

JACK MEDLEY

I first came here in 1964 and was on a double bill, *Dark Lady of the Sonnets* and *Village Wooing*, and Christopher Newton was on that double bill in *Village Wooing*, with Linda Livingston. I remember I lived at the Anchorage motel down by the waterfront. We all lived there; it was the only place in town really in those days. There was not even a hotel—well, the Prince of Wales, and there was the Oban. The Prince of Wales was a dreadful pub. Andrew Allen was the artistic director and whenever we couldn't find him we used to look in the Prince of Wales. The door was where the wine shop was. They built a wine shop in there and the doors to the wine shop were the entrance to the pub. It was a tavern; it was a dreadful, awful place. It was like a tavern on Jarvis Street in Toronto or something like that. That's where we used to find Andrew.

It was a village. There was a barber shop. I think it was run by somebody who later worked for the theatre. And there was a deli and a cheese shop. But none of the stuff you see now. I think there was a fudge shop but it wasn't where it is now. Certainly there were none of these junk—little shops where you can buy everything. Every shop sells the same thing. There was nothing around the Anchorage. They didn't have a restaurant. We cooked for ourselves in our rooms; most actors do. We brought electric frying pans and cooked for ourselves. Still, it was a very nice place to be. I wasn't here very long. It was a four-week season and we rehearsed for two or three weeks. I wasn't only in the one show so we played for about two weeks, I think.

I didn't come here again, except to visit occasionally, until 1979 I think. I was asked to come in 1978. I was on holiday in Portugal and they called me from here and asked to replace somebody and play Hector Hushabye and they had only just started rehearsals. I had already agreed to do an engagement in Victoria as Doolittle in *Pygmalion* but Ed Stephenson, the artistic director, wouldn't let me go, which was a bloody shame because it was a very good deal. They would have flown me from Portugal and flown me back because they had interrupted the holiday, and give me a free house here and the engagement for very good money. So I didn't come again until 1979. Leslie Yeo was artistic director then. By that time the town was beginning to change. Various shops had opened—antique shops, junk shops; I call all those shops junk shops. And of course the new theatre had been built. Leslie asked me to do Noel Coward's *Private Lives* and I said yes. Then he changed his mind and called me and said unfortunately I couldn't play the role in *Private Lives* because he had already promised it to another actor. I was pretty miffed about that, but he said, "You can play the doctor and I would like you to play the first lunchtime," which was *Village Wooing*. So I agreed. Then Christopher took over in 1980 and I came to work for him and I've been here ever since.

Those were exciting years, those first years, because there was a lot of stuff happening in the town. We were going to lose the Court House. They'd been losing it for a number of years because they hadn't got the money to fix it and put in a proper theatre that we have now. There were the fire regulations, and the whole business was a big mess. The townspeople didn't want us to use it, so there was a lot of trouble going on. That's when various citizens of the old town complained about us being here. If we were going to lose the Court House we needed to build another space. So Christopher decided to build a marquee-type theatre, that they have in Quebec—a structure that would stand all year round but would only be used in the summer. I don't know what sort of air conditioning it would have had, but anyway we were going to call it the Pavilion. But then the powers that be said we could keep the Court House if we put in a proper theatre, which is what we have now. I can't remember who designed that.

Interviewer: Where was the Pavilion going to go?

Mr Medley: Well, that was one of the problems with the town. We wanted to put it just on the edge of the Commons but they wouldn't have that, wouldn't have it at all, and that's when there were all those dreadful letters in the paper about actors in the town, get rid of them, they're useless. It hadn't become the tourist

attraction that it is now. So I'm afraid we lost that. We were quite happy to go back into the Court House, of course. It's become a very substantial theatre.

That happened in 1980; no, it happened later than that. We didn't have the George in those days; we didn't get the George until 1982 or 1983, something like that. In 1981 I was here and I went to Stratford in 1982 and 1983, when I had my terrible accident in 1982. I stabbed on the stage. It made headlines all over the world because it's always in Macbeth if there are any problems happen; it's always in Mac-unmentionable. That's why we don't quote it in the theatre. But this happened in Julius Caesar. I got stabbed in the assassination scene and ended up being in hospital for six months. It pierced the lung. In 1985 I came back here and in 1986 I bought this house and I've been here ever since, although I've done engagements in Winnipeg, Calgary I think—usually somewhere very cold and always in the winter.

I hardly ever go up on Queen Street; too many people. The mail is all I go for and I try to go early in the morning before the buses have dropped all those Japanese off. Mind you, since they have stopped dropping them on King Street, which is just around the corner from here, I don't get too many Japanese. How many Japanese households have photographs of this house I couldn't imagine. Every Japanese who came down the street would stop here and take photographs of this house; not that over there, but this house, and that's the prettier house. But that's vinyl. Here they wouldn't allow me to do vinyl because it's a heritage house. The way they decide to do this is not just one house, they'll do one whole side of the street. This house has been heritage since I moved in, but so has next-door but two, which was built in the fifties. The other side of the street is not heritage and some of the better houses are on that side. The tourists park here and just walk from here and up King Street. If I'm sitting out on the porch I'll get a comment from them but other than that I tend to avoid them. I usually sit in the back. That's why I had three cedars put in the front so that's a secret garden back there. Some of them ask me very politely if they can park. I tell them the city allows it, I don't like it but the city allows it, so go ahead.

When I came back in 1979 I rented a house on Regent Street. Actually it had been the garage to the big house and the owners had converted it to a small apartment. It was next to the Secord house, not far up from Queen Street near the Angel Inn. There has always been a housing person here but it's very difficult, having a load of actors coming to a town all at the same time and trying to find somewhere for them all to live. Most people feel they have to make money out of it and an actor can't afford to pay that much so usually what we get are the dregs. Of course, most actors keep a place in Toronto or Vancouver or wherever they come from and can't afford to pay that much when they come here. But they try their best to do the best they can. Sharry Flett and her husband rent the house across the street. The O'Connors are friends of mine who own the house and they like the theatre and want a long let. But it only goes to people they want in. It doesn't come up every year. There are one or two like that but most of it is—I couldn't live in it, not any more. I did for six or seven years when I lived on Regent Street in that shack. I paid something like \$400 a month for it, an exorbitant price, with no heat except for one of those big space heaters and it's bloody cold here when you start rehearsals in March. That wasn't much fun. I had a garden I could do what I liked with, which was nice.

Interviewer: Any anecdotes about the theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Mr Medley: I've just given my anecdotes for a book that has just come out.

Interviewer: Jennifer Phipps told me she's not very good with anecdotes, that the male actors are the ones with all the anecdotes.

Mr Medley: Oh, really.

Interviewer: Do you think that's accurate?

Mr Medley: Oh, no, I don't think so.

Interviewer: At the Amnesty International concert, Barry MacGregor told about a time when you and he were in a mystery and were down at the front of the stage—

Mr Medley: Oh, yes, yes, yes; that was quite a saying: "Would you look at that face?" pointing right at me. And of course we heard it and couldn't say a word. We went on with the play but back to back; we couldn't look at each other. Barry would remember things like that. He's a marvellous raconteur, he remembers everything. I can't think of any, and I'm sure there are dozens. I find that when trying to remember those things it's best if you're in a group of people, because one thing sparks off another. Someone mentions something and that sparks it off. Except the terrible things that happened to me in Stratford; those things I remember.

Interviewer: Is there any reason you picked Niagara-on-the-Lake rather than Stratford, say?

Mr Medley: Oh, well, yes indeed. Stratford never really appealed to me. It's too big, it's too big a company. This is much more intimate and I like the stuff they do here. I like Shaw; I've done a lot of him. And I like the other plays they do here. I also like the town very much—I should say I used to like the town. That's not true; it's a lovely part of the country to be in and the town is smaller than Stratford. I don't know how Stratford won the title of prettiest town recently. I can't understand that. I don't think it's a pretty town at all. There are parts of it that are quite pretty; along the lake it's lovely. When I lived in Stratford and I owned a house it was on the lake. I bought the house because when I saw it there were swans sitting on the lawn and I thought, "This is for me." I remember the lady who was showing it to me said, "You won't like it. It's been torn about inside." I said, "I don't care what it's like inside, it's got swans outside." I bought it, renovated the whole place and sold it two years later, and I made almost twice as much as I paid for it. I came here because the town was so pretty and I'd made a lot of friends here. I don't drive and there are no taxis here so you have to manage on a bicycle, so it's ideal. Where you live anywhere in the old town is not very far to any theatre.

Curtain