**Type**

Sound: WAV

**Duration**

01:56:00

**Project**

Pass it On – Oral History Project for the Chichester Festival Theatre

**Recording Date**

10 April 2014

**Recording locations**

Interviewee’s home

**Interviewee**

John Gale OBE (speaker, male)

**Interviewer**

Gill Bushby (speaker, female)

**Abstract**

John Gale (JG) born 2 August 1929 Chigwell in Essex. Anecdote after successful acting career and later as a producer, on a chance meeting with Patrick Garland [CFT Artistic Director 1981-1984] he agreed to assist the theatre and was appointed Director in 1983 overseeing finance and general running of theatre. (6:00) Mentions on the retirement of Patrick Garland he took sole charge in 1985. Describes difficulty in obtaining the rights to produce ‘No Time for Comedy’ for first season without success, (15:00) but producing ‘A Patriot for Me’ by John Osborne with Alan Bates directed by Ron Eyre. Very successful play, but some including Leslie Evershed-Martin did not approve of the content. (21:00) Mentions other successes ‘As You Like It’ with Patricia Hodge, ‘Time and the Conways’ and ‘The Sleeping Prince’ with Omar Sharif. Anecdote of introducing a theatre for young people but without a permanent venue. Obtaining funding for a marquee, starting the Youth Theatre which was to be run by a primary school teacher. (39:00) Anecdote of audition with Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry for an Alan Bennett play. Commented on a production of ‘The Merchant of Venice’ with Alec Guinness, full house for every performance, but not successful creatively. Remarked on the need for “stars” to bring audiences from long distances to ensure theatre’s financial stability. (51:00) Described how the Boards of theatres do not have the theatrical knowledge to appoint a good director, but assisted by Baroness Jenny McIntosh, who is knowledgeable about talented theatre management, suggested Jonathan Church at Birmingham. JG anecdote of his first year at CFT opening with a community production of Noel Coward’s ‘Cavalcade’ with 15 professional actors and hundreds of local people, a huge success. (60:00) Mentions his enthusiasm for community productions, producing ‘Victory’ in his last season at CFT [1989]. Anecdote of other productions in that last season ‘Anthony and Cleopatra’ with Diana Rigg and Dennis Quilley, ‘The Philanthropist’ and ‘The Scarlet Pimpernel’ with Donald Sinden. (01:09:00) Describes at the end of his fourth year being in a strong financial position he suggested building a second theatre, which eventually became the Minerva Theatre, a smaller version of the main theatre. (01:18:00) Remarks on the difficulty in managing the new build and the main theatre, recruiting a Cambridge graduate, Sam Mendes [SM] as Assistant Director, eventually promoted to Artistic Director of the Minerva Theatre. (1:27:00) Mentions SM’s brilliance in directing. (1:30:00) Anecdote of recruiting Robins Phillips from Ontario to take over as Director when JG retired at the end of 1989, and after casting and rehearsing the first play of the season, ‘London Assurance’ with Paul Eddington, without any notice Robin left, returning to Canada, leaving Sam Mendes who was a great success at the Minerva to direct the main theatre productions. JG described how he had enjoyed the seven years spent at CFT and with successful management left £1,000,000 in the bank. Commented that Jonathon Church and Alan Finch have the right balance between attracting audiences, creative productions and financial stability. Mentions that he was pleased to have survived as an actor for 10 years before moving into producing, noting that plays should be seen on stage not just read. (01:56:00)