

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW  
with DAVID CLARKE  
by Lorraine Brown  
for the  
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Transcribed by Rhoda Durkan  
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LB: ... When we recovered the material, it was in an airplane hangar near Baltimore

and it was piled on pallets 10 feet in the air. And there it all was, 900 cubic feet of it and we went just wild. We started and we took crowbars and opened up the crates. And all these materials just fell out, scripts and radio scripts and we have posters, some posters. We have costume and set designs although some of those are in bad shape. They were so badly

packed that people just threw them in boxes and then threw other things on top.

DC: I suppose when the thing folded up and they just--

LB: Yes, just "to heck with it." This is one I was just going to use for another interview. We have a number of the production bulletins. I don't know whether you remember those or not, but for each production they would put together press clippings and blueprints of the lighting system.

DC: Well, you know, the highlight of my experience of course was that night The Cradle Will Rock was done. And it's been done so much and it's been talked about so much. You know, I had my worm's-eye view of it, and I

was assistant stage manager for that play. It was a fascinating evening. I had invited a man, a William somebody from New Yorker magazine, who had written a book. He had a novel published about that time and I had just invited him to

come to the opening. And of course he was one of the people who walked up the street. And I don't know whether he ever wrote about it or not, but he said it was the most exciting evening he'd ever had. I suppose you've heard Marc Blitzstein's rendition of that.

LB: Yes. Oh, that was an extraordinary evening.

DC: It certainly was. And Will Geer, of course, you've talked to him? Somebody

has?

LB: Yes, one of the members of our project. Actually I had trouble, for the reasons that you said, getting together myself. Whenever I was free, he wasn't free. But a staff member did talk to him briefly.

DC: He's working on a film now for Disney besides "The Waltons." He's 75 years old and he goes like a house afire.

LB: It's amazing. No, I know, and I talked to him on the telephone two or three times and we came within that much, you know, of getting together. But the trouble with our schedule is that we do these things during the summer or during vacations because everyone connected with our project also teaches. So we have to make the most of our California time.

Let's go back, if you don't mind, and start with when you joined the Project and sort of move through. Because I'm very interested in your point of view and in what happened to you as an individual all the way along.

DC: Well, I must have been on for about two years and I left in 1938 to go into Abe Lincoln in Illinois. That was before the Project closed I got this job. I remember the essential thing was to get on relief and although I was, you know, a poor, starving actor, it would have never occurred to anybody to get on relief even then just per se like people do now. But when we found out that you had to be on relief to get on Federal Theatre, of course everybody was trying to get on relief. And you know that was the same time about that Orson Welles, he didn't have to get on relief but he did have to volunteer his services. And I was living in a small room in an <sup>11</sup>apartment up on West End Avenue and the woman who ran the place was an old friend and I knew her husband, who was the brother of Moe Solotaroff, who was the scene designer for the Artef. And I had only rented this room a

short time before, and she said, "Well, we can get you on relief. All I

have to do is vouch for you as being broke, you know." And that wasn't hard. [L] [SEP] LB: (Laugh) That wasn't hard to do at that time?

DC: So I got on relief and then I became a--I had had experience as a stage manager besides some of the acting I had done before. I started in the theatre in 1929. Will Geer got me my first job in the theatre. And I had stage-managed for Arthur Hopkins in one of the last productions he ever did. And also I had been stage manager for Bury the Dead, which Will was in. You probably know the history of that. That was, I think, about 1934 or 1935.

So it was obvious that they would categorize me as a stage manager.

And [L] [SEP] they put me on a dance project as a stage manager. I had had no experience at all in dance, even with dance. Bill Matons was a member of the company and Helen Tamiris, so it was, you know, quite a group of people. And I was fascinated because I had never been around dancers at all.

LB: What was she like? There are so many--

DC: Well, Tamiris was, as I remember her, a very attractive girl, woman. She must have been in her thirties then. And she was very intense, very vital,

and wanted to expand from dancing into, I guess what she was aiming at, sort of musical candy, choreography, something like that.

Because that was before Oklahoma and all those things. And I can remember, during the run of Abe Lincoln in Illinois, which was after this, I still had some contact with her. I shared an apartment with Herbert Rudney, who was trying to promote a musical version of Alice in Wonderland with a political

connotation, and she was there for many conferences. I just happened to live in the same apartment, so I saw her attempting to work on a piece with him and I could tell she was trying to expand.

LB: But with political overtones, not just dance for dance?

DC: No.

LB: But with politically--

DC: Well, Herbert was writing the script for it. And you know there was--not too

long ago there was an Alice in Wonderland, a far-out one done by--you see, my wife teaches at New York University. And they had several groups there that were developing and they finally became companies and went out all over

the world. And this one did a far-out extravaganza of Alice in Wonderland, so that always reminded me of that.

But my connection with the dance group was rather short-lived because Will, who was with the Welles project, said to me, "Why don't you get on the Welles project?" And so through his influence and a couple of other people,

they got me transferred as a stage manager and of course the Welles project had, I think, 350 people.

LB: This was 891? You weren't with Welles at the Lafayette?

DC: The Mercury, you mean?

LB: No, I was thinking of--

DC: Oh, Welles was up in--no, no. This was down at the Maxine Elliott. They were doing Faustus when I moved in there, and I had nothing to do with that although I was around all the time. And also they had just finished Horse Eats Hat and I remember the production of Faustus very well with all the magic tricks. So when you first went into the thing like that, you were just in a pool. As a

matter of fact, for a time--I don't know whether it was before I got into the dance group or between the two times--they used to have just a general pool down at the Provincetown Playhouse. If you were unattached, you had to

come and report there, I think, for maybe an hour in the morning. And some

people would be assigned maybe to a temporary job in the Puppet Theatre or

something, wherever they needed help. It was such a vast organization. But when I finally got with the Welles project--891, that's what it was--I was sort of in a little pool there for a while. And then Curt Conway, who was a young, aspiring director who had been with

He's dead now; he died about a year or two ago. He had been on the periphery of the group and he wanted to be a director. So they took a group of us who were at loose ends and he formed a class, and we actually had classes. And Eleanor Scherr, who was Van Heflin's girlfriend at that time--

LB: I've spoken to her in California now. Yes, she lives in Long Beach.

DC: I'd like to see her.

LB: I'll give you her address.

DC: Of course I knew Van very well later. I was in View from the Bridge, but at that time, I remember Don Lehman Engel one night that Van and Eleanor came there and just sitting around and chatting. I can't say I met Van Heflin there. I already knew him from View from the Bridge.

But she wrote a play. I guess you know about the history. Do you know about that play that she wrote?

LB: That was Five Cents to Heaven or something like that?

DC: Probably the title, I don't know.

LB: Yes.

DC: Anyway, that play, she was in this group at this time. It was just what you'd call an experimental class, you know. And she came in with the

outline

or some dialogue on this play. I think she had what she thought was the first and third act and couldn't get a second act. So Curt said, "Well, we'll improvise it." And there was a big party scene, I remember, and in

the class he would have us just get up and improvise. It had to do with drug addiction, though.

LB: Yes, that's the one.

DC: That's it?

LB: Yes.

DC: So we worked on this for several months and worked up this combination, improvisation. It depended on about 20 people doing their own thing and only a very rough outline of what the act was like. And we did it--Curt said it was in good enough shape that he would show it to Welles and Houseman. And I remember we went on the stage of the Maxine Elliott and did it for maybe 50 people and it was very alive and very improvisational.

LB: Is that the first time you had done anything like that improvising?

DC: I believe it was, pretty much. I remember when we were rehearsing Bury the Dead, which was before that, and I was on the stage-managing end, they did some of that. Tony Minor and Walter Hardin co-directed that and, of course, they were beginning to have the effect. And I was with the Actors' Repertory Company, which was formed at the time we did Bury the Dead. And we functioned at the same time as the Group Theatre. We were sort of a poor man's Group, but we had good people. We had Tony Ross, Will Geer. Will Geer's ex-wife, Herta Ware, was in it. I guess Tony Ross probably did more later on with something. He played in the original Glass Menagerie.  
SEP:  
But they did some, a little bit of improvisation.

LB: Did that come by the way of Chekhov? Was it Russian? Do you think that's what--?

DC: It came through the Group's interest in Stanislavski.

LB: In Stanislavski? Yes.

DC: And later, of course, I came--after I served in World War II, I went to

the Actor's Lab here under the G-I Bill. And practically all the Group Theatre were involved there except Stella Adler and Luther. Everybody else from the Group, Carnovsky, Bromberg. That's the first time I really studied acting. That was after I'd been in the theatre for 13 years, gone into the service and come out. And I went into the service, of course, shortly after Abe Lincoln. I was with that for two years. I played William Herndon on

the road, so I had a second part in that. But that was what got me out of

the Federal Theatre before it collapsed. You know. I always felt I jumped off <sup>l l l l</sup>the ship just before it sank. (laugh) You know, I was in a hit and I remember <sup>l l l l</sup>Kevin McCarthy and I and a fellow named Richard Charlton were the three <sup>l l l l</sup>Clary's Grove boys. And I heard Kevin talking about this in a meeting of the

New Dramatists, which I belong to. I just had a play produced in Milwaukee. I've been connected with the New Dramatists. And Kevin was talking about getting that job in Abe Lincoln. But I want to speak about Federal Theatre.

LB: I think we have a lot to talk about. Maybe we won't be able to get it all finished today.

DC: I've been diverting. You'll probably have to do some cutting.

My memory of the rehearsals of Cradle are very fascinating. I was off at the side with the crew. I was usually the second or third assistant who was assigned to getting everything done that Welles needed when he got up there to direct. And I remember him directing the Yasha-Dauber scene,

and he was working with Hiram Sherman and I forget the other fellow's name. There were just the four of us and he, you know, Welles hardly knew my name, but I was there to do the job. And he was so creative. He was giving them things so fast that they were having trouble to remember, you know, and he was in a

regular fever heat of creativity. And I remember him turning to me and saying, "Did you get that?"

And I'd say, "Yes, I think so."

And he'd say, "Well, you'd better, you know." Because he couldn't remember 10 minutes later what he had done because he was giving them so much. And of course this I saw later when the thing--the fascinating thing to me

about that evening, we had had a dress rehearsal the night before, with a full orchestra, 30-piece orchestra, loud speakers in the auditorium of the Maxine Elliott, a chorus down in the basement singing. The production would have cost at that time in the commercial theatre probably \$150,000, which was out of the--you probably know all this, but I like to talk about it. They had platforms with plate glass and lights showing up. In other words, he had produced it lavishly and with great imagination, things moving in and out, and it was a very successful performance. The house was packed- They went absolutely wild. Of course, it was pretty much liberal left-wing audiences, and they felt very lucky that they'd been able to get this on and all. And then the next night when we came and there was this pall. I walked in the place and everybody was down in the lounge, down below the lobby. And I said, "What's going on?"

They said, "We're not going to open." And nobody could believe it, you know.

I had been working closely with Lehman Engel, taking care of the score

and all that. And he said to Welles, "I know a Miss--" I think her name was Woodward--"who is a big shot in Washington in the Federal Theatre. He said, - "She's an old friend of mine. I'll call her up. I haven't talked to her for some time, but I think that she will do something for us."

So Welles said, "For God sake, do it." So he grabbed the phone and called Washington and he told me later, he said, "When I said, 'This is Lehman Engel,' she said, 'Oh, Lehman, how lovely to hear from you! It's so marvelous! What are you doing?'"

And he said, "Well, I'm with the Orson Welles project."

And she said, "Oh."

And he said, "Can't you do something for us?"

And she said, "I'm sorry, nothing."

LB: So just the curtain went down?

DC: So then Will Geer went out in front and entertained the crowd as they came in<sup>[1]</sup> front of the theatre. And then my job was to collect all the sheet music<sup>[1]</sup> with Lehman. We took a cab. We didn't walk because we had to carry all this stuff, you know. And Lehman, of course, even then was fairly successful. He was working on the Federal Theatre for \$30 a week, I think. He was already beginning to be, you know, he had his own so he was fairly successful for that time.

LB: Let me interrupt for a second. Did people know the reason why everybody was pretty--

DC: I think it was announced that the heads of the Federal Theatre had said "no" and locked the theatre and Welles had decided to do it anyway. And they were to go up to the--I forget the name of the theatre. It was up on Columbus Circle, as I remember. And I think Will must have announced it out in front when it finally came through, which was after curtain time. And they'd

gotten a piano and hitched it on. I didn't know about that until I

heard Marc tell about it exactly what had been done.

But Lehman and I went up and there was nothing for him to do except sit in the audience with all this sheet music on our laps and sat there. And Welles

came out and and said, "Greetings." And the place was

absolutely jammed. He said, "The best we can do is if Marc will play it, which he's done so many times for auditions and things." And everybody was very happy. From my viewpoint it just happened spontaneously. There must have been some talk among the cast as they were going up there. There were two people, I think, who refused to appear. I don't know if they even went, two or three people.

But this girl got up, the girl who played the prostitute--- I can't remember her name. She got up in the front row and sang the opening number. And from then on--

LB: It just went?

DC: I'll never forget the Polish scene as he got up from the bar. Howard Da Silva came down the aisle, his entrance as Larry Foreman. And so it just built, the silence just built so it was just incredible. And this man that I invited, William something from the New Yorker, he said it was the most electrifying evening he'd ever had. Later then I guess they did it. Well, Equity was involved in the reason they couldn't get up on the stage.

LB: Yes, that's right.

DC: They had such a technical interest in it.

LB: You must have had a sense that you were there when history was being made.

DC: Yes, and the fact that they really did have--somebody was thinking pretty fast. Of course, I don't think it just happened. I think the girl started the whole.. as far as I know.

LB: It took a great deal of courage for those people to continue.

DC: Yes, because they were, they thought that they were going to be--well, it had been explained to them that as long as they didn't get on the stage, if

they were just kind of as a member of the audience participating--that's all they ever did was jumping up. And so Equity I'm sure was sympathetic and they just had to have--there was a rule.

LB: How did Lehman Engel react and Welles and the people as this went on?

DC: Well, Lehman, of course, he was horribly disappointed, I think, that he didn't get the chance to direct the orchestra that night and that it had all just been taken out of his hands. And here he was, you know, he naturally got such a kick out of the night before because he was such a part of it, you know, with the trumpets from the basement and the singing and all that. Of course, he was an absolute dynamo as far as--and a perfectionist. I know so little about music, and dance too, that to be borrowed--you see, that's the kind of thing the Federal Theatre made possible. People would.. And you could even have experience with the puppet theatre if you wanted to. If you really wanted to be with some other group, you could probably get moved. There was a lot of fluidity.

LB: Was there a particularly large waiting list for the 891? Did a lot of people want to work with Welles?

DC: I think so, probably, yes. It was a hell of a big outfit, you know, 350 people. And most of the people involved, including the--you know, they used the puppets in the--I believe it was in Faustus.

LB: Yes. Bill Baird?

DC: Bill Baird and Cora. I didn't know Bill very well, but I'd known Cora from before she married Bill. So I was around when they were doing the puppets,

just when L first met them.

LB: Just looking at the various--I Xeroxed some of the cast list. But when you

take a look at the people that were in these productions, it's a kind of Who's Who really. This is The Cradle. And Nat Karson did the costumes and settings for Horse Eats Hat.

DC: Who?

LB: Nat Karson. Do you remember Nat Karson? Of course, you just run up and down the list here, and it's incredible.

DC: Now Jack Carter was living in that same little room in the apartment. It was a large apartment. He had a room in that same place.

LB: Did you know him at all?

DC: Oh, yes.

LB: Did you? What kind of person was he? There were so many--again, there was a person with so many stories attached.

DC: Well, he was like Canada Lee, I think. He had had a very, very tough childhood and he was kind of a moody, tough character, just the same as Canada was. I used to play softball with Canada out here in Hollywood

after he came out here, so I got to know him fairly well. I met his son later after he died. But there was a man named Eric Burroughs who also lived in that place.

LB: I believe he was in the Macbeth.

DC: Eric played Hecate, I think. And Jack was Macbeth and in this he was Mephistopheles. And I remember the effects that Welles used to have in lighting and so forth. You know there was a scene where Mephistopheles hid? You probably know the scene?

LB: No, please tell me.

DC: He used black drapes and black cylinders for disappearing. You know, he was--when Welles disappeared, he would have a puff of smoke and they would drop a black velour cylinder right around him so he would just go off like that.

And then he'd step out from behind that and they'd bring it up and the stage would be bare. By that time, he'd be off. And in this case he had Jack on

a high platform with a railing that came up to his neck, all black velour with a black velour background and the pin spot on him so that it was a disembodied head way up in the--and he played a scene, as I remember, with Orson down here, you know, all the way across the whole stage. Those kinds of things that nobody else had mastered then. And the magic part of it, of course, he was clever about, too, the way he really did it.

But the thing I started to say about The Cradle Will Rock, after they did it in that improvisational performance with nothing except a piano and then they did it with a black chorus and just chairs when they put it in for the run after that--I think that was the beginning of the Mercury--I realized that even though Welles' genius was just--I mean, he had overproduced the thing to the extent, you know, of just being idiotic really, although it was effective. But this is an example to me of how many different ways something can be done, and it really didn't need a production at all. And still he, because he just loved gadgets and mechanical things and he loved also to push the managing end hierarchy into spending more money than they wanted to spend. He loved that kind of power even then, and there was such a small budget. But he knew that he was very important to the whole project because he was making such a

splurge with his productions that he would just push them to the limit every time. And this is why they had plate glass, you know, and of course it did make work for technicians. They were standing there waiting to work. You had to buy materials, of course. But he didn't need to have that kind of a production really. And the same thing with the direction of a scene like Yasha-Dauber. He gave them so much stuff that they couldn't possibly use it all, and still it was just rolling out of him. So

I think it showed up later in some of his films that he was so creative that he lacked judgment. Because he did some of the worst films, I think, and some of the best ones that were ever made.

LB: Just all that leftover talent.

DC: That's right. It was just flowing out of him and just bubbling over, and he was so excited about it, and everybody else was.

LB: It must have been, well, a powerful atmosphere around him.

DC: Yes. And of course, my viewpoint, being such a lowly kind of thing, you know, it was quite interesting and compared, I suppose, to most of the other people that you've talked to, we were on a little higher level. It was a worm's-eye view really, but a very fascinating thing.

LB: It depends upon the perceptiveness of the person, too. A lot of people, I think who were associated with him closely probably didn't have much of an idea of him, say, apart from their own relationship with him. So this is, I think, very valuable to see him as an entity operating.

How did he and Houseman work together? Did you see both of them together?

DC: Yes, I saw both of them. Of course, Houseman, as he says in his book, stayed up in the office most of the time. And of course, in a crisis thing, he was out and as I say, I've had some contact with him. I saw him recently

out in California at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) when he brought

his troupe out there. And L always stopped and chatted with him. I feel like I know him, whereas with Welles he would have to be thoroughly reminded for him to recognize my face. But L had contact with John when I was working in films out here. After L worked at the Actors' Lab, I did--for about four years I did some very good parts out here in films. And I remember L worked in one film that he produced. L can't remember the name of it, but he talked

to me about his production of King Lear about possibly doing it in New York and it didn't work out. So we've had some contact.

LB: He's had a pretty distinguished acting career himself now, hasn't he?

DC: Yes. L was fascinated to read his book, too. His conflict with Welles in that is very interesting and I didn't know. I hadn't had contact with him at that time. I didn't know that they had that thing really you know, and he was very bitter.

LB: What kind of an impact did the kind of thing that you've been talking about have on the theatre as a whole? It's clear that these plays were good for the Federal Theatre and really a vehicle that allowed Welles to demonstrate his talents, but..

DC: . . . probably wouldn't have had a chance to do anything, did get a chance to do some very important things. Well, people like Arthur Kennedy, for instance. You know, he got his start in--I forget the name of it, but he played the lead in something. And his talent just burst out. It might have at a later time,

I mean possibly. But it certainly gave a great number of people a feeling that they belonged, you know. And you know the terrible letdown. L'm sure

that the charge that they'd gotten out of working with Federal Theatre gave them the impetus to stick with it, you know, which is half the battle, to get through the bad spots in their careers.

LB: Not be too discouraged?

DC: And to just never get to the point where you say, "I'm going to give it up;" although some people do. I have a daughter 20 years' old who has had two Broadway shows and a lead in a motion picture, and she's given the thing up. She says it's too uncertain, which it is. And my older daughter is in it for

life and she'll probably never be anything but an actress, even if she has to starve. But the other one is just too--she's a Scorpio and she decided that--I guess she's wiser than the rest of us. They say that Scorpions are--

LB: So it's in part temperament for anybody who sticks it out, as well as talent.

DC: Yes. And now, you know, she may go back because she worked in a film called

Miriam, which was part of a film called Trilogy, the Truman Capote story. She played the title role in it when she was 10 years old, and I have a print of it which she said, "Oh, Daddy, why did you buy that?"

I said, "I'll show it to you when you're 40 years old and see what you think."

LB: That's very exciting to have actors in one family. You must have a good time.

DC: My wife and two daughters were all on tour with the Lunts in the last play they did. I'm going to write a book about that. It's going to be a rather amusing book, paradoxical. But that was a fascinating experience.

LB: What about the chances for a national theatre now? Do you think there's

any hope that really something will happen? Or did the Court of  
[111] Administrations --  
[111]

DC: I have been doing some research on attitudes towards a national theatre and I have some fascinating material. And I've written a one-woman show

for my

wife. Actually it's a two-character based on the early life, the middle life, of Minnie Maddern Fiske. She had conversations with Alexander Woollcott. I don't know whether you've read that book or not where she expounds on the Federal Theatre. Now she had had three careers and she

and her husband had produced plays and she was a well-known--you know her history. And she said, and I think it's a fascinating theory and I've put

it in this play, that is, as dialogue. And I kind of think that she's right; it's controversial. Her idea was that repertory would never work, that a national theatre should consist of one play at a time, produced with the

finest talent you could find, the best director that would give six months or a year to the project, the best possible play, either a classic or a modern play. That with a cast, whatever cast was required, get the very best people you could who would commit themselves to, not their lifetime but to one year, six months, whatever. Not have a building at first, jus have a company. Do this play, play it all over the country for a year, billed as the National Theatre, eventually maybe get headquarters. But she

said you would have representation--after 10 years you would have had maybe four or five hundred actors involved who had committed themselves for shorter periods, which she said was only possible because the best actors simply would not give up the films and so forth except for like

Olivier, they do in England. They allocate a certain amount of time. Albert

Finney now is allocating more to the theatre, I guess, than to films. But the dedication is in both areas. And she said that the idea of a national repertory company was a will-o'-the-wisp that could never be accomplished, you know, maybe in 200 years. And they said, "Well, they do it in Europe."

And she said, "Yes, but we don't have the background." Now this was 1970 when she talked about this. But it's so modern in her thoughts that--so I guess I've been influenced by that because it's on my mind now. And I

know Joe Papp has talked about his ideas about a national theatre. I mean, it's a possibility, but I think there are alternatives and I think maybe this idea of hers would be fantastic.

LB: It's a very interesting one, isn't it? It's a very interesting concept. DC: Yes, and the basis maybe for maybe it would accomplish what she said was impossible to accomplish, which would be a repertory company eventually.

But by the time 10 years had passed, you would have had say, 10 top directors

who could say, "I directed for the National Theatre." It would give the Federal Government, whatever subsidy they put in, what they would get out of it would be the reputation of the fact that they were producing one beautifully produced and acted and directed play each year; that the people in Seattle could count on this company, whatever it was, the best possible company, not a second-rate company coming in and a road company, that they would get exactly or better than New York had gotten.

That's another thing she used to say. She said, "I used to go out--" She said, "New York is just another whistle stop." She said, "I'm out on the

road--" she played on the road a lot. She said, "When I'm out on the road and I see another play that's advertised as the original company, I say, 'What, they have made no improvements on it since it left New York? It's the same thing that they had there?'" She believed like the Lunts, you know,

you rehearsed on the last day of the play. And I saw the Lunts do that. The last play that they ever did and probably ever will do, because he's blind now, you know; I saw them rehearsing on the last day in their dressing room.

LB: That's the real professional.

DC: I didn't believe it because I had read this stuff about them, you know.

LB: Well, that sounds like a good idea. And I know your own career, looking you up in Who's Who, recognized what a variety of theatrical experiences you've had. And one thing about California, you realize that you can go into television, you can go into film, you can do all kinds of things.

DC: That's true. Well now, with my writing, I'm in a position--you see, I've had a play produced at the Milwaukee Rep, and I've made some money out of it. I'm a professional writer now. So, you know, I don't know when the last one will be produced. Joe Papp says--he's read my stuff. He's recommended the first play, the one that was done at Milwaukee, to the Royal Court. They're

reading it now. So, you know, I may have a career and it was started--you see, I've tried to write plays all my life, but I've never been able to

finish one. And I met this old sea captain, 88 years old, who had written his life story and I got a magazine article published on the material. And

then I was going to do, just rewrite his--and he died just short of 90 and

I am so full of the material, talking about his family back in 1900. He ran away from home and joined the British Navy and deserted the British Navy, came over here under an assumed name. And so I just decided to write it as

an exercise. And through advice from Hume Cronyn and Will Geer and other people, I presented it to the regional theatres and I got it produced. And

I couldn't believe it, that it actually happened. I was talking to Joanne Woodward at a party at her house recently and I was telling her about this. She said, "Oh, you've given me such a lift because I have written a screenplay.

And to actually write something and get it on." And she said, "You did it when you were 63 years old?"

I said, "Yes, that's right."

She said, "Well, you know—" she's not quite 63 yet. (Laugh) She's going to see me in the fall when she gets back.

LB: I think everybody is looking for that kind of hope, that one can, with talent, move from career to career and really be as creative. And that age is really not important in creativity.

DC: No, it isn't. That's what Will was--on the hearing recently with Colonel Sanders.

LB: No, I don't know.

DC: They were at a Congressional hearing on the mandatory retirement thing, you know, at 65. And Sanders said, "Why, I didn't do anything until I was 65."

(Laugh) And then Will was on; he's 75 years old and making more money than he ever made in his life, \$300,000 a year.

LB: Yes, a tremendous actor.

DC: I remember when Will was blacklisted. He came and lived in my house.

He had a farm that he was trying to sell, but he was really broke then. For several years he didn't work at all. It was partly because he had been in The Cradle Will Rock and a few other things, you know, that they called him.

LB: Federal Theatre was obviously closed for political reasons.

DC: Yes.

LB: A fair statement?

DC: I think so. They said it was costing less than one battleship would cost. LB: What a marvelous time.

DC: It was a very creative time and a marvelous time. You know, you just forget about all the hardships that you had at that period. I figured it up when L-- when L went into the service in 1942, I'd been in the theatre for 13 years.

And I sat down and figured up how much I'd averaged per week. You'd never guess: \$13 a week, for 13 years. I said, "13, 13, that's it." And it's 'all

been uphill since then, of course, because I got through the war without a scratch. Everybody in my outfit was either wounded or had dengue or malaria.

And I just feel like I was, you know, reborn, as they say, reborn like the President, President Carter. (Laugh)

LB: The spirit is there. That's what really counts.

DC: And now L have what L think is reasonably good health and I'll be 69 next month. And I just, you know, I'm beginning to live. My two daughters are pretty well grown and my wife is successful, a teacher of speech at NYU (New York University), and also an actress who hasn't been able to act as much as

she'd like to. And that's one reason I've written this thing. I see

in Variety today that Joe Papp is starting a cabaret and he's wanting material.

He said that he was going to read everything I've written. He's already read two things that I'd written before, so I've sure I'll get a hearing on this new thing. And they don't want anything more than 90 minutes. It's a very experimental cabaret kind of--there are going to be no restrictions on

material at all. So I think L can--when my wife gets this thing in shape. She's getting a young director from NYU Programs. She teaches in the director program. And she's getting a young actor. She only needs one actor and one director, and I told her I'd stand on the side and supervise it. And L

think Joe will probably put it on.

LB: Oh, that's wonderful!

DC: So that'll be exciting.

LB: I certainly wish you all the best.

DC: Thank you. I haven't been back to New York for over a year. We live in New York, you know.

LB: L think we just missed you, as a matter of fact, missed interviewing you.

DC: Yes. L came out here just to spend the summer with my daughters and my wife as a vacation. And in September when she had to go back, I got a job at Metro

with Danny Mann, just a short job on How the West Was Won. And I realized that L could probably get my Screen Actors' Guild pension if I stayed out here, and L did. L needed one more year. So I got my Screen Actors' Guild pension and my wife came out for Christmas. Now she can come out six months a year and L may be living out here now. L don't know.

LB: Isn't that exciting!

DC: It's fantastic, although I do kind of miss New York, even with all the trouble they're having. I just read about that blackout.

LB: That's something. Oh, I tell you! Well, I want to talk to you further, but do you have any--is there anything about the Federal Theatre that I haven't asked you about that you would like to put on the tape? I think we've covered an awful lot.

DC: I don't know of anything. The highlights, of course, were with the Welles, experience with the Welles project. And I guess I was with that for less than a year. I did get the job and was out--when did the Federal Theatre close up?

LB: In 1939, in June, the end of June.

DC: 1939?

LB: Yes.

DC: You see; I went into Abe Lincoln in Illinois in the fall of 1938. We went into rehearsal in September and opened in New York. We had a tryout and

then we opened, I think, in October of 1938. And then in the fall of 1939 we went on the road. So I was just finishing up the New York run.

No, we

played through the summer, that's right. Richard Gaines replaced Massey, and Massey came out here and did the film with Howard da Silva and Herbert Rudley,

I think. They were both in it. So I was in Abe Lincoln at the time that the Federal Theatre folded up.

LB: Watched the old friend go down, yes.

DC: Yes, watched the ship go down.

LB: It was very sad. Well, on behalf of everyone at the Research Center, I thank you very much.

(End of Interview)