest cultural event of the annual calendar. And it has this fantastic scope. And the Perth public are incredibly in love with their Festival, incredibly loyal and committed and engaged with their Festival. So in terms of the attendances per population it's obviously bigger in a smaller city like Perth. So you really did feel that with the Perth Festival you were being part of the narrative of a city. And I learnt that one can, as a director – and you know I'm an opera director, a theatre director as well as a festival director – the notion of a narrative, the notion of storytelling, the notion of being part of the city's story is very much possible, running a city's festival.

2.15 And so that was something that I learnt through the narrative of the Perth Festivals. And then when it came to making my proposal for the Sydney Festival, it was very much about "What are the stories of the city that we want to tell and what is the moment in this city that we need to celebrate?"

MP: Was the international programming part of that storytelling in Perth more significant, given that at least historically that sort of product didn't actually habitually go to Perth, it was a city that wasn't naturally on the circuit of activity?

LH: I would absolutely disagree with that.

MP: Right.

LH: Perth Festival punches well above its weight in terms of the international presence of the festival. If you look at the festival programs from David Blenkinsop's time onwards, they've had some pretty extraordinary international programs.

MP: But that's throughout the year, is it?

LH: Sorry, I see what you're saying. No, no, no, just purely for the Perth Festival.

MP: Very significant.

LH: Yes, I'm sorry. I didn't quite understand what you were saying there. Yes, that's right. It's very much the "moment" in the city's life where all these extraordinary acts and local artists and international artists can connect and so that makes it very important in Perth. It makes it very important for every festival, the combination of local artists and the sort of alchemy between local artists and international artists is one of the great legacies of any festival.

MP: And we'll get to your storytelling, of course, in Sydney. But in Perth, is it something that – do you just go in and tell stories wherever you are? Or surely the nature of the stories, the way you tell them is significantly different in one city to another?

4.11 LH: Well, Perth is a vastly different proposition. Perth is on the Indian Ocean, looking towards a very different kind of - - -

MP: India.

LH: - - - India, a different kind of neighbourhood, really. And of course the big thing was, the great, great opportunity and challenge and responsibility of the Festival during my time there was to really engage with the Indigenous cultures of Western Australia, contemporary Indigenous cultures of Western Australia. And in particular I think in 2006, engaging with Noongar culture, which was the first time that the Festival had really done that, really celebrated Noongar culture, which is the Indigenous culture of the southwest of Western Australia and is fantastic. Noongar celebration, really I guess, was one of the signature moments for my time at Perth Festival, because it was a long engagement with a long consultation and trust-building with leaders from the Noongar community across the southwest of Western Australia. And it was where I really learnt, I guess, the important lessons of trust-building, relationship-building, consultation, listening, shutting up and listening to the wisdom of the Elders' groups that we brought together.

And I was really excited to be able to bring some of that experience a little bit to Sydney in my last Festival when we were able to – here we are in Redfern Community Centre – and we spent a lot of time in meetings here when we were developing Black Capital at Carriageworks in my last Festival. So totally different communities, totally different personalities and scenarios in Perth and Sydney but certainly the principle of engaging with the community was very much the lesson that I learnt in Perth that I was able to - - -

6.36 **MP: That's interesting. So the principles were the same, but from one side of Australia to another, it was very different issues and processes in that Aboriginal consultation?**

LH: Well, certainly. But it was about speaking to people who had authority and who had the respect of the community and just listening, really, and being able to put aside enough time. I mean festivals are very time-dynamic creatures. You know, in the case of an annual festival, you've got to make a lot of very fast decisions about curation and assembling groups of people and artists that are really hot right now and so forth. That's not how it works in terms of engaging with communities. Wherever you are, you really need to put the time in. And you really need to build up relationships and depth of relationships in communities wherever you are, and that will eventually bear fruit. And I think in the case of Perth Festival – and also in the case of Sydney Festival – I think those long term relationships were more evident in the programming in the later festivals than the early ones.

7.56 **MP: Well, they take a time to do, don't they? You're rare as a festival director and you're unique in the Sydney Festival line-up as being one who's a practising artist. I imagine that local collaboration capacity is a part of that. Just to update the listener, you were Artistic Director of the West Australian Opera, earlier the Victorian State Opera and Oz Opera, the experimental and touring arm of Opera Australia, you now run Opera Queensland. Now moving to the Sydney canvas, how did being an artist inform your programming and your thinking as a festival director? Local collaborations is obviously one thing.**

LH: Local collaborations, yes. I mean knowing very well the dynamics of the inside of the rehearsal room does, I believe, make a big difference to being an Artistic Director. I really do think that understanding where artists are at most stages of the development process, particularly in the development of new work, has been incredibly valuable to me, to be able to go into a rehearsal room and understand completely where those artists are and what their insecurities and strengths and so forth are. And

I have had the experience [so] that artistic directors and the creative teams understand that empathy that I bring and they understand that I understand what they're going through. So feedback is easier sometimes from somebody who has that kind of experience. Questions that I ask in the context of how things are going or developing aren't seen as kind of "the suits arrive".

MP: The bossy entrepreneurial type.

9.53 LH: No. But I mean of course there's other – I mean you've named some of the companies but I'm also a freelance director - I direct all around the world. I direct in Germany and America and I'm just about to go back to Leipzig and direct some of my own stuff. So I'm not just an Australian director – not that there's a "just" there at all – but I do have some good contacts in other parts of the world which also help in terms of networking. The one thing you really do need as a festival director is a bloody good phonebook and I have a very good phonebook, I mean particularly in the world of opera. But it's easy, really, to sort of extrapolate from there and you do sometimes hear things and see things that you perhaps wouldn't [otherwise] see. If you're in a creative community for a little while directing a show in, I don't know, Houston or, as I say, Berlin or in the UK somewhere, you actually do have a different kind of depth of relationship with people, you can have a different sort of engagement with somebody's work, because you've actually worked with them. So that's helpful. It's not the only thing, of course. There are different styles of festival director. But throughout my time as festival director and indeed throughout my time as artistic director of anything I primarily identify as an artist first and then an artistic director.

MP: And you make the point about the storytelling - normally festival directors run a mile from the idea of themes - so not exactly a theme but a narrative?

LH: I'm not running away from themes, no.

MP: You don't? Why don't you?

LH: I mean I didn't have them for Sydney Festival but I did for Perth. I found them really helpful as a way of making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Just simply creating a pebble in the pond that at least is a start point for a conversation.

12.09 Some of the associations that simply starting with a conversation about journeying or the human family or earthly pleasures - they're very broad themes but essentially they start a conversation that people feel somehow given permission to discuss in a way that they don't perhaps

feel the authority to discuss of the curation of a festival program but they can certainly talk about their own experiences. And I think one of the important things to remember about a festival is it's not just you and the artists, it's you and the audience and the audience and the potential audience and the audience who perhaps are a little bit more on the fringes of the festival-going community do actually connect with themes. They actually do feel that will be a way in that perhaps they might not have felt if it's just purely "Here's an arts festival". I get the whole thing of not wanting a theme because I actually think Sydney Festival is its own theme, Sydney itself is its own animal.

MP: But it's often shown – now that everyone seems to be resigned (they weren't once) to have the Sydney Festival in January in summer but that seems to be well-established now – but it's often seen to be a happy place, a summery place. You were interested, weren't you, in stories about Sydney that were not necessarily all sunny summer?

LH: Well, I grew up here. I'm your real proper Sydneysider. I mean I grew up in the inner west.

14.01 **MP: Paddington?**

LH: I grew up in Glebe, went to Glebe Primary School, Fort Street High, I went to ballet school at Chippendale. You know, I'm the real item in terms of the Sydneysider. And I wanted a reflection of the Sydney that I knew and loved and also hated sometimes. And that kind of ambivalence that I felt about taking on the job of Sydney Festival was partly a bit to do with that sort of rather self-congratulatory, "We're so fabulous, we're Sydney" which I genuinely couldn't identify with. My Sydney is a different kind of a Sydney that I love. I love the crazy cockatoos and the light shimmering through the trees and the cicadas and that sort of amazing heat on your skin. That sort of summer for me is the kind of extraordinary euphoria that you feel in summer in Sydney, and I feel that from when I was a little girl. And my family who still live here have that experience and it's as much about that kind of nostalgia that I sort of wanted to tap into a little bit. But also, yeah, I wanted to go west because I could see - I mean, that was the big change for me when I came back to Sydney - while a lot of the focus was on sort of, you know, the glamour end of town, the beautiful city at the harbour, that sort of really magnificent, absurdly spectacular part of Sydney that is kind of gobsmackingly glamorous and beautiful - but what was really interesting was watching what was happening out west and the extraordinary growth and confidence in Parramatta and Campbelltown. And of course I'm going to be drawn to inner west, of course I'm looking at the Seymour Centre and

Carriageworks and King Street and this part of Sydney too is very much my old - - -

16.11 **MP: And far, far west than that, of course.**

LH: Much. Certainly we were well engaged with the Campbelltown Arts Centre when Lisa Havilah was there. And Parramatta, of course, we put – particularly in my last Festival – a big footprint there that I think has been an exciting step forward for the Festival.

MP: Did you say at some time you were a little sort of awkward with the kind of glamour side of town?

LH: I did.

MP: You're not so comfortable with that big end of town in Sydney?

LH: Look, I know it's really a little bit of an embarrassing admission for a festival director but I'm very shy and I do feel very awkward in foyers, which is a bit of a drawback for an opera director and for festival director. I do. I would do almost anything to avoid pre-show, interval, post-show. But of course then I have a great time - but I feel terribly nervous about that. As a director but also as a festival director I just feel uncomfortable and I'm not so great with crowds. I'm actually a little bit nervous in crowds too.

MP: Including two hundred and fifty thousand that you're getting to come together on Festival First Nights in Sydney?

LH: Yes. As I say, I love being in the rehearsal room, I love the creative process, I love nothing more than sitting in a theatre, watching an amazing piece or show or listening to some fantastic music. That's heaven. It's the other aspects that some people are just fantastic at, you know, working the room and all of that. I have always found and still do find it takes a certain amount of courage.

MP: There are so many tasks about being a festival director and we're starting to move into just some of them. One of them is raising sponsorship, of course. That must have been hard being a shy girl raising sponsorship.

18.07 LH: Well, of course, the Sydney Festival has an extraordinary machine to do just that.

MP: Yes.

LH: And my job is really to obviously use the contacts that I do have, but also to connect the Festival ambitions and vision with the ambitions and vision

of the sponsor. And, of course, we had an extraordinary sponsor during the time – I mean we had many extraordinary sponsors during the time I was at Sydney Festival. ANZ, of course, were really, really important to us. But Zip Industries and the hot water tap, the Zip tap became very visible now.

MP: A rather unusual one but a very generous one and including from the CEO himself personally as an added amount.

LH: Yes, Michael was an incredibly generous sponsor.

MP: Michael Crouch?

LH: Michael Crouch, indeed, who was very engaged with the Festival, would often pop in and see how things were going and I ended up rather amusingly posing as a model for his hot water taps in the program, which everyone gave me a heap of shit for. But anyway I look back and I think they're rather glamorous, actually, me posing with my cup of tea.

MP: But it was a shifting transition because Channel 9 after decades was withdrawing from the Festival as a sponsor. The first year that you started you said farewell to Ros Packer on the board.

LH: Indeed. That had all happened prior to my arrival.

MP: Just. But on that financial note, you were really, truly the first post-GFC Sydney Festival.

LH: I was.

19.58 **MP: Because Fergus Linehan, your predecessor for four festivals, he had to ride, midway that term, the GFC. And you arrived at a time when ticket sales were uncertain and sponsorship was shrinking, it seemed. Fergus had had a good run with budgets but his last festival had a minor deficit of a hundred and fifty thousand and you were given a million less for the 2010 first festival of yours, for programming than before. What did it feel like being sort of squeezed just as you started the job?**

LH: Look, my great enthusiasm for the task at hand, I guess, is always going to be – and there's no difference – every single time you bring on a festival there's never enough money. There was a little moment of "Damn. Why did I get the post-GFC festivals" and Fergus is always a hard act to follow, always a hard act to follow, so it was a bit like "Thanks, guys. Give the girl" - - -

MP: Yes, that's right.

LH: - - - the first female festival director and here's she's got a bit less money. Look, I have to say you just play the cards you're dealt, really, and there's no point whinging about it. I think I probably did have a bit of a whinge at the beginning, within the kind of team. You know, one wants to go out with a bang, one wants to kind of do the splashiest "Hi, Sydney. This is me".

21:55 And I was very aware of Fergus' legacy. I mean he was such an amazing festival director and he went out on such a high and he just seemed to really strike a chord. And we're very, very different and just finding the right time, it's doing that thing of changing the tone of a Festival. If you look at how each of the Festivals have changed in tone over each of the festival directors' times, finding something that really has the kind of characteristic of you, the essence of you, but that still hits the chord that people love about the festival. That's what you need to do and you can do that on a big budget and you can do it on a small budget.

And I think we had a number of things in the first Sydney Festival that seemed to really capture the imagination and kind of ride that little bump of the GFC. So things like the *Manganiyar Seduction* and the *Hamlet* and so forth, I think people really grabbed onto those and enjoyed my first festival. I was really happy with my first festival.

MP: So was I. I remember I saw a lot of it, including the Festival First Night which had begun under Fergus and was a hugely extravagant free event that took over the whole festival, began under Fergus and continued under you.

LH: I'm just going to stop you with the "extravagant". It had a - - -

MP: A budget of two and a half million or something?

LH: Yes. That's not extravagant for a citywide festival - - -

MP: For one night.

LH: - - - for one amazing night across the whole of Sydney and the number of people that came to see it. It was generous rather than extravagant, I would say. The budgeting for Festival First Night's always - like doing anything outdoors is - a phenomenally expensive undertaking. And so I wouldn't call it extravagant. I would call it appropriately generous because the whole notion of a big free outdoor event for the whole city is going to cost. That's what it's going to cost. At that level.

24.19 **MP: And you weren't sure, at that time when you started until some months into your tenure, the funding wasn't even confirmed to do it.**

LH: Indeed. It was all “Oh, man”.

MP: So you were uncertain. It was a financially uncertain time.

LH: It really, really was. And you’ve got a better memory than me, Martin, because I think I’ve sort of like deleted quite a bit in my head. Look, it was a very uncertain time because I think at that stage there was still some details to be worked out with the relationship with Destination New South Wales or Events New South Wales as it was then called. And honestly my memory is not going to be so hot on all of these things. But I remember that in all of the Festival First Nights the funding came through phenomenally late and there was always this sense that you just had to plan to the point where you can’t plan any more unless you get that funding confirmed. And it was terrifying, often really, really terrifying.

MP: And in your last year you did, 2012, with the Festival First Night but that turned out to be the end. And Lieven Bertels started and he had to wait a very long time for confirmation and it never came.

LH: Yes, indeed. And we went to press for the 2012 Festival First Night without the headliner, as you may recall, and announced the headliner Manu Chao, much later than we wanted to.

MP: The headline act for the Domain free concert, part of the Festival First Night.

LH: Mm.

MP: You also, to move onto the program for that first year, perhaps via western Sydney - there was a free concert which was extravagant because that was one concert and that was \$2.36 million to stage A.R. Rahman in Parramatta Park.

26.07 LH: A.R. Rahman, yeah, thank you.

MP: So this is the two-time Oscar winner, the composer and songwriter who worked on the famous film, *Slumdog Millionaire*.

LH: Yes.

MP: What was the thinking behind having that concert, a free concert, aimed at the Indian community and in Parramatta?

LH: That was one of the most extraordinary, actually of my life, experiences because what I did have – it’s a bit of a long story. So, what I did have was the beautiful Manganiyar Seduction with all the forty three or forty five Rajasthani musicians.

MP: All lined up in a kind of - like an Amsterdam brothel in tiny little - - -

LH: Boxes.

MP: - - - boxes, lighted boxes, yes.

LH: Absolute joyful thing that I had seen in Vienna, of all places, Vienna: a good example of being somewhere where I was directing something, and then going to see this thing and saying "Ha, ha, let's have that".

MP: But was it on the international circuit? Because I thought in Anthony Steel's day he might have driven across a desert in Rajasthan to find them. But you saw them in Vienna.

LH: I did see them in Vienna but they hadn't hit that big circuit yet. But I have to say, yes, of course, I did see them in a proper city with no driving across the desert. But anyway we had the Manganiyar Seduction which was something that I was very excited to bring to Sydney - I did think it would hit a chord and it did.

MP: And it did.

LH: And I thought we'd do it in Parramatta and I went to meet with the Indian community and had lots of great conversations with the fantastic Indian community, not just in Parramatta.

28.02 **MP: But it's very big in Parramatta.**

LH: And I said "Guess what? We're going to do this fantastic concert in Parramatta Park with the Manganiyar Seduction" and everyone went "Who cares? We want A. R. Rahman". And I have to admit I knew of *Slumdog Millionaire* and I loved the song but I hadn't put the two together. And then I started Googling and thought "Oh, my God, this man is massive". I mean he has squillions of fans all around the world, but particularly in India, he's an absolute national hero. But the interesting thing about Rahman – that whole circumstance, of course, was that at that time there were those horrible attacks on Indian students, if you recall.

MP: That's right, and getting extensive media coverage in India.

LH: The Indian media were very angry and very much the tension between Australia and India, very friendly countries, was palpable and it was a really horrible, horrible time. And the Consul General was extremely concerned. And when we started talking about – look, I did write an email to Mr Rahman's agent and said "Would you be interested in coming for Festival First Night? And here is Sydney in summer". And I knew he was a friend of some artists here in Sydney, I knew he'd played an arena

concert with great success already in Australia. So I sent it off thinking "I'll never hear. The guy's just won two Oscars". But lo and behold I had this message literally in the middle of the night from his agent who said he would indeed like to come to Australia but he would like to do it in very special circumstances in support of the Indian students and to make a gesture of solidarity with the Indian students and also to build a bridge between the Australian and Indian communities through music.

30.15 And indeed there was a lot of work behind the scenes and Josephine Ridge who was the general manager was incredibly involved in that as well. And we went to Canberra and up to Macquarie Street and we did as much work behind the scenes politically as we possibly could and there was a lot of interest in making this happen. And rather suddenly, actually, the New South Wales government, the Premier, Nathan Rees, said "If you can get this in place within this amount of time, I will make this announcement at the Australian-Indian Celebration Day".

MP: Nathan Rees, of course, was the MP for an electorate in the Parramatta area from western Sydney. Did his presence and other forces help make the program in Parramatta, to say nothing of the Rahman concert, much bigger than before?

LH: Well, he was very keen to see Sydney Festival expressed in a really meaningful way in Parramatta. And at that time the Rahman concert was one thing. But I think from Brett Sheehy's day there was a legacy of a continuing program in Parramatta Riverside Theatre. But the problem was the Parramatta program just didn't have the amount of money thrown at it that it needed to have to have the impact, the critical mass and the impact that we could have in the CBD.

32.01 **MP: Does it now? Have you made that point that it has critical mass appeal now?**

LH: If you have a look at what we were able to do in the last festival, we actually reached a tipping point before the 2012 Festival where – putting the huge success of the Rahman concert to one side – between us, between Riverside Festival [Theatre], the Parramatta Council and Sydney Festival, we realised that unless we put significantly more resources into this, the Parramatta outcome was always going to look like a poor cousin to the CBD program. And that wasn't reflective of what Sydney looked like any more. The west of Sydney was much more - - -

MP: So that money in these tightened times did come and essentially from the state?

LH: Yes, indeed. We invested more money - - -

MP: The Festival itself as well?

LH: - - - yes, into the Parramatta program in that last year, as did - - -

MP: For example, you had the Sydney Dance Company, ACO, performing in Parramatta and in Penrith, I think. You had a program for three years out at Campbelltown Arts Centre called *Edge of Elsewhere* - - -

LH: *Edge of Elsewhere*, yes.

MP: - - - a visual arts collaboration.

LH: Yes. But the big push came in that final year where the Parramatta Council and the state, NSW government, matched each other and we put more of a resource in. So we had \$1.5 million to program for Parramatta, which meant significantly that we could put in a Festival Garden like we had in the CBD in Hyde Park, we had a Spiegeltent out there, we had, if you like, a Festival First Night event in Parramatta and a closing event that equalled in scale something like the sort of thing that we'd had in the CBD.

34.02

So not to say in any way that Parramatta hadn't been taken seriously beforehand, it's just to create a festival you do need that critical mass, and you do need some big gestural statement like a garden where people can gather and meet. You need those meeting places, those hubs. And actually I think you do need a sort of iconic event like an opening or a closing to send it on its way. And until 2012 we hadn't had the resources really to do that.

With the exception, the very notable exception of the A. R. Rahman concert which was truly one of the most extraordinary nights. Just sitting there in Parramatta Park with sixty thousand of our new best friends and I'm looking out there and I'm thinking "Hi, everyone. Hi, Sydney. This is a new Sydney Festival audience" because a lot of the people, of course, were Indian-Australians, a lot of black faces, white faces. It was just the most fantastic, joyful evening. And families of all kinds sitting there, having these wonderful – the fantastic food stalls and things – having these great, great meals and picnicking and then the concert which was the true Bollywood extravaganza.

MP: It was - I was there - it was a very Bollywood experience.

LH: It was hilarious, all these crazy video screens and dancers dressed as butterflies and stuff. I mean high art it was not but the fireworks at the end and him singing 'Jai Ho' and I remember having a little cry. I remember thinking– well, everyone's up on their feet, they're dancing –

“This is a great moment for the relationship between India and Australia”.
And he did it.

35.56 **MP:** It was soft diplomacy at its best, really. And just finally on the western Sydney/Parramatta kind of push: you did create that Festival Garden scene and environment where a lot of ongoing local collaborations with companies, particularly the Urban Theatre Projects company, continued to produce interesting work of its place every year.

LH: Yes, yes. Well, Urban Theatre Projects had been very much part of the Festival story well before my time. It was a company I didn't know until I'd seen them in the history of Sydney Festival. I think Fergus had programmed them but even before that I think Brett programmed them so I became aware of them through my predecessors. So it's important that we do have that sort of lineage, I think, for certain companies who do have an alternate sort of voice through the festival and, yes, Urban Theatre Projects is one of those.

MP: In that first festival we were yet to see that other stated priority of yours which was a Pacific-Asian arts focus to shift the Festival, as you said at the beginning, away from a Euro-Anglocentric programming - - -

LH: Well, there was a little bit, I mean - - -

MP: - - - with a touch of Indian and West African, from Brazilian dance - - -

LH: And Lemi Ponifasio, I think, was a really important - - -

MP: Mali Musicians.

LH: Was he there in that first year? Look at me. I'm going through my own program. I don't know what's in it. Yes, it was great to have Lemi Ponifasio from MAU Company from New Zealand. Lemi's a really important artist who works mostly in Europe now. He does actually perform in festivals in New Zealand but he doesn't have a regular presence. But he has this extraordinary Pacific culture, his own Pacific culture, but also he draws on the extraordinary dance culture and spiritual culture of the Pacific Rim.

38.15 And his performances are meticulous, meticulous sort of conceptual contemporary performance with really beautiful imagery, dancing, hugely overwhelming soundtracks and so forth. And he hadn't ever been represented at Sydney Festival so that was fantastic to get him to do. I

think we only did two performances and that was my first letter of complaint as a festival director of Sydney Festival.

MP: The first of many, no doubt. It comes with the job, doesn't it?

LH: Yes, I had a few, sure. But some poor lady was frightened because it was "very loud". And it was very loud but, yes, that was my first walkout, I think.

MP: Well, it was called the *Tempest*, after all, the name of the show.

LH: Yes.

MP: Speaking of loud, you had a big success with Al Green from the United States with a very big band backing. The theatre was strong in that year, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which you said at the time was exactly what we should be doing but you were patient about such things not translating to the box office. Why didn't that translate well to the box office? I thought it was good.

LH: I don't know, I don't know. I don't know the answer to some of those questions because really just, you put it there and you think "I wonder if people will come to this?" And sometimes they do and sometimes they don't and you imagine that a work like that, that hasn't been seen in Sydney – like hadn't, I'm imagining it wouldn't have been seen - - -

MP: No.

LH: - - - and, you know, a very reputable company. No, I don't know. It's funny, isn't it? I got a letter of complaint about that one too.

MP: What was wrong with that one?

LH: I think it was to do with paedophilia, I think it had to do with the child character.

40.05 **MP: Oh, yes.**

LH: Yes.

MP: But did people like *Hamlet* in mud?

LH: Martin, they loved *Hamlet* in mud. I loved *Hamlet* in mud.

MP: A German direction with surtitles and quite an abbreviated version.

LH: Yes, wow. Yes, it was quite an extraordinary production. Of course, Thomas Ostermeier director, great director of the Schaubühne in Berlin, but I guess that Sydney completely fell in love with the actor playing

Hamlet, Lars Eidinger, who played Hamlet as a very provocative, very angry, out-of-control brat. It was an extraordinary performance which I had seen in Avignon early in its time - I think it might even have been its premiere. And I loved it and I loved the production and I'm a huge admirer of Ostermeier's direction and he [Lars Eidinger] was extraordinary. But something about the connection, possibly about the proximity between him and the audience in Sydney, and he had such a kind of, I guess a kind of - - -

MP: What do you mean, in this muddy cast?

LH: Yes. Really, the audience in Sydney just loved him. And then he started talking back to the audience so that he started breaking the fourth wall and having this very improvised conversation with the audience while he was completely in character as Hamlet. And they just ate it with a spoon.

42.05

I think when I saw it in Avignon it was certainly the production that was the star - very beautifully executed, very intelligent and very visceral and a great use of video but also this fantastic thing of being muddy and wet and water and so forth, dirty, grubby. But in Sydney it just was the absolutely amazing performances which had been really run in then by a couple of years of performing the show.

MP: You did well with Australia's Shaun Parker who is not a well-known choreographer particularly. So dance is sort of very hit and miss, isn't it, with audiences sometimes?

LH: Yes, it is. No, Shaun did a great job. Was that *Happy as Larry*?

MP: Yes.

LH: I think it must have been, yes. That was a lovely piece, very optimistic and joyful and it was the perfect piece to put into Sydney Festival. So actually I think there are some things that just are going to work in January in Sydney and that was one of those shows.

MP: Then the year later, though, you had a Canadian choreographer who did *Dark Matters* in the following program [actually this was 2010]. That was a miss to some extent.

LH: Well, yes, maybe.

MP: Any clues as to why?

LH: Maybe in terms of audiences but it was great – this was Crystal Pite's work?

MP: Yes.

LH: Well, I think she's one of the great choreographers at the moment and I think she's fantastic and it was great to have Crystal Pite's work here in Sydney. But, yes, I don't know, maybe it is as simple as *Happy as Larry* versus *Dark Matters*, who knows? It's Sydney in summer.

MP: Is it just the title?

LH: It certainly wasn't the only time in which – I won't say which piece it was but there was a very famous production that I went to Edinburgh to kind of do the final deal on. And when I saw it – incredibly important company – and when I saw it I just thought "This is going to die a death in January in Sydney. Too bleak, too dark".

44.11 **MP: You'd all but signed it up but when you saw it finally it was too dark for Sydney?**

LH: Yes, too dark for this particular situation: in the first week of the Festival it just wouldn't have worked at all.

MP: Another headline act in that 2010 Festival was Peter Sellars, a very well-known director, a double bill of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and *Symphony of Psalms*. So I didn't see that. It got a mixed reaction – you had trouble selling that one.

LH: Yes. Well, it had a great response in the room. It's a production from LA. And it was great, it was the first time Peter had been back in Australia since he directed the Adelaide Festival and there was quite a lot of controversy around the way he - - -

MP: He left the festival early, didn't he?

LH: He did and he polarised people. He's quite an extraordinary man, Peter Sellars, with a huge brain and a huge ambition and probably what he needs to be is, I don't know, President of the United States or something to do the sorts of things he really wants to do with the budgets that he wants to do it. But it was not a match made in heaven, the Adelaide Festival and Peter Sellars. So I'm a huge fan. I admire his work as a director greatly and I was really, really proud to be able to bring *Oedipus Rex* and *Symphony of Psalms* with a lot of the performers who had played it at LA Philharmonic but also people like Yvonne Kenny and Paula Arundell who were able to be fitted into the production.

46.03 And the great thing about Peter – well, not "the" great thing but one of the very signature things that Peter does is he works in an incredibly detailed way with choruses with sign language and big physical gesture that is incredibly difficult for people to learn and execute. And he worked with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs for weeks and weeks with teaching

them all the very particular sign language, particularly the men's chorus in *Oedipus Rex*.

MP: As a practising artist you would know that that's quite a legacy – to leave behind that kind of expertise, left behind to a choir, and those lead singers who are Australian who performed in it.

LH: Yes, sure. And, look, the thing is Peter will be back - he's involved in a project for this year for Brisbane Festival. I don't know if he'll actually be coming but his work is seen everywhere. But that particular thing that he does all around the world, you know, in America and in Europe and the UK, that particular way that he works with choruses has never been seen in Australia. And we had it for Sydney Festival, which I thought was really lovely.

MP: You learned something, though, about pricing all that, didn't you? It was like where you can set ticketing.

LH: I guess.

MP: Well, the tickets were a bit high in price.

LH: Yes, they were, they were. Yes, they were. I was expensive. I mean it's a massive great show, big Sydney Symphony Orchestra and, yes, that's opera. And maybe that's why opera is a hard thing for a festival to pull off because it's always going to be the most expensive thing.

MP: But it's an interesting thing about you, your signature as a director, that you're interested in opera, you're interested in baroque opera. You have a touch of the Leo Schofield tastes about you and yet you have a kind of innovation in your application of music theatre that is actually a bit like Lieven Bertels', interested in exploring different ways of using text and music and putting them together not in a traditional opera form. But doing opera and in fact restoring classical music to the festival program is something that is a signature of your three festivals, isn't it?

48.22 LH: Well, it wasn't like gone, gone - Fergus wasn't really that interested in classical music. And I think we did have some: we had this, we had, I think, a string quartet and the Symphony on the Domain but it wasn't a huge signature, I don't think – an opera wasn't a huge - - -

MP: Well, you had Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, which Opera Australia did.

LH: Yes.

MP: You had them staging through your term quite interesting works in the Domain.

LH: Yes. Well, I think it's really important that we do do interesting works in the Domain.

MP: But sometimes they haven't been interesting.

LH: That's true, yes.

MP: And interestingly enough you've just directed that opera, *Candide*, in the Brisbane Festival.

LH: I have. No, it wasn't in the Brisbane Festival.

MP: Sorry.

LH: Just in the Playhouse.

MP: Just in the Playhouse, O.K.

LH: Yes, as part of Opera Queensland's program.

MP: But on ticketing prices, firstly on that issue - - -

LH: I'm not going to remember those things now.

MP: - - - but in classical dance, in classic music, you managed to restore that - - -

LH: I didn't put any classical ballet in there at all.

MP: - - - no, I was wrong with ballet, I meant music – and yet also keep the kind of funky, contemporary music feel that was Fergus' signature so profoundly.

LH: That's right, yes. Well, I was really, really lucky that Kristy Pinder who came with me from Perth Festival – well, that she was the programmer for the contemporary music, the great contemporary music program in Perth Festival, and she happened to be moving over to Sydney.

MP: Right, that's good.

50.01 LH: Yes, so she programmed. I mean, it's not my area of expertise but I've learnt a lot more through festivals about contemporary bands and musicians and things and so that's been a fantastic learning curve.

MP: Actually, it's tough because Fergus Linehan then went across the water to the Sydney Opera House and became their programmer for contemporary music - - -

LH: There was a moment.

MP: - - - and was a competitor then to you and your programming.

LH: He would deny that with all of his heart and soul.

MP: But he's very charming.

LH: Look, Sydney Festival, it's an interesting thing. In my time there I was very aware of [the fact that] the space that Sydney Festival had kind of traditionally had was being munched away by other competitors if you like. And certainly the Opera House was very competitive in terms of its programming against Sydney Festival, sort of owning that 'summer in Sydney' space, and festival-like programming. So that the line was really blurred between what was Opera House and what was Sydney Festival. And if you were to take a kind of paranoid view you would probably be a bit upset about that. But it seemed to me that it was great for audiences.

MP: But some people did get paranoid, did they not, within the Festival with, say, the arrival of the Vivid Festival which was sort of competition again with the Sydney Festival?

LH: Oh, yes. I guess, look, it's all kind of storm in a teacup, really, isn't it?

MP: No, but it's in a very competitive marketplace now with presenters like the Sydney Opera House working throughout the year almost in festival mode and focusing as they didn't used to on January as a time to compete with the Festival in getting audiences. So there's a lot of completion out there.

52.07 LH: A lot of competition out there which makes, for example, Sydney Festival, it needs to continually refresh its thinking on what exactly it specifically and distinctively offers the Sydney community. So if that kind of international programming is being done by other people, what then is Sydney Festival to the community? And find different ways of engaging with that community so that it doesn't lose its relevance, its meaning, its connection to the community that it serves.

MP: We were talking about ticket prices in relation to the Peter Sellars double bill. A terribly successful invention of the festival which I think goes back to Fergus, does it not, is About An Hour series - - -

LH: Yes, again brilliant.

MP: - - - this international program of dance and theatre, of short shows which seems to be increasingly to people's taste and relatively cheap tickets.

LH: Great. It was a fantastic idea and the more the merrier, actually. Actually, what was fantastic about About An Hour, was people could take in two or three shows, and did, in a night. It just absolutely added to the granular quality of the festival. You don't have to have sort of lots of big experiences, you can have large and small and it was fantastic, the menu.

MP: Yes. And you could make good use of the Seymour Centre and create yet another social environment of festival - - -

LH: Yes. Well, we did move into the Seymour Centre significantly in 2010 and that was a perfect environment for About An Hour. Seymour Centre is a sort of slightly tricky venue and had kind of lost its mojo. But I think clustering some events into there and then holding our nerve and doing it every year made it very much a festival go-to venue.

54.11 **MP: One of your great successes was *Smoke and Mirrors* with Craig Ilott and the gender bending iOTA in the Spiegel tent. So that came back - that was a hit and you brought it back in 2011, and you actually became kind of a producer of that and toured it to Edinburgh – and Adelaide as well, did you?**

LH: Yes, did go to Adelaide. God, I can't remember. Yes, well of course Fergus, bless him, had done – what was the show in the Spiegel tent before, the one with the bath boy – La Clique - - -

MP: La Clique, yes.

LH: - - - and he'd done it three years running and I just thought "Enough".

MP: Three times, yes.

LH: So we obviously wanted a La Clique type show, we wanted a show that had the same kind of audience draw but wouldn't it be great to make our own. So, yes. The original idea was that it would be a sort of Spiegel tent version of *Snow White* with all those mirrors. And we put that idea to Craig and he had been working with iOTA on *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. And they were already a kind of 'making show' team so that was a very easy – not easy, it was a kind of difficult birth, I have to admit, but it was a fantastic thing to be able to make a show around iOTA who is an amazing performer and an extraordinary, incredibly unique figure on a stage. And so that was just a joy to see that show developing, and for the audiences to embrace it the way they did was fantastic.

56.12 **MP: But to develop it from the ground up.**

LH: Yes, yes, to commission it. And in fact one of the fun things about *Smoke and Mirrors* was in that year's Helpmann's – I'm not a huge fan of the Helpmann kind of world but it was - - -

MP: The Helpmann Awards given annually to all branches of the performing arts.

LH: Yes. We did very well in that year's Helpmann. We got five, I think, but one was Best New Australian Work and it came up against *Bliss* - - -

MP: The opera?

LH: - - - the Brett Dean opera and it won. So Opera Australia were mightily annoyed because there's this little cabaret show with iOTA and it's magicians and a bearded lady and contortionists and jugglers.

MP: But it's interesting, isn't it, that the Sydney Festival has had to move to keep abreast of its audience and to make use of the Festival Garden, which is such a social environment, very successfully in Hyde Park and the Spiegeltent inside. To be a producer and a developer of cabaret, the form of cabaret. To make cabaret, you don't just stage theatre and dance but cabaret is now a very important part of festival-making.

LH: Yes, yes, cabaret's music theatre. It's about scale and the performers' ability to engage with the room. I mean we did a lot of new work in the Spiegeltent. We then after *Smoke and Mirrors* did Meow Meow's *Little Match Girl* with Malthouse in Melbourne and - - -

MP: So you staged that in the 2012 Festival?

LH: Yes, I think we did. I think we did *Smoke and Mirrors* twice and then Meow's *Little Match Girl*. And also we commissioned Eddie Perfect's *Misanthropy* as well. So we were all about trying to make sure that Australian work, that that Spiegeltent, was also taken seriously as a place where new work can be shown.

58.14 **MP: I suppose in a related way was *Rogue's Gallery*. Except that was outdoor in the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House - always a kind of challenging but important space to fill.**

LH: Yes.

MP: This sounded great on paper, a pirate-inspired show conceived by Johnny Depp – that's a pretty good pedigree. It was a bit disappointing - I saw it.

LH: Yes. And that's why you didn't see *Oedipus Rex*, because you were outside on the steps, seeing *Rogue's Gallery*.

MP: Yes.

LH: I was inside, watching *Oedipus Rex* and I missed *Rogue's Gallery* but I heard about it straight afterwards: went to the Spiegel tent and there were lots of people with thin lips. Look, it did look great on paper.

MP: So it was a cabaret show. It started with some very significant singers - Marianne Faithfull, I think was in it.

LH: Yes. Look, it was, yes, a curated show of sea shanties. And I'll come in with a sort of sturdy defence of *Rogue's Gallery*, I think. I wasn't there so I didn't sort of actually see the performance so I can't actually first hand say. But I take absolutely in good faith what people have said about it and I'm sure that they're right. But the idea of placing this sort of raffish group of musicians together to sing these extraordinary sea shanties had been done in different parts of the world. It had been done in Belfast, it had been done in different towns to great success and we had, what we thought, a fantastic line-up.

60.05

Look, it's really had to know why some of these things come off and some don't. My feeling is perhaps had we done it in the Enmore Theatre or something, with a little bit more raffishness of an experience it might have had a different energy. In some places it had been put by the waterside, which is why we decided to do it on the forecourt. But culturally, the iconography of the forecourt of the Opera House is a totally different waterside experience to that of a sort of – so if you turned it around and put it into some kind of dock or wharfies' place, which is where it had played, for example by the waterside, I think, in Belfast. Yes, so its sort of bawdy, rough, rough-as-guts kind of quality was part of its charm. But then the iconography of the Sydney Opera House - you know, it should have worked because a lot of the songs that were in *Rogue's Gallery* were about people, convicts, travelling from England to Australia and they were actually landing in Sydney Cove. And a lot of the stories had that sort of sense of the currency between the old world and this godforsaken place, Australia. And the sort of charm of being able to actually have the concert happening where some of the sea shanties could actually realistically have been sung was again, great idea. But many a slip betwixt cup and lip and apparently that was one of them. So, yes, again that was the first time, I think, as a festival director I encountered the absolute really evil side of social media, people being really vitriolic on paper in a sort of anonymous way that was really hard to read. I mean I'll take criticism absolutely on the chin but - - -

62.24 **MP: Why do people get so upset or so venomous?**

LH: Look, again I wasn't there and it is now several years ago. But I think people just felt very disappointed or let down.

MP: And if they paid for their ticket, of course.

LH: And it was drizzling. I just don't think it was - look, I'm really having trouble remembering exactly how it all played out because it was some time ago and I've done a few things in between then.

MP: I was just interested, not in that example alone, why audiences at festival time or at other times really let rip with the advantage of social media to be able to do it on, and the source of that venom in an otherwise happy festival environment.

LH: Yes.

MP: But they do - it's human nature.

LH: Yes and I don't think it's particularly nice to see. But I do think we went to a lot of trouble to respond to every single one of those letters.

MP: That's good customer relations – is that what you do?

LH: Yes, I always do. You should see some of the things. Some of the letters I respond to are very misinformed, some of them. Some of them are quite amusing. But I think it's really important; if somebody's gone to the trouble of writing to me, I'll write back.

MP: Good on you. You had a new partner in that festival with the University of Sydney - - -

LH: Yes.

MP: - - - which took your three festivals into interesting places, with the university being involved in particularly ideas talks and later outdoor films. It's an interesting kind of partnership.

64.15 LH: Yes, it was great.

MP: Is this part of your desire to, as I think you said at the beginning, to sort of add a little bit of substance to the festival?

LH: Yes. But, look, I spent four years at Perth Festival, which is part of the University of Western Australia.

MP: The Festival actually comes out of the university or did historically.

LH: Yes, it did and indeed my office was on campus at University of Western Australia. So the notion of a festival and the city's university – I mean of course Sydney has many universities – but the notion of the Festival not being in a tight relationship with the city's major university felt very odd to me and also luckily the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University - - -

MP: Michael Spence.

LH: - - - Spence of course, who was most open and most enthusiastic about this idea that we both share a world of ideas, the life of the mind, if you like; that the university and the festival have very similar objectives in terms of stimulating ideas and stimulating discussion and being a sort of hub for playfulness in those spaces. So he was very – and he had just been appointed so it was a really good time to start that relationship which continues, I think, still. And, of course, then that opened up the possibility of using some of the spaces in the university, which was fantastic. So we were in obviously the Seymour Centre, which is a university venue, but we started using the quadrangle and just generally - - -

66.07 **MP: The Great Hall for talks.**

LH: - - - the Great Hall. Yes. But it was great to have people like Michael Spence and other eminent thinkers: Geoff Gallop who worked at Sydney Uni facilitated one of the conversations at one point and Michael Spence himself came and gave one of the talks at one of our Hope Symposiums, so there was a real, genuine engagement with the faculties across the festival. We worked at one point with the architecture students, so there was a range of different ways that we could do that. For me, that has huge potential.

MP: You did have in 2012 a very interesting exhibition down in Festival Garden which was very well-lit and extravagantly presented, about architectural students for the University of Sydney imagining designs for iconic Sydney sites. So at one level you've still got the Ferrython in the Sydney Festival and on another level you've got the lecture as a festival event.

LH: Yes, which I'm very happy about, the Ferrython. I'm not very good on ferries, I'm not good with crowds, I'm not good on ferries but I wholeheartedly support the notion of the Ferrython. I mean it's a little weird sometimes; you just think "What?" but actually the sheer madness and the sheer Sydney-ness of it, it's great.

MP: And no festival director has dared touch it, I think, anyway, even if he or she didn't like it. So you did a very successful Festival First

Night. That was the third one in 2010, Nigel Jamison involved in that as sort of an event organiser. You had Al Green there doing a free concert and the Black Arm Band, speaking of your interest to bring Indigenous content more into the festival. The crowd control seemed to be very sophisticated that year. It seems like the festival had really kind of got that organised with water stops and good thoroughfares.

68.20 LH: Yes, it was amazing watching that machine come into play. I claim no responsibility or glory for the brilliant work that was done by the team.

MP: So it was a success, that festival, but how did you feel? It did have a deficit of some three hundred and fifty thousand – that's the 2010 one. Then you had a board – remember you're a post-GFC director – you had a board saying you had to be risk-averse for the next festival and you need to rebuild the reserve. So the pressure is still on financially even as you begin thinking of your 2011 festival.

LH: It always is.

MP: It always is.

LH: But it definitely was then, yes. And, you know, that's how it goes but it does affect the way you think programming-wise, yes.

MP: And you had to do the Festival First Night the following year, being 2011, with a reduced budget of something like 2.6 million. But you had to kind of balance doing a big event like that, pruning the money but not scaring away the essential sponsors that are attracted to the high impact. It's a very hard balance, isn't it?

LH: That's right. You've summed it up nicely.

MP: Anything to add?

LH: Not really. All of the above, yes.

69.59 **MP: In some way, though, 2008 was the sort of high-water mark of the festival in terms of its financial expenditure, isn't it? Was there a sense that the festival needed to sort of consolidate? Where did it have room to go? Or did it need to consolidate rather than expand financially after 2008?**

LH: Well, the possibility of splashing out was not really there. I mean you did have to program a different way. And it's quite confronting, actually, not to have as much wriggle room in terms of the stuff that you fervently believe need to be in a festival: a generous free program and some risky events that provoke and stimulate discussion. It's always hard for

somebody who likes to program in that way, that generous, that democratic, that sense of the festival being a gift to the city on one hand and then also a festival being a place where ideas can be bravely positioned in the public discourse. So when that is your firm philosophical position, that both generosity and provocation and stimulation of ideas is the function of a festival, and that sort of democratic ideal, then doing a festival that is getting back in the black is actually a hard lesson to learn. And it's an experience I'm glad I had. It's a tricky one. And often you're making decisions with your head rather than your heart and that, I think, does affect the program.

72.28 **MP: So did you have things you absolutely adored that ticked those boxes about democratic involvement and stimulation that you had to drop?**

LH: I just can't remember now. I'm sure I did.

MP: It's probably just as well.

LH: I'm absolutely certain I did. But, you know, Martin, there's always the horrible moment, no matter whether you've got a healthy reserve or a healthy surplus from the previous year or not, you will never create a festival that you want that you can afford.

MP: Yes.

LH: You've always got to have that sickening moment when you realise you're a million dollars over budget and you've just got to find it somewhere, either find more sponsorship or cut something or make something pay for itself better or shave a little here, there and everywhere and make it up. But there is always that sickening moment and there are always horrible phone calls to be made to artists who thought they were going to be in the festival who now aren't.

MP: That's hard.

LH: It's horrible – it's probably the worst job.

MP: You must have lost a few friends from your contact book after doing calls like that.

LH: No, I have to say generally people – I mean I've had a few phone calls where probably both of us have been in tears. But people kind of roll with the punches, really.

74.03 **MP: Yes. As we look at these three programs in front of us: you changed the branding of the festival. The program is closer to an A4 size, it's smaller in size, it's bright and colourful and it's banners**

and it has the iconic yellow balloon and the tag “This is our city in summer”. How did that branding sort of capture your values and your vision for the festival?

LH: Well, “This is our city in summer” was Fergus’ tagline and it was great so I thought “Well, let’s keep it”. It’s perfect. It’s this and this. So “This is our city in summer” can equally mean something, quite a profound, small scale experience or it can be something as joyful as the Festival First Night kind of celebration.

MP: Yes.

LH: And so it was perfect for me and I also felt very personally that it was the right strapline because it’s my city and it is - summer in Sydney, there’s something truly magnificent about it. But the yellow balloon was brought to us by the agency, Saatchis, I think.

MP: I had a kid’s book about a boy in France - - -

LH: *The Red Balloon.*

MP: - - - who had the red balloon, didn’t he?

LH: A yellow balloon, we felt, was just a beautiful, optimistic shape, colour, idea, just an idea, really, and we liked it. We liked it in all its different iterations – it’s been in different forms – it just seemed to capture, and it became very kind of iconic around the time: Sydney Festival, you could always identify a Festival event because the yellow balloon was there.

76.04 **MP: Yes, yes.**

LH: They’re clean. It’s a nice, clean, magaziney kind of - - -

MP: Yes, there’s something kind of cartoonesque, bright, happy.

LH: Yes, it’s simple.

MP: There’s no grunge-grey which was a feature of some earlier programs.

LH: No. It’s really simple. Everything’s based on white and recycled paper – it’s just really simple. My personal favourite was the sulphur-crested cockatoos and the suburban rooftops of 2011.

MP: I think that’s your inner west childhood.

LH: Yes, I grew up, that’s me, that’s my place – “That’s my place, there”. So I always try to celebrate Sydney in its unique joy, the unique joys of Sydney and we did that, I think, in all of them.

MP: Thinking of that program, what are you most proud of as we move to talk about the 2011 Festival? What are you most proud of in terms of embodying that vision, midway now in your tenure?

LH: In the program?

MP: Yes.

LH: Well, actually *The Red Shoes*, the Kneehigh Theatre, was my first experience with Kneehigh Theatre.

MP: And this is the telling of the Hans Christian Andersen story, *The Red Shoes*, a rather bloody tale.

LH: Fantastic theatre-making by probably one of my favourite companies in the world, a just extraordinary company based in regional Cornwall, who make absolutely brilliant theatre in a very honest, very visceral, very robust way. And I was lucky enough to see this show in the company's new touring theatre called the Asylum, which is a kind of mad dome-shaped theatre that sat in a field in Truro. And I went to see *The Red Shoes* and I loved the show and loved the company and loved the spirit that they brought with them. And they brought all that to the Seymour Centre. So that was very special for me. God, I'm flicking through.

78.16 **MP:** Well, playing *Dracula* with Philip Glass and the Kronos Quartet was pretty sexy. The idea which has just been picked up many times in recent Sydney Festivals of screening a film and playing music against it - in that case Glass himself playing - it is impressive.

LH: That was pretty gorgeous - and Kronos, and also playing it in the State Theatre with all that kind of gothic chaos of the State Theatre.

MP: You also gave very high profile to a modest, small/medium Sydney company, physical theatre company, Legs on the Wall, doing *My Bicycle Loves Me*.

LH: *Loves You*.

MP: *Loves You*. So a kind of film/theatre collaboration around vaudevillian films from Australia's Federation time. That's a lot of investment of profile into a small local company, isn't it?

LH: Yes.

MP: Did it work? I didn't see it.

LH: Yes, it did. I don't think it did so well at the box office but it was a fantastic project. It was one of the Major Festivals Initiative collaborations between ourselves and Perth Festival.

MP: So joint projects done together and funded by the Commonwealth.

LH: By the federal government, yes, that's right. And they need to be something that at least two festivals need to sign up to commit this money. But what I loved about that project was that a set of films had been found quite literally in someone's attic in Tasmania that were historically incredibly important, because they captured the history of vaudeville, including the Corrick family, who were an Australian vaudeville family and had in their number, I think it was Leonard Corrick, the son – I think there were about seven or eight sisters and Leonard – who was an avid filmmaker and a film collector.

80.37 And he collected and made fantastic films of vaudeville of the time which went straight, of course, to the National Film and Sound Archives whom we were able to persuade to let us turn that vaudeville material into the basis of a live theatre show. So you literally had the ghosts of performers past coming to life with people who were doing almost the same sorts of routines. It was a beautiful piece of engagement.

MP: Very good storytelling about local past.

LH: Absolutely. And genius, Mic Gruchy, video artist here, and the capacity of a company like Legs on the Wall to bring that show to life with new age performers, physical theatre performers responding to performers from a hundred years ago. Absolutely gorgeous, delicious.

MP: No, no, that's good, that's good.

LH: And Ben Walsh, amazing Ben Walsh, crazy music. And, yes, it was big and expensive and it was scary because it was like "Oh, my God, is this going to work?" But again that's one of those moments where I was able to be in the rehearsal room a few times and spend a lot of time with Patrick Nolan who was directing it and have a conversation as the piece grew.

82.07 **MP: Good. Surely the Trocadero Dance Palace, your very fine invention from that year and repeated in subsequent years, a kind of a revival of the '40s and '50s swing bands staged at the Sydney Town Hall.**

LH: Yes, that's kind of festival director gold, really, in the sense that I literally walked into the Town Hall and saw a kind of octogenarian guy dancing with a sort of rockabilly, retro, swing-dancing lesbian twenty-something gorgeousness and they were doing the same steps and dancing. They

were absolutely the best dancers on the floor, they were just fantastic. I just thought "This is heaven." Not just a great night, party night, it was a real place where Sydney remembered what Sydney once was in that period. That was fantastic. Again, fantastic footage of video footage being used of Sydney in that heyday. And it was a great way of really celebrating something that meant a lot to Sydney, the Trocadero. My nanna went to the Troc. And it was a really great place for people to meet throughout the whole of the twentieth century – well, most of the twentieth century until it was pulled down. And it had this fantastic characteristic in that period in that sort of '40s and '50s – '40s, I think - of having an all-girl swing band, so as soon as I heard that I thought "We have to have one of those". I mean we found an all-girl band and then we turned them into an all-girl swing band. And that was fantastic. And Kris Stewart, who now runs the Powerhouse in Brisbane, directed a terrific floor show, all absolutely within the sort of ethos of the '40s kind of swing era.

84.12 And, yes, so it was a fantastic event that just seemed to capture imagination. We had a lot of pre-publicity about it because people were literally sharing with radio interviews on the ABC, their memories of the Troc. And a lot of people met their husbands and wives and boyfriends at the Troc.

MP: I suppose it ticked so many boxes of excellence for a festival in the fact that it creates yet another social environment. This kind of knack Leo Schofield was very good at it, wasn't he, and many since and with this you too are creating a kind of a new social environment where people interact, you're telling kind of a story of Sydney that is inherently social and a history of Sydney and you're using a new venue with the Town Hall.

LH: The Town Hall.

MP: And venues in Sydney are always very hard to find for any festival director.

LH: Yes. Well, the Town Hall was fantastic but it also had the unique quality of being literally just two blocks down the same street. The Troc actually was in George Street, just down the road, so it had the capacity to be close enough for jazz for the people who actually went to the original. And we had lots of people who came to the Trocadero who had been to the original. And then the new generation of swing dancers who absolutely loved getting up with live music and doing their thing. It's a big movement, swing dancing, at the moment.

MP: Musically, you had Sufjan Stevens, the American band, Los Lobos, is it, in 2011.

LH: Yes.

MP: And again on the Domain you had interesting choices with John Bell and the SSO playing scores from Shakespeare-themed music.

86.09 LH: Yes.

MP: So musically you were doing well.

LH: Yes.

MP: The Festival First Night we've discussed, you delivered on a smaller budget, you had smaller attendance but no one seemed to notice that you had slightly smaller attendance.

LH: Really? There was still a lot of people out there on that street.

MP: As part of that Festival First Night there's always that question of where do the visual arts fit in a Sydney Festival. And they seem to have a status often as being an inspired installation – going back to Anthony Steel putting Jeff Koons' *Puppy* outside the MCA. You used visual arts quite imaginatively in the Festival First Night that you did that year with John Baldessari.

LH: Yes. That wasn't just Festival First Night, that was throughout the Festival.

MP: Throughout?

LH: Yes.

MP: A kind of bit of Vegas dazzle, that was?

LH: Yes, *Your Name in Lights*, so that was a fantastic installation. That ran throughout the Festival. It was I think every fifteen seconds a new – so you registered to have your name in lights and it was on the façade of the museum, facing the Festival Garden. So along William Street this massive articulated billboard, very Vegas. So if you waited long enough – we told people when their name would come up, and there were little parties, they would have a little champagne moment, little streamers going off – and indeed every fifteen seconds or thirty seconds, I can't remember how many seconds; I think it was fifteen seconds, up came someone's name in massive, massive lights with a big kind of lighting flourish beforehand. So it was very much you were literally a very big marquee star for - - -

88.10 **MP: Fifteen seconds.**

LH: - - - fifteen seconds. But there were lots, like a hundred and sixty thousand people or something like that. It was just a massive response we had. And you can imagine the logistic nightmare of programming all of those names into the event but also then telling people when their name came up.

MP: Yes, yes. Administratively that's complex. And there's something terribly Sydney Festival, I can't quite put my finger on.

LH: Yes. Truly, honestly, it was a very vulgar display.

MP: Of celebrity anarchy, yes, I think that's it.

LH: Entirely superficial and loads of fun and champagne was involved and bubbles.

MP: And you had a multimedia historic work, *Captain Cook*, speaking of storytelling and from the past, by New Zealand artist - - -

LH: Yes, indeed, Michael Tuffery

MP: - - - Michel Tuffery.

LH: Michael Tuffery.

MP: Michael Tuffery.

LH: Yes, amazing artist. He did a really extraordinary – he's a very brilliant artist, Michael, and almost like a household name in New Zealand. But he does have this fantastic, very distinctive visual style that connects, if you like, the contested colonial histories of "discovering" New Zealand and the east coast of Australia. He always thinks it's extraordinarily – well, it is – extraordinarily arrogant to call Captain Cook the "discoverer" of all these places.

MP: Yes.

89.56 LH: And so he has very much a kind of humorous narrative in his paintings of "Cookie", he calls – and so it was just great to have. He's got this beautiful visual style, very lush, very colourful, very vivid and works with video very creatively and music very creatively. So we had a lot of artists from the Pacific involved in that. So it wasn't just visual projections all over the ANZ Building, but it was also very performative live music at the same time.

MP: You also had a little show called *Giacomo Variations* with John Malkovich, Mozart's *Variations* which the SSO did. What happened to that show, just briefly?

LH: Must we?

MP: Yes, we must, Lindy. You got quite attacked about this show because people thought it was disappointing.

LH: It was disappointing.

MP: And called it self-indulgent, called it an under-rehearsed cabaret and many other things.

LH: Well, it wasn't under-rehearsed because it had been presented. In fact, Sydney got it straight after its premiere in - - -

MP: Vienna.

LH: - - - Vienna.

MP: Only a fortnight earlier.

LH: Only a fortnight earlier, that's right.

MP: But you hadn't seen it?

LH: No. Well, one couldn't see it.

MP: Of course.

LH: No. But, look, it was again one of those situations where on paper there it all is, looking very promising.

MP: Malkovich playing the womaniser to this Mozart music about Casanova.

LH: Yes. And who better, really. And really, the provenance of the work looked really impressive. And so one takes one's chances, and they're important artists, the people that were there, singing, directing and, of course, Malkovich is an amazing marquee name. So, you know, it looked like it was going to be a really exciting night for Sydney Festival. But it was obviously very disappointing. The first night was really tricky, partly because I think there was some industrial problem on the docks or something. We had the scenery arrive extremely late, so indeed the first performance there hadn't been a rehearsal on stage because they had just literally bumped it in and it was just arriving there. So I made an announcement before the first performance to say that the cast would go on in the true showbiz trouper style. Indeed they did and went on without

having rehearsed it on the Sydney Opera House stage. So that was probably not very helpful. But it wasn't to many people's taste and people did give us an absolute bollocking. I sat in the performance - I have to say it wasn't particularly to my taste either.

MP: Did you curl up on the first night when you saw it? Did it strike you as curl-upably bad, if that makes sense?

LH: God, you have no idea how many times I've rerun – I think it was disappointing but I do think it was the subsequent kind of vitriol that really made that experience probably one of the worst experiences in my professional life. Because the glee with which people threw their vitriol at us and me and it - - -

93.59 **MP: So we were talking before about why people turn nasty on social media. They turn actually gleeful at a failure of another.**

LH: Yes. And, look, yes, there's a sort of *schadenfreude* factor that was definitely in play there. I don't think it was Sydney's finest hour. I don't think it was our finest hour by a very long shot. But we took a risk on this project for, I think, all the right reasons. I think people were interested and excited about the idea.

MP: Because if you want to have things that are hot you can't always see them beforehand, because they're old by the time they get to you in Sydney.

LH: No, that's right. And so what do you do, wait until everyone else has seen it and then get it to Sydney? Or be part of that kind of forward guard? Look, it's hard to know what else I would have done, really, because everyone was very, very excited to have the project come and it sold extremely well and so, as you say, on paper it looked amazing, great orchestra, great artists.

MP: Could I ask you at this point what you think generally of the media commentary – around that issue, but also more generally the Sydney Festival and Sydney Festival's programs?

LH: On - ?

MP: Generally the commentary on it, on the Sydney Festival's content and on this issue, but more widely on the Sydney Festival? Of how the media and the general commentary react to the Festival?

LH: Well, look, I don't know. I mean obviously the media gave this show an incredibly hard time and I think some of it was deserved and some of it wasn't.

95.59 I was a bit shocked at how little people understood of the risk of something not coming good or not, can be in a festival. I was surprised. It was as if I had wilfully chosen this thing and that was my taste, which was frustrating. And they were pretty brutal with John Malkovich who's a significant artist. But obviously they just kind of let him have it and let us have it. And fair enough - but I think what was difficult about it was the kind of bitchiness and the *schadenfreude*. And I just saw some pretty bad behaviour around it that made me very disappointed and very sad. But also that it seemed to overwhelm what had been a really joyful festival. So there were so many interesting things that were going on in that festival that were balancing this one event. But it just seemed people just loved a scandal and it was horrible, it was really horrible.

MP: In this short time that we've got left, we should note that that festival was indeed a financial success too, that you exceeded your budget target of 4.7 million, reaching about five million, and restored the reserve and everything like that, so all that was good. You didn't seek a fourth year, you didn't seek to extend your three year contract as many festival directors have done before you. Why not?

98.06 LH: I'd had enough.

MP: I'm sure it's got nothing to do with John Malkovich.

LH: No, really. Look, I felt that I just wanted to do other things. It really is a very all-consuming project, Sydney Festival, and I found it fantastically interesting and fantastically exciting and fantastically challenging and I learnt so much. But I had other things that I wanted to do and I just felt that I was sort of running on empty, I think, a bit. The prospect of doing another one - I'd signed up for three and I did my three and I had my ideas for three and I was excited by that prospect. And the notion of doing another one just didn't really - - -

MP: What came - now, just on the final 2012 program, what came to fruition for you in that last year? Because so much of good festival planning is indeed planning, and indeed it seems like three years is required. What came together for you in that last year?

LH: Look, I was so happy to work with Carriageworks on the Black Capital project over a number of years, but with Lisa Havilah coming into the directorship of Carriageworks - - -

MP: After having run the Campbelltown Arts Centre.

99.55 LH: - - - that's right, with whom we'd had a connection anyway, the opportunity came up to really celebrate Redfern. And really celebrate the

contemporary theatre-making history of Sydney. And to commission a new work, *I am Eora*. And to really celebrate that amazing part of Sydney that is Redfern – so it's great to be here, talking about it.

MP: So this was directed by Wesley Enoch.

LH: *I am Eora* was directed by Wesley Enoch. But what we were able to do was kind of use Carriageworks as, I guess, a festival within a festival and to really animate the foyers with Brook Andrews beautiful *Travelling Colony* - there was a stunning installation throughout the foyers.

MP: Of painted caravans in his kind of black and white geometry design version of his local culture.

LH: Wiradjuri, yes, amazing. Yes, but also some programming, looking at the black theatre movement, the National Black Theatre, that was celebrating its fortieth anniversary - we also had at the Sydney Opera House Gary Foley's show – so it was a fantastic opportunity to - - -

MP: *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* from Indigenous women, six or seven of them from different parts again from the Pacific and Australia, of course, and other countries.

LH: Yes. But *I am Eora* was a massive undertaking and very nice to be able to say that - that was working with Wesley who's the new festival director - Wesley just was an absolute, you know, he was such a leader in that project. To tell the story of Pemulwuy, Barangaroo and Bennelong in a contemporary way in the Carriageworks in the middle of Redfern was really, really powerful. And we had a great amount of support from the Balnaves Foundation for that project and, of course, we made a significant investment. But a lot of that was crowd-sourced, the funding for that.

102.12 **MP: Yes, that's interesting. You had a target of some three hundred thousand.**

LH: Yes, a lot of money we needed to find. And people came on as associate producers for that project. And it was a really, really important new way of looking at funding and developing a kind of funding portfolio, if you like - not funding, but an investment portfolio for making new work. And it was a great celebration and I was really, really proud of the Black Capital project.

MP: You had some fantastic local work again from Thyestes, a reworking of Seneca which was such a knockout for the Hayloft project in Melbourne. We discussed Meow Meow and *Little Match*

Girl as a sort of cabaret initiative that also came from Melbourne. Cheek by Jowl's - - -

LH: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore.*

MP: - - - *She's a Whore* from Britain was - - -

LH: Fabulous.

MP: - - - fabulous.

LH: Really fabulous. It was just such a great piece of theatre and Declan Donnellan, an amazing director. Just I was so, so happy to bring *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore* and just to see that company working. They've been so important to Sydney Festival. They've brought the famous *Twelfth Night* in Fergus' year. Amazing, amazing artists and so it was great to have them there for the final year and great to do a sort of Jacobean fully-fledged, sexy, nasty Jacobean drama, fabulous.

MP: Yes, blood and revenge, they go for that.

LH: Love it.

103.56 **MP: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's east-west - - -**

LH: Yes, *Babel*, brilliant.

MP: - - - fusion in dance, I thought was particularly strong with the work, *Babel*, which was a very stimulating idea of the story of Babel and everyone talking in different voices as a dance piece.

LH: Yes. And, of course, Antony Gormley's beautiful, simple installation of the frames that were used by the dancers that created this sort of geometric, continually moving geometric framing for the action. And just a stunningly complete work, really. By the time it came to Australia - it was one of the pieces that, for example, I think it had been around for two or three years by then, and the dancers had it so much in their bodies. It was early on in the festival and everyone just went crazy for it; it was really exciting.

MP: Just as *Cheek by Jowl* came back, so did the National Theatre of Scotland but this time with *Beautiful Burnout* about disadvantaged boys in the boxing ring.

LH: Yes.

MP: What did you make of this show? This show lost quite a lot of money.

LH: Again, it's that second album thing.

MP: The second album.

LH: The National Theatre of Scotland had had such a massive hit with *Black Watch* during Fergus' time that the anticipation of what they would bring next time – I guess people just didn't connect with *Beautiful Burnout* in the way that they did with *Black Watch*. I liked it. I thought it was a small, kind of fairly modest piece of theatre, again though, bearing with it quite a big expectation, it being the National Theatre of Scotland who had done the *Black Watch*.

MP: But this is big amounts. A hundred and ninety thousand, it was. The budget deficit for that Festival was about two hundred thousand and that was about what *Beautiful Burnout* was, it alone.

106.05 LH: Yes, yes. Well, again you're always making as educated a guess as you can about number of performances and potential audience numbers for a project. And I think we just miscalculated that particular level of interest in *Beautiful Burnout*.

MP: I know you have to go so we have to kind of cut short this. But can I ask you finally in what ways that you think you changed the Sydney Festival from what you inherited? And you've acknowledged generously the legacy of Fergus Linehan and what you had to work with, and take on from there. How in summary do you feel as though you've shifted it?

LH: Look, I think what I felt I wanted to do, knowing Sydney as I did, was to provide alternate perspectives on Sydney. And I think I was able to do that – I think during my time people saw Sydney through different eyes; different parts of Sydney had voice in my festivals. So obviously Redfern, obviously western Sydney, there was a range of different ways of looking at the city. And I think that's really important. I think that sense of beginning the year with sort of an optimistic perspective, a hopeful perspective, I think that's one of the great things about January: we're all bringing to our January a sort of sense of hope for the world, a sense of hope for ourselves.

MP: But in a thoughtful way, not just putting a name up in celebrity lights way.

107.56 LH: No, that's right. But again, Sydney is titillated by glamour and spangly things and big names and celebrity and I think we did all of that. But I think one of the things that I really wanted to show, was that beneath the sort of superficial layers – and there are some in Sydney - - -

MP: Some.

LH: - - - that Sydney does have a heart and it does have a soul and it is thirsty for ideas. And I just wanted to be part of a dialogue about those things. A lot of people have said to me that they felt that my festivals have heart and I'm very happy about that, I'm happy to accept that as a compliment because I think I'm all about the human condition, I'm all about a festival being a celebration of our shared humanity.

MP: So a heart/brain narrative?

LH: Stories, storytelling.

MP: And stories. And appropriately you're currently chair of Regional Arts NSW.

LH: I'm actually not chair, I'm a board member. I was chair for a while.

MP: You're a board member. As well as running Opera Queensland. There's many more things to talk about but Lindy Hume thank you for sharing your thoughts.

LH: Thanks Martin.

Interview ends