

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

PERFORMING ARTS

Name: Ben Strout

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Place: Town Hall House

Interviewer: Margaret Leask

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **ML:** This is an interview for the City of Sydney Performing Arts Oral History Project with Ben Strout who during the 1980s was artistic director of the then New South Wales Theatre of the Deaf. The interview is taking place at Town Hall House, Sydney on Friday the 21st of June 2013. The interviewer is Margaret Leask and this is the first track of the interview.

Thank you, Ben, for agreeing to take part in this project. You came to Australia from America in late 1982 to take up the position of artistic director of the New South Wales Theatre of the Deaf and worked with the company for a number of years. Since

then you've had a long career in arts administration in Sydney. Before we talk about the Theatre of the Deaf, please tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life and education and how indeed you became interested in theatre.

BS: O.K. I was born on the ***** 1953 in New Haven Connecticut. My father was a professor at Yale at the time and we lived there in the snowy east until I was five and then my parents and my older brother and then very much new younger brother moved out to California for four years, in exile I think from the then very conservative movements in Yale, and we lived there for four years and then my father got a job in Cornell University in Ithaca New York where they still are, my parents still are. And so that's where I grew up, Ithaca New York and Ithaca it's actually central, probably, to my growing up because it's a country town but it's got this ivy league university, it's also got Ithaca College and then there's a community college. So there's some thirty thousand people, there's a lot of farm country, beautiful woods and deer walking in people's backyards and yet this bed of tertiary education with one of the best ivy league schools in the nation there. So touring theatre, touring music, film festivals, student activism, just a fantastic place to grow up in the '60s and then very early '70s.

2.10 **ML: So how did you become interested in the theatre – was that at school?**

BS: What a good question. Yes, I think I, like many young men, auditioned for a play because there was a girl and she suggested I do it and, of course, I liked her and I got involved in the theatre in high school and ended up winning the theatre award in high school. I did acting for a bit and I directed a play – I directed *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and loved it and had a great time, had a good mentor there. And then when I went to college at Williams College they had a very good theatre – there was a summer theatre programme – but I studied other things but spent time in the theatre knowing I wanted to work in the theatre. So again I did acting and some directing and a little bit of writing and graduated with a degree in medieval philosophy and history of education but knew ultimately that I was working in the theatre.

ML: And so what was your first job in the theatre?

BS: Well, I'd worked in high school at the Cornell University Theatre in the summer as a summer job, technical; I worked in summers when I was at Williams College. I'm trying to remember the names of all the theatres. There was one in New Hampshire and there was one in Ogunquit, Maine, and I would just be involved in the theatre, worked

with Art Carney in a summer stock production in Maine which was great fun. And when I was at Williams College my third year – junior year, as we call it – there was a programme at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut and it was the National Theater Institute and you could spend a full term – so whatever that is, four months – at the National Theater Institute, get credit, get college credit but do nothing but study and work in the theatre.

4.12 So we had artists come up from New York City. It was directed by Larry Eric who was a Broadway director, we had Kevin O’Connor come up, Suzanne Shepherd – these are excellent theatre actors – Lloyd Richards who was the head of the National Playwrights Conference in America and a teacher at Yale and a revered man of the theatre, Dennis Scott who was also a Jamaican playwright/dancer/actor and we spent four months with them, learning in workshop and a conservatorium environment and then touring a play around the east for about three weeks. And we did a new adaptation, musical adaptation of Tennessee Williams Camino Real and toured that. I acted a bit but also played guitar and did the lighting and it was just an astonishing experience. From that I met the National Theater of the Deaf which happened to be based at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center as well and I was fascinated by the language that they used, the hand language, which was the American sign language, a very visual language, with poetry, the spoken text. And so after I’d done my National Theater Institute term I went back for a January term which at Williams College we had winter study and you could spend the month of January doing anything. I worked for George McGovern’s political campaign, failed presidential campaign, I did photography one year and then in one January this girl from Williams College and I studied the sign language for theatrical purposes and that got me even more interested in what that company was doing.

6.00 I went on and worked in other theatres after college, touring around Maryland and back in Ithaca but then because of my connection with the National Theatre of the Deaf auditioned for that company as an actor after I’d been out of college for a while and that began a long journey.

ML: So tell me about working with the National Theater of the Deaf in America. They came to Australia before the New South Wales Company was set up.

BS: That’s right.

ML: And I remember how wonderful that was.

BS: Yes.

ML: Tell me about working as a hearing actor, what processes you went through in terms of putting on shows.

BS: When I first met the artistic director of the National Theater of the Deaf it was David Hays who became another mentor, a very fine man, Broadway designer and creator of the company and an author of a couple of fascinating books and a sailor, with holding some records about being the second or third smallest boat around Cape Horn and things like that - I mean, just a very fascinating man. And when I auditioned we were going into the audition space and he'd dropped all his coins and I helped him pick them up and he was sort of looking at them and I said something to the effect of "Don't worry, they're all there" and which he looked up and smiled and clearly it had nothing to do with theatre, it had nothing to do with whether I could speak well or anything like that, it just had to do with the communication, about saying "We'll be right, it's O.K." And I did a very short and simple audition but was given the job with the company and spent the first three months in the summer - they have like a summer workshop programme where hearing actors and directors work with deaf people and that's how they train the deaf people into theatre and how they train the hearing actors into sign language and working with deaf people - and then they sent me off doing workshops with deaf people down when some theatre companies would ask for a week's residency with a deaf artist and I would go along with.

8.15 So I sort of became a part of the outreach of the programme and I really enjoyed the mix of visual language with spoken language. It's half dance, it was half poetry, another half theatre; to me, it was an absolutely fascinating theatrical medium.

ML: So this was presumably in the late '70s, early '80s you were working with the company?

BS: It was '77, I believe, when I first joined the company and I spent two years as an actor, touring actor, with the company which itself was a fantastic experience and we did 'Under Milk Wood', we did a Gilgamesh epic where I also created the sound. We did this extraordinary - how to describe it - sort of cross-dressing Kabuki western called 'The Ghost of Chastity Past' and it was semi-written by a deaf man who'd been with the company but directed by the then wunderkind of the opera who has had a bit of a profile in Australia, Peter Sellers, who became the Adelaide Festival director. And he and I shared a house off site while we were rehearsing this and I was in

charge of the music which was trying to make sounds out of banjos, out of little toy pianos, out of whistles and flutes and coming up with theatrical solutions for gunfights and things like this and it was just this remarkable collaboration.

10.01 So we did brilliant, brilliant productions and as an actor we toured around the world to Japan and Alaska and throughout Europe - I didn't get to Australia as part of the company but I know they had been. So it was a brilliant experience, appeared on 'Sesame Street' and just fun things when you're a young person who's interested in the theatre and you've got two years of decent pay and you're touring the world and seeing Europe and just wonderful.

ML: So how did you find out about the position in Australia?

BS: I think it's the other way around. I think they've contacted me if memory serves. I believe Carol Lee Aquiline who was a deaf actress, American deaf actress, who I had worked with at the National Theater of the Deaf, came out to Australia, she was here, and when the company needed a new artistic director they contacted me to say "Would you be interested in applying for this job?" At the time I was actually working in the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, just a regular repertory theatre, again with Larry Eric and his collaborator, Barbara Damashek, and we were doing musical adaptation of 'Tom Jones' and other things and they asked me to apply. And so I wrote in an application to the company, interviewed by phone, had an offer of going into New York for an off Broadway production of one of Barbara Damashek's musical adaptations, a quite beautiful piece called 'Quilters', which was an all-women piece but she wanted me to be in it as a musician and sort of this background, pioneering background something but the idea of coming to Australia with little more than really a return airfare and a promise of at least a two or three year contract, it just sort of filled some deep subliminal dream and so I took the job and came out to Australia in November 1982.

12.14 **ML: And what did you know about the company before you arrived in terms of its history?**

BS: Not a lot. I read what I could read and the material they sent me - I did ask them to send me marketing material and historical material. It all looked fairly low budget and fairly simple. I probably didn't understand what I later learned is how deeply connected with the Deaf Society it was and so I probably didn't know what I later found, which was the National Theatre of the Deaf was an established company learning from David Hays' experience as the first designer of the 'Miracle

Worker' and his introduction to deaf people and sign language but it came from a major theatrical pedigree if you will. And the New South Wales Theatre of the Deaf, as it was then known, was a much smaller company made from the Deaf Society and some dedicated hearing directors who really wanted to do something in sort of the alternative theatre of the '70s. And so when I came it was probably a little bit smaller and a little bit less, I would argue, a little bit less well respected than I wanted it to be.

ML: Because it had been going for nearly ten years or at least the idea and it had had a combination of kind of amateur and professional activity as it were and that was obviously different from the American one. But who did you succeed as artistic director?

13.58 BS: My predecessor, I think, was Ian Watson who was in New York, studying in New York, and I'd subsequently met him and stayed in his flat in New York, his loft in New York, and he was a very, very nice, intelligent man and I think he actually helped the first step of drawing it out of being, as you say, a mix of amateur and more professional performance. He did some things: he'd been involved with the Griffin [Theatre, Sydney] and he'd brought in some performers who were more of the trained performers, NIDA trained, and I think he helped put on some productions that were seen to be energetic and a little bit of good, modern theatricality. So I think he got things going well.

ML: And so when you arrived it was kind of the era of Theatre in Education [TIE] in terms of that was the big thing?

BS: Yes.

ML: So already a group from the Theatre of the Deaf were actually doing Theatre in Education programmes in schools when you arrived, presumably.

BS: That's right. You have to remember that as an American, 'Theatre in Education', actually I didn't know what that was. It's a very British concept that worked very well and as it turns out in the '80s, probably through to the end of the '80s and early '90s worked very well in Australia and well regarded internationally for our young people's work. I'd had experience with children's shows, a couple of companies, not just the National Theater of the Deaf, but then the National Theater of the Deaf had a children's show, sort of wing; it broke into little things that toured around the schools, to units that toured around schools so I'd had experience with that but nothing that was seen as Theatre in Education in that whole TIE movement of the '80s. So when I arrived one of the first meetings that the administrator of the company, Priscilla

Shorne [?], set up for me was meeting the other New South Wales directors of TIE companies.

16.04 I met a man called Richard Tulloch who remains a close friend now some thirty years later and Don Mamoonie [?], Ann Hinchcliffe [?] who was the administrator – they were from Sidetrack [Theatre] – Phillip Rolf who also remains a friend from the Marionette Theatre at the time – he was the manager of the Marionette Theatre, just some actually very, very talented administrators and directors and writers of theatre in Sydney at the time. We were housed at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust which was not a modern organisation but at least it was a big house to stay in and we were looked after, which was useful because we didn't always make money. And I learned a bit about what Theatre in Education was from those other sort of collaborators as I probably came in with more of a National Theatre of the Deaf young people's model, kids' show model, and then started to understand a bit more about how to go partway from that idea towards Theatre in Education though I was never really very good at totally issue-based or curriculum-based things.

ML: Yes. I read somewhere that you had noticed early on that Australian shows for young people were more concerned with topical issues than entertainment and, you had a heavy educational bias in other words in Australia, which is earnest.

BS: Sounds a very American comment, doesn't it, but perhaps true.

ML: In a minute I'd like to talk a little bit about the plans as you started work with the company presumably almost immediately in November '82. But it was a different sign language in Australia to America and how easy, quick or whatever was it for you to pick up and how much did you need of that to do the job?

18.00 BS: I commend the deaf people of the company and in Sydney that we worked with at the Deaf Society for their ability to understand me more than my ability to understand them. Deaf language, sign languages, are quite unique in various countries, they're each different. There might be a couple of core alphabets, like the British alphabet which is the two-handed alphabet which the Australian sign language uses and the one-handed alphabet from the French that the Americans use but deaf people can understand each other so much better than spoken language, people from different spoken languages, in part because it's a visual or largely a visual representation. So the American sign language I found to be much more visual and so by using American sign language whenever I couldn't think of the Australian sign for it –

which was often – usually I was well understood by the deaf people. It was harder for me to understand the Australian sign language, Auslan, but then the deaf actors were so good they would adopt American signs for me and it became quite an easy level of conversation, though probably less so for me with the deaf community than with the actors who were already so visual and could learn my quirks and my sort of pidgin sign.

ML: Yes. And the eye contact and the humour that they could bring to situations.

BS: It's a very cinematic form of language. You've got close-ups and long shots, depending on how you're representing the image graphically with your hands; it's very facially oriented, as you say, body language, directional. I was asked to be in a little scene of 'Fatal Attraction', actually, when my wife and I were living in New York, because the director wanted to have a scene between people using sign language because there was no lying in sign language and this is when Michael Douglas and Glenn Close were first meeting in the restaurant and sort of setting up what became this horrible tryst.

20.24 And so it was a counterpoint from their sort of language to ours, which was just open and upfront and without lying. It didn't make the final theatrical release though it did make the director's cut in the video release so go look for it.

ML: O.K. I read in Lowdown which was the Theatre in Education journal in July '83 announcing your appointment and plans for the year and things like you wanted the company to tour to all major cities in Australia and to perform in festivals and undertake residencies and you wanted to work in television and present a high quality public theatre season. I could see these are influences from what the Theater of the Deaf in America was doing.

BS: Yes.

ML: So how did you set about - so perhaps talking about the relationship with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and what sort of backup you had firstly and then we'll talk about from an artistic point of view, choosing actors and that process.

BS: When I first arrived the company was either under review or on notice – I can't remember which, as it used to be called from the Australia Council at the time - and that was probably a standard form of practice in that there was a change of artistic director and they were unsure of

the company's future and who was this fellow from America but one of the very first things I did was I went down to some form of deaf symposium thing in Melbourne in January.

22.09 So I'd only been in the country for four or five weeks and met with some deaf people down there and got to see a little bit more beyond the company and that was useful. But one of the other things was to meet with Mary Travers who was the theatre officer then at the Theatre Board of the Australia Council to get her view on the company, what its profile was; what its standing was; what this meant to be on notice. And I wanted to change the company's name from New South Wales Theatre of the Deaf which I found a bit a) a mouthful and b) parochial to the Australian Theatre of the Deaf and I thought we were the only one that was really at a standard where you would call professional, in my view, and where we subsidised by the Australia Council and where we had such sort of national aspirations. So she was very supportive and we made that change and I guess to me that was a signal of what we wanted to do and where we wanted to perform. So finding the actors was one of the hardest things: there's not, you know, like a training institution or two that covers it whereas in America there are a couple. And working with the core actors that I had they were wonderful but I thought the company was bigger than we could sustain and I did take the company size down a bit and had to let a couple of people go but working with the core of the deaf actors and then one or two hearing actors and just trying then to sort of keep it as a discipline where we made the language and the story the focus.

24.00 **ML: And the acting team you chose were Martha Rundle [?], Colin Allan [?] who was aged thirteen when he was first involved and I think his mother, Margot [?], was an actor with the company as well and Carol Lee Aquiline who you'd mentioned before, the American who had come to Australia, David London [?] who was a founding member of the company and he was there from '73 to '86 and then Rosemarie Lenzo.**

BS: Yes.

ML: Why were these five people particularly chosen from your point of view?

BS: I think they were all in the company when I started, though Colin was not an actor at the very beginning. He may have been before but then I didn't use him for a year or so afterwards. Carol Lee I knew, as I said, and had great confidence in her professionalism. Rosemarie Lenzo, the hearing actor, I'm grateful to her for introducing me to the AFL

[Australian Football League] football and I've been a Swans [Sydney team] fan ever since. And David London was astonishing; he was a gentleman of the theatre. And there was a similar actor, character if you will, in the National Theater of the Deaf in America. Patrick Graville [?] who was senior, who did play the elderly characters or the clown characters sometimes but a wonderful sense of the community of being involved. And David had a brilliant comic timing and a real love of being there; he found himself in the theatre, I think, and that was evident and I really liked working with him. And Martha was a young girl. She had some things to work through being as young as she was but she was also committed and energetic. So these were people who really gave themselves, I think, to lifting the standards and being part of a professional company.

26.07 And I had wanted to try and pull the company a little bit away from its connections with the amateur group, the Deaf Society. I tried a little bit of keeping that together but I don't think I was very good at it and so in making a commitment to being in a professional company those were all very talented and very visually oriented people who kept that commitment for a number of years.

ML: In 1983 there were three, I think, or there were a number of Theatre in Education shows presented by the company, some of which I think were probably already in the repertoire and some that you were involved with and I just wondered if we could talk through a few of those and how you rehearsed, how you put together a piece, was it scripted, all of those sort of things. Just to quickly list some of the shows in '83, 'Alphabets and Crackers' for ages five to twelve – these were shows going into schools – I think there was a show called 'Finger Painting', 'Five Little Wishes' and then a secondary show called 'Hooligan's Hands'. Can you talk about how some of these were put together and rehearsed?

BS: Sure. I think Five Little Wishes - I think his name's John McFadyen [?] who's a South Australian TIE writer – that had been written and I think might have had a version before I started and it was a nice story. 'Finger Painting' again would have been one that existed beforehand. That was an earlier show. I won't claim anything to putting that on other than saying "Do you all remember how to do it?" But 'Alphabets and Crackers' was one of the first ones I put together for the company and it probably came directly from some experience with the National Theater of the Deaf's kids' work.

28.08 It was Sesame Street influence, it was sort of a potpourri of different bits and pieces that we thought would be fun about language, about the

alphabet, about sign language and activity. And I remember we had a sort of primary coloured very fundamental set that the actors could run up and down and sit around and it was very basic. My first experience really in creating something entirely for the TIE touring experience of throwing it in the back of a HiAce van and hoping it got down Parramatta Road in time. It also meant that I totally sort of overconstructed and designed things so that it was hard for the actors to carry these primary coloured boxes in and out and I learned to go lighter in later years because they worked so in putting two or three shows on a day, plus setting out, taking down and getting a biscuit in the teacher's room. Hooligan's Hands was actually one of the very successful attempts at an older audience and it was a play that I wrote with the company based on some experiences. It was Colin Allen's real star turn and it was about trying to fit in in high school and factory workers. I'd taken some things out of some interviews with young people who were working in factories, looking really at being in high school and whether you stay in high school. There was a slightly chaotic scene in the classroom in which David London was the teacher which the history class that got totally out of hand, perhaps a little bit of high farce that sat oddly with the more verbatim theatre concept of the rest of Hooligan's Hands.

30.15 My memory is that we opened it in the first public showing at, I think the Come Out Festival – it was at the Thebarton Hall in Adelaide – and I had no idea what people were going to think of this production and it got resounding applause. And then I remember the administrator coming up and saying “We've got a hit on our hands” which was very nice and it was probably one of the ones that I felt most connected to in my time with the company.

ML: Where did the company rehearse, where was the office?

BS: The office was at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. We did a lot of our rehearsals at the Deaf Society in Stanmore, in part because they had a big space that we could just use and the actors were quite comfortable there. We did use some of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's spaces at times but it was a little bit harder and the one that we could get to the most often was downstairs, had columns in the way and it was a little bit less useful for a larger, freer production. And I tried some sort of week-long workshop concepts to try and train actors, to find deaf actors but also to find hearing actors and to use some of my own workshop training. I'd done workshop classes after the National Theater of the Deaf for universities and theatre companies and so to use some of that and to bring in others who would sort of teach movement or teach these sorts of things. We had some dancers from Aboriginal Islander

Dance School [Theatre] to come in and teach people some dance movement. So it was for our company but it was also for others who could sign up and it was how I would then hire people for the company because they participated in those workshops and then you could sort of have it as an audition and that was at the Deaf Society.

32.13 **ML: And how long were the rehearsals normally, how long did you rehearse a show?**

BS: Probably never long enough. Usually only four weeks, three to five weeks. We'd come back and redo things when we would put it out again for another season or something. And probably three weeks is a bit short, it was more like four or five weeks but they were usually new works that we had to devise as well.

ML: And how did you relate to the schools in terms of planning these and then the presentation of them actually going into a school? Did you do that or was that done by one of the company?

BS: Well, our marketing was all handled by the administration team, Priscilla, and we actually had Andrew McKinnon [?] at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust doing marketing for us which always amused me and Wayne Harrison used to sit outside my office when he was the dramaturge for the Sydney Theatre Company and they would offer helpful advice. It was a great time to be at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Ann Churchill-Brown was there, Donald McDonald and Wendy Blacklock; there were just some terrific people involved with presenting Australian theatre at the time. Most of the marketing I'm embarrassed to say, I guess, that usually when we knew we had to create a work and we had a marketing deadline for the schools, we had an idea and we would write a paragraph and hope that the show resembled the paragraph six months later when we actually produced it. I did start to commission people like Richard Tulloch and others to write works for the company and Richard, I believe, wrote two, and they were based in part on his great experience as a performer but also his ability as a writer to just capture lovely moments and use both visual language but also slapstick and just movement, if you will, to tell very simple stories.

34.27 So we created some of the pieces ourselves. I wrote bits, the company helped write bits and then we did commission other writers. The aim was to try and in terms of the schoolwork to get close to what we said and thought at the time but we had no idea. It's hand to mouth at that time in a small company and we didn't really have a strong idea of what we were producing when we sold it to the schools and hoped that it did achieve that. Then day to day the actors would take themselves out. I

would go with them once or twice a week but they would take themselves out and do the liaison with the schools and if there were issues we'd get calls back at the office but that was about it.

ML: And the audience response from students in schools. Talk a little bit about how the schools received the company.

BS: You remember the ones where you just feel you've made a difference and I do remember we did, I think, bits of 'Hooligan's Hands' at Canterbury Boys' [High School] which oddly now is about a hundred metres from where I live but it had a reputation as a rather rough school and kids who were not interested in education and I do remember seeing one slouching Year 8 or 9 boy in his school uniform said "It was good". For me that was actually a great moment.

36.03

He didn't have to say anything and he certainly wouldn't have said "That was good" too much, and he might have related to the character of Hooligan in 'Hooligan's Hands' about struggling with the concepts of staying in school. Generally, it was very popular and successful and laughter. I can't say every show was a hit but yes.

ML: And did you have to have the shows, as it were, passed or vetted by the Education Department?

BS: Yes, we did, absolutely right. There was a process where they would see a rehearsal or an early performance and then give approval. Actually, I think one year we got in trouble because it was one of my first years and I'd referred to the "koala bear" and they said "They're not bears". So I'm "O.K, I've learned that now" but they were always very supportive and helpful. And New South Wales at the time was not as, 'restrictive' is perhaps the word, and Queensland had a reputation for its touring which was very, very controlled about who could tour and what, and New South Wales once it was teacher related and once they'd validated that, yes, this was appropriate to go into schools then you could market yourself to schools.

ML: How long were the tours, how long was the company out on the road?

BS: Well, when you're doing TIE largely you're staying at home, you're in Sydney most times and then you'd just go out every day. So whoever, usually Rosemarie Lenzo, would have the van and pick up the actors or they'd meet at a particular place and then they would go all over greater Sydney and come back at the end of the day and it was usually three to five weeks, I think, would be the life of a production in that term, perhaps longer but my memory would be more like five weeks. And

then you'd put that one to rest and you might have another one that you'd rehearse for a couple of weeks, reproduce it and then put it out on the road as well.

38.09 Sometimes you'd have two going at the same time. You'd have this week, that week, or shift day by day, so it's a hard job for those actors but they got paid, but it is a hard job just putting that out and churning that out. When we were on tour for festivals and things, of course, it's different, which is why the Come Out Festival was always a great thing for the company to look forward to.

ML: Sure. And were you doing shows for adults as well? Were there times when you were doing theatre for three or four weeks at that stage?

BS: Yes. Well, I mean my first dream when I came out, I'd actually brought with me a copy of 'The Recruiting Officer' which I was positive I was going to produce with this company, and I'd stopped in Hawaii on the way out to Sydney and visited a deaf friend who was living there; we were talking it through and I had great plans. I wasn't ready to produce it and probably we weren't ready to produce it but we did do some adult work. The one that I was the most proud of was 'Man is Man' or 'Man Equals Man', the Brecht play which I loved and we did a probably very non-Brechtian, not traditionally Brechtian way, though the mere use of sign language and someone else speaking already provides some of that sort of dissociation that Brecht was known for. It was the very first theatre production ever produced in what is now the Wharf 2 at the Sydney Theatre Company so that's how we christened that space. And I know Richard Wherrettt came along and I was very grateful for his support.

40.03 That to me was one of the pinnacles of the company. We got reviewed as a theatre company, we had a couple of weeks' season in a decent theatre space, some of the people that we worked with on that, designers and things, are people that I see still occasionally. So its reception was fine. I don't remember whether we made money, lost money, it had full houses or anything like that, but we had a decent review but from my perspective it was a solid production that said "This is a company that wants to produce professional work".

ML: That was in April – just for the record – April 1985 and at that stage the Elizabethan Theatre Trust was saying that the company worked mainly as a TIE team and performs each year to approximately fifty thousand students in schools throughout New South Wales so that was quite impressive.

BS: Sounds good.

ML: But can we just go back a little bit to shows in 1984 – and I don't have a complete list; you might remember more – things like 'How', 'I Live Here' and 'Hooligan's Hands', of course, went out again in '84.

BS: Yes.

ML: But for the younger children, tell me a bit about those shows.

BS: I'm struggling to remember how, I must admit. I Live Here was a piece that I wrote with the company and it was very much about immigration and multicultural Australia. It was perhaps more earnest than highly successful but it was also about deaf acceptance because it was ultimately about who can live here and everyone is a part of this country. '84 we were perhaps hitting our straps.

42.01 We'd gotten off notice, we were well-funded, we felt like a decent company going along, I knew a little bit more about the country. It was also, though, I suppose I'd been working in Theatre of the Deaf for five or six years by that point because I had started in '76/'77 and so perhaps I was getting more comfortable just in the whole form and how to translate that into Australia. But interestingly those are not the productions that stick in my mind yet about either the first ones that are always a trial or the later ones where you feel maybe you've really sort of knocked something over.

ML: Hit your straps, yes.

BS: Yes.

ML: Well, would you talk about some of those other productions? You've talked about Man Equals Man. 'Good Sports' was done, I think, as part of the Youth Theatre Festival in 1985. You performed that at the Sydney Opera House, at the Liverpool Civic Centre and Parramatta Town Hall as far as I know and that was for seven to fourteen year olds so that was another older age group.

BS: Yes. Good Sports would have been like an older version of Alphabets and Crackers and it was a pastiche sort of piece.

ML: Nothing else?

BS: Not really. Again, it wasn't one of those memorable things. It was a chance to be active and to put sign language out on the stage and to get people aware and interested but I don't know that it was one necessarily that we felt said something about the company.

ML: O.K. So what about other shows that I haven't got a list of but that you particularly remember?

BS: Well, there's one, yes, that you haven't mentioned which was 'Bundle of Sticks' and it was written by Greg McCart [?], I think his name is, who was a teacher at Bathurst and it was about regional Australia in a way.

44.01

It had flood, fire and we put a lot of theatricality into this one. It was about the community staying together, the bundle of sticks is stronger staying together than it is in any single stick, and we used a lot of sort of oriental oriented theatrical devices, bamboo, black plastic, sheets and sheets of black plastic as the floodwaters and as the sound of fire and things like that. So it was a bit more of an epic sort of piece that theatrically I always loved. I'm not sure it was an audience hit but it put the company into more of that sort of coming out of the '70s in story theatre, things coming out of Chicago, things that I'd worked with in, when I mentioned Gilgamesh, that we'd done as the National Theater of the Deaf. It's these big sort of epic stories where you use the transformative story theatre processes to try and tell a big story. Certainly, that was one we rehearsed at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust itself and I remember putting it on there. I was proud of what we at least tried to do with that production. I don't know that it saw a lot of time on the stage but it was a very different style. It was not just costumes and standing and talking, it was actually trying to use a whole theatricality.

ML: And what age group, did you say what age group it was for?

BS: That one was older, that would have been high schools, yes.

ML: High schools, yes, O.K. Any other shows that you remember that we haven't talked about?

BS: No. I do remember a couple of plays that I'd asked people to write that I didn't end up producing and I apologise to those authors. It's a hard thing to get right, actually, and, well, a) I suppose how to as the artistic director to envision what that piece could be with your company but b) also to write for a company like this.

46.09

ML: Yes, I imagine it's very hard.

BS: It is a different medium and to understand that medium and, as I say, Richard in at least one piece – memory is that it was 'Oddbods', a wonderful piece that used mostly non-verbal communication, characters interacting without necessarily speaking but very visually oriented and it was a good solution. Others offering a lot of verbal

solutions, it just doesn't really work in my view, particularly in the Australian sign language.

ML: But those scripts, do they exist?

BS: Are they preserved somewhere?

ML: Yes. Do you know?

BS: Margaret, I apologise for not digging back through some filing cabinet somewhere. There might be copies but I would hope that the Elizabethan Theatre Trust archives would be – because we were a part of the trust throughout the time that I was there.

ML: Sure. While you're on that, was there a board for the Theatre of the Deaf or were you relating really to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust structure?

BS: Relating to the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. First Jeffrey Joynton-Smith and then Catherine Veitch and were generally well looked after by them I'd have to say. I think we sat oddly in the company – maybe the company was a bit odd at the time as well about what it really was there for – but they did help and that was our senior management and that's really who we reported to. We obviously had advisory discussions with the deaf community and worked and communicated with a number of people in the deaf community, senior people in the deaf community, on a regular basis but we were independent and worked with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

48.15 **ML: I wondered because you wrote a history of the early years of the Theatre of the Deaf if you have any memories of Nola Colefax.**

BS: I do.

ML: Nola's book, which you have now picked up the copy called 'Signs of Change: My Autobiography and History of Australian Theatre of the Deaf 1973-1983'. She retired from the company at the end of 1982 at about the time that you arrived and, of course, the company still continues to exist today, so there's another history to be written but I just wondered - she was one of the instigators back in the '70s – what your memories of Nola are. I think she's still alive as well; I think she's about ninety two, I think.

BS: Well, I would hope so. She was a wonderful woman. She was a senior member of the community and a great fan. I'm not sure that the direction I wanted to take the company was the direction Nola thought it should go and it's interesting that her timeline stops in 1983, which is

probably really when I'd said "Right, we're not really connected to the New South Wales Deaf Society's sort of community productions. We are going to be a professional theatre company". That would have upset some people in the deaf community. It was a direction I thought the company needed to go but I always have very fond memories of her. I understand that the book doesn't always have very fond memories of me but so be it.

ML: She says actually, "As with so many hearing people who became involved with the theatre he" – meaning you – "came under the influence of the immense talents of the deaf actors" and I can't tell whether that's a good or bad statement from the way she puts it.

50.19 BS: Yes.

ML: But presumably you did have a real connection with them.

BS: Oh, yes.

ML: It was hard not to. I mean, you would have had to have been hardhearted not to respond to the way they worked.

BS: But they were also my company. I mean, these were the people that you worked with; this is an ensemble. This was not jobbing actors, this was the people that you work with day in and day out, and when you take on a role like this you do it because you want to do it; you'll certainly not do it for the pay or the glory or anything like that. So these were my friends as far as you should be friends when you're the director of a company but also the people who made it happen every day. So they were, for all their foibles and all of mine, they were the heart of it.

ML: Do you remember any dramas or times when things were difficult in terms of either communication or understanding?

BS: Sure. We had a bit of a strike, actors' strike at one point, about conditions which I understood and we addressed it as a company. As in a lot of small companies, you know, sort of management and artistic direction sometimes go in two different directions or struggle to go to the same direction so we had some of that. And when you have an actor who's either unavailable or decides they need to move on and do something else, that can be difficult when you don't have a large number of other actors to pull in.

52.15 So we did have some casting I'm not a hundred per cent satisfied I got right, but picked people who were committed to the company and sometimes the actors themselves would have, as in any small knit

group, affections and disaffections and that could colour the production for the next two or three weeks. But these were people who I was very fond of and although their talents were very different to the talents that I'd seen and learned with the National Theater of the Deaf these were my friends.

ML: Yes, it obviously is an important time. I know you've talked about workshops and some training collaborations with other groups but did you collaborate with any other companies for productions? I mean, previously the Theatre of the Deaf had worked with Nimrod [Theatre] and with Griffin as you alluded to. I just wondered if there were any times during your period there that you worked with other companies to put on productions.

BS: Not that I remember to put on productions. As I say, we did some in some of our training periods. You probably have got a better set of research and therefore memory on this than I do but because we were a part of the TIE network or Young People's Theatre network in Sydney I certainly felt connected with Richard and then David Young at Toe Truck connected with Sidetrack Theatre and connected with some of those companies.

54.13

I certainly benefited from networking in association if not collaboration. Our work with Richard [Tulloch] as a writer was independent of collaboration with Toe Truck. Probably all of us at the time were desperate to survive in the narrow market and so we were very friendly but you each did our very different sort of brief or objectives, aims and objectives as a company. So unless you've got the facts to prove my memory very, very wrong I don't remember any specific widespread collaborations other than the kinds of general partnerships that managements and companies would give to us when we produce things at the Sydney Theatre Company or had Richard work with us.

ML: Did the company or you have a favourite performance space within Sydney? Was there a best relationship with the audience type space that you identified?

BS: What a good question. And since most of our work was in schools that can be rather difficult to remember them all but also that they're seldom really, really good spaces. I did like the Wharf Theatre 2 as it's now called in the Pier 4/5 in Walsh Bay. I thought that was a very successful black box space, much more appropriate in stage side than like the Griffin Theatre [Company], [located in] the Stables Theatre, which was quite small. Big, big venues weren't all that attractive to me;

it's harder to see the language which I think is very important for that particular form.

56.04

I know after I'd left the company – and I don't know if I'm jumping ahead here – but there were some excellent directors who also took over the company afterwards and took it down some different directions and I saw what some of them were doing and it was quite wonderful what some of them were doing. Patrick Mitchell did some great work and then Tony Strachan headed up the company too and Carol Lee Aquiline herself headed up the company for a while and there were other deaf actors and probably that's, I hope, a growth of the company, that it actually could have deaf performers actually lead the company and not just always have a hearing performer be in charge of a deaf group.

ML: So let's go with when and why did you leave the company and who succeeded you?

BS: Yes. Well, I believe I resigned in 1986. So I'd signed for a two year contract and I stayed for three and a bit. By then I had worked in Theatre of the Deaf, if you will, for about seven years, counting America and Australia, and I had also by then met Suzanne who's my wife of twenty six years or so. I'd had a trip back to America to visit family and came back from that and that helped me decide I'd had enough in that particular environment, that I didn't know where I could grow and that maybe the company needed somebody else too. So I did give notice, fairly long notice but gave them some notice to find somebody else, and ended up going travelling across America with Suzy who works in theatre costumes and could have readily worked in New York and could have worked anywhere but since she was committed to doing Les Misérables back here in Sydney we came back and got married and settled here, with her doing production after production.

58.11

But it was a catalyst for leaving the company, was saying I wanted to go back to America, Suzy and I wanted to travel across America, see what it looked like over there in terms of opportunities. I believe it was Patrick Mitchell who took over the company - he'd been in Newcastle, working in Newcastle. He was a lovely man and did, I think, some excellent work. He did a most astonishing production of a David Holman work that I saw that had everyone in tears; it was quite beautiful. So I did feel that the company was in very good, if not even better, hands.

ML: So after your trip to America and coming back to settle in Australia – and you’ve always lived in Sydney, I’m guessing - - -

BS: I have, yes.

ML: - - - what did you do then?

BS: When we came back I applied for three jobs on day and I think I got all three of them so I ended up being a project officer in theatre at the Australia Council on a short term contract. This was March 1987, I believe. I also got a job doing script assessments for a movie guarantee production company sort of. I would read the scripts, movie scripts, and then write a report, synopsis and an assessment of whether I thought they would take off and I read scripts by people I then became friends with and scripts that I know were produced into movies and so that was a fascinating thing which I could do at home. But I started as this project officer in the theatre at the Australia Council when it was in North Sydney with Des James was another officer there and David Thompson was my adviser, the first man I'd met to have died of AIDS complications, and so it was that era.

60.05

And Chris Mangan was the head of the Theatre Board at the time and it was just before the Theatre Board sort of amalgamated to become the Performing Arts Board. So we had theatre and then later we were part of Performing Arts and that sort of kept me in the whole music and dance milieu as well but I was a theatre officer on a nine month contract. At the end of the nine month contract I actually got a job teaching at a university, signed the contract and saw a production of theirs that night and hated it, thought it was everything that I didn't want to do in theatre, and the man who could have shot me but very generously said "O.K, if you want to go, you go". I put in an application back at the Australia Council for a senior officer job that I hadn't applied for, got the application in and over Christmas holidays was given that job and I became the senior program officer at the Performing Arts Board. And I was with the Australia Council bar one year when our second child was born and my wife was working on another major production and I took a year off to be the executive director of the Australian Centre of the International Theatre Institute. And then went back to the Australia Council senior program officer, then manager of theatre, manager of theatre and dance and then ultimately nine years as executive director of arts development which I left after nine great years working on things like the Visual Arts And Craft Strategy, the Books Alive Program, the Small to Medium Performing Arts Company, investment from government, working with some brilliant chairs and colleagues and left there in January 2009 and started as executive

director of Sydney Writers' Festival in February 2009, which is where I still am.

62.07 **ML: Where you still are. I want to go back to a little bit of the Australia Council stuff. It's been based in the city now for some time. Firstly it was at Redfern, I think. Was it in Redfern?**

BS: Well, it was originally in North Sydney where I was and then we went to Abercrombie Street, Lawson Street, the corner of Abercrombie and Lawson Street in Redfern for about ten years and then Jennifer Bott came in as the CEO and very much wanted to move and there were a couple of options on the table and took the Seidler Building on Elizabeth Street. And I very cleverly went on holidays the week of the move and came back to find all my stuff moved, which was wonderful, into an office that had the entire indigenous arts collection stored in it, so I got the pick to put up on my wall and that was great. And that was a wonderful place to work and they're still there.

ML: So were you able or did you do any acting or directing once you've started at the Australia Council?

BS: I think that the film thing I mentioned happened before; it happened when Suzy and I were travelling in New York, when I did the 'Fatal Attraction' bit. By then I'd become a manager so I can't certainly remember anything other than trying to give a speech here and there or trying to persuade a company that maybe we've just cut the funding for about why this was exactly the right thing. But largely my performing days other than at parties, etcetera, and Richard and I would sometimes break out our guitar and violin and play together at parties but performing days were over.

ML: And did you have any contact or did you follow the fortunes of the Theatre of the Deaf once you were at the Australia Council?

64.04 BS: I did a bit. I mean, obviously as the executive director one of my team was the director of theatre who was overarchingly responsible for funding in the theatre area so I watched what happened there but I would not get involved in particular funding decisions. As I said, there was Patrick Mitchell, there was Carol Lee Aquiline, Caroline – surname I've forgotten.

ML: Conlon?

BS: Deaf performer.

ML: Was it Conlon?

BS: Yes, thank you, Conlon. I was going to say Quinlan but that was wrong, Caroline Conlon. And I saw one of her works and then Tony Strachan with Penny Miles for a while and subsequently, and I still know Tony Strachan very well, so I would catch up about what was happening with the company. And you could hear that it was struggling and I knew that it was having funding issues and probably having just that reserve bench of performers issues about where can you really find the talent that can keep revitalising the company because in small companies people leave; they take other opportunities and you really feel the impact. So I could see that it was a struggle but I also felt it was totally wrong to get involved in any way.

ML: I'd like you to talk a little bit more about the Books Alive campaign at the Australia Council because it sort of segues eventually, I guess, into your role at the Sydney Writers' Festival.

BS: Yes, it does, yes.

ML: And Books Alive is fantastic. Does it still run?

BS: It's called 'Get Reading' now and a fascinating project. It was part of government's conversation package for the introduction of the GST, including GST on books, and so they put a multimillion dollar package, four year package, that helped printers and helped other things and part of it was two million dollars to promote books.

66.05 It's a kind of, if you will, arguably an advertising way through to offset the impact of a ten per cent rise or about ten per cent rise in the cost of books. And an industry reference group was created which struggled for a while, I think it's fair to say. I wasn't involved in it for the first eight or nine months but at one point the Australia Council thought that it was perhaps not realising the aims that had been set up to do. And so the then chair of the council, who's Margaret Seares, and the CEO, Jenny Bott, asked Helen Nugent, who was the deputy chair of council and a former McKinsey strategist as well as the chair of the Major Performing Arts Board to chair the reference group and myself to take over in terms of leading the reference group from a management perspective. And we did that for about a year, working with the reference group to analyse what was going on in the book industry and how we could make a difference and try to get an agreement about how we could make a difference in using the funds to increase book sales, ultimately, and quality book sales. It was an extraordinarily diverse group that took a long time to agree and we did get there and we had basically a signed-off business plan and then Helen had to leave the group and I think the council at the time and so Jenny and Helen and I went to

Sandra Yates and proposed that she become the chair of delivering the first Books Alive campaign because we had this agreed business plan. And Sandra agreed because she's a great lover of books and so Sandra and I worked together in delivering Books Alive in its first three years to, we thought, great public success.

68.12 It's learned over time, it's changed a bit over time, it's switched to being all Australia. It was international when we first developed it, just encouraging book sales in general and then it sort of said "No, it should only be Australian". So it's had some changes to it but it has largely been every August, this great investment in getting people to read and buy books and read. We'd studied what had happened in Holland at the Sepay [?] and Nay [?], the National Promotion of Books campaign which has got a World Book Day or a National Book Day and if you buy that book you can get on the train for free if you carry it on the train; I mean, it's like a wonderful sense nationally. And we studied what they were doing in America which was, I think, 'Get Caught Reading' and something in the UK with World Book Day. So we looked at a lot of international models, devised an Australian model and really marketed it throughout bookstores as a promotion campaign to read and buy books and as far as we know in the first year it got several hundred thousand dollars of extra books sold in the time of the campaign – sorry, several hundred thousand copies of books, which was great.

ML: I guess the technology has changed a lot of this now.

BS: Well, as executive director of the Sydney Writers' Festival you come across the publishers now who are coming to grips with changing technology and how they stay profitable and viable in their world; people are reading things differently, accessing things differently, producing things differently. From the Writers' Festival perspective what I loved about Sandra's work and why I was very happy to work with her when she was chair of the Writers' Festival and she hired me as executive is because of a love of reading, a love of the broad range of books, of no particular love of fiction or poetry or history or anything but actually just the love of a really good story and a really good book.

70.22 And we do that, I think, at the Writers' Festival now, I do hope, across genres but also across modes of delivery and whether it's music writing, story writing, poetry, live poetry, slam poetry and theatrical stories, actors telling stories, short bit stories, comedy, everything, including major fiction and history. I love that range of abilities of focusing on and talking about and giving to audience story and language.

ML: It's become incredibly popular too in terms of your audience or attendees – I don't know what you'd call them.

BS: I do call them audiences because it's a mixture; from my perspective it's a great mixture of language and books, which I do love, but also of live event; it's like theatre, it's unrehearsed. We don't know quite what most of them are going to do when they get on stage and talk in a panel or in an interview but it is a live event and we need to make sure that we produce it as well as any live event is produced. So there's a fantastic production team who just creates new spaces and new solutions and the crowds down at Walsh Bay absolutely bring warmth to any chilly May day. And then the sun's sparkling off the water and then the crowds, truly engaged crowds and we have twelve venues going down there at once and it's five times a day a new event, a new event in twelve venues, sixty venues across the city. It's a fantastic thing to see Sydney engage with it and want it.

72.05 **ML: And you've just finished a festival and it happens in May, doesn't it?**

BS: We have, that's right. We're still in sort of the post-festival recovery. It's one week and yet it does take a lot of preparation for that one week. We did three hundred and forty events in that one week so it's busy and from the Blue Mountains and Wollongong and through suburbs and packed into the city and Town Hall and the Opera House and City Recital Hall and Sydney Theatre and truly great reception. I think this year's programme in particular got praised for a fresh approach and for the breadth of the genres that we presented. And we had the food trucks, the great city of Sydney icon now, food trucks being our caterers for our club at night and down at the precinct so we really feel that we inhabit and then bring to life the space down in Walsh Bay and hopefully across the city.

ML: Any idea of how many people attend or how many

BS: We had eighty thousand attendances; we'd had about eighty thousand attendances for each of the last five years. We're still counting; there's about thirty or forty events that I haven't got the reports on yet and we're on track to be eighty thousand again.

ML: And how is the festival funded?

BS: Sydney Writers' Festival, we have about thirty per cent of our total budget from the City and the state combined. So the City and the state were partners in the setup of the festival in 1997, the first independent festival run in 1998, and the City and the state were equal co-funding

partners. Stayed that way; not quite equal now but close to it and remain our core funding partners. So their support covers about seven hundred thousand dollars in total and we have a 2.1 to 2.8 million dollar budget so the rest comes from sponsorship and from box office though we present half of all of our events free of charge.

74.18 **ML: Amazing.**

BS: So it's a tightrope. From a writers' festival perspective it's a large organisation; from a major company perspective because of the profile that we think we do get in the press it's a small operation.

ML: And what does your job entail as the executive director?

BS: I'm in charge of the resources, supporting the board in terms of the strategic direction of the company, hiring the staff and making sure that we properly produce the artistic programme that the artistic director will have curated and for all intents anyway to manage the budget so that we make money over time in terms of having the reserves that every arts company would need to have. So we've had a number of years of small profit and then years where we might not have a profit but all in all we still build those reserves. So running the company, if you will, and working with the board to keep the reputation of the company solid from an audience and production and government perspectives, that's my role.

ML: Before we finish, I just wondered if there was anything else you'd like to say, either about the Theatre of the Deaf or about living and working in Sydney in terms of both of those things. You obviously spend a lot of time in the city of Sydney.

BS: Yes.

ML: And I wonder if you still get time to go to the theatre?

BS: I don't read as many books or go to as many shows as I used to, unfortunately. My wife is from Melbourne originally and so we have family connections in Victoria and often would holiday down there and she would open shows down there and so we spend a lot of time there but this is the town that I've lived in since arriving in '82.

76.22 When I first moved out I lived for a short time in Bondi Junction, an apartment that the company had found for me which was interesting. I didn't know anything about having restricted trading hours and Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings only; you know, I come from America where everything's open all the time. And I then moved into sort of a little – I think it was the maid's quarters of a house in Point

Piper which was rather a wonderful place for a bachelor to be living. I would have hard days at work – everyone has hard days at work – I would have hard days at work compounded by the fact that I was half a world away from my family and anyone that I'd grown up with and knew and on those sometimes desolate days, disconsolate days, I would get back to my little flat in Point Piper and I would look at this gorgeous, gorgeous harbour and the sun setting over the Harbour Bridge and think about Sydney and I'd say "O.K, I'll give it one more day" and that was twenty seven to thirty years ago. I'll be giving it probably most of my days. We live well here in the city. It's just a great place to raise kids and we have two kids and they've been a part of the arts and of things around Sydney and my son's become deeply steeped in the bike culture of Sydney and did one of his media photo essays for university on the city's bike paths and bike culture.

78.05 And our daughter now works in community theatre. This is our town, it's sort of where our kids have grown up and where I think there's just so much going on.

ML: And I always think walking and working around the wharf area, around the harbour area down at Hickson Road must be one of the best places to go to work every day.

BS: It's a glorious location and we are in the basement so there's no windows but on the way to work it's spectacular and it's the historical heart of modern Australia in Circular Quay and we're working with our funding partners to actually get up a level or two and have some windows. But then it is a five minute walk from where we produce the festival in Walsh Bay with the Finger Wharves and we use the hotel right next to the Finger Wharves so the artists roll out of bed and roll across a fifteen metre walkway next to the harbour into these heritage buildings and into renovated buildings with theatres and they have the ten thousand people a day milling around, listening and buying books and it's a great, great heart of the city.

ML: Anything else on the Theatre of the Deaf? I mean, it's now twenty-something years since you had an involvement and the theatre has changed a lot. Theatre in Education is no longer really – in fact, it's somewhat regarded as a negative which I find strange.

BS: That's right.

ML: But just anything that you took away from that experience of working with the Theatre of the Deaf that has stayed with the way you work or the way you respond to theatre?

BS: I think I always been interested in the – perhaps two sides – I used to love Pinter and Stoppard and the true creators of theatre in terms of language but the Theatre of the Deaf got me more interested in the theatre of not just style but the theatre of representation and movement and not just but realism.

80.32 And that theatre probably remains to me – I probably lurch around about what I truly enjoy but I was a great fan of things at the Performance Space for many years. It had that representational, sometimes very text oriented but largely throwing text around, still loving forms of language but not just a play that you might see on television somewhere so that part of the theatrical landscape is still of great interest to me. As I say, probably my connection with those other theatre artists when I first arrived, Ann Hinchliffe as a manager and Tony Strachan and Phillip Rolfe and Richard Tulloch, those people remain in my mind as great contributors to the arts in this city and I'm very lucky to stay friends with them.

ML: Then thank you very much for this.

BS: Thank you, Margaret. I hope that's of some use for the future.

ML: I know you've got to run back and deal with a board meeting from last night.

BS: All good.

ML: Thank you.

Interview ends