0.00 (There are some words at the head of the recording which do not form part of the interview).

This is Felicity Morgan interviewing Mr Chris Winzar on 9th October, 2007 at the office of the Don Dunstan Foundation in Adelaide about his employment in the Arts Development Branch during Don Dunstan’s premiership.

This recording is being made for the Don Dunstan Foundation Oral History Project and will be deposited in the Flinders University Library, Don Dunstan Special Collection, and in the State Library of South Australia.

In attendance at this recording is Mr George Lewkowicz, Executive Director of the Don Dunstan Foundation.

0.37 Good morning Chris, and thank you very much for taking time to do this interview.

Thank you for asking me.

0.42 Good. Now perhaps I could start by asking you a little bit about yourself, (Clang on the tape), your background and your experience in the arts before you joined the Don Dunstan arts team?

Well, I’ve been in the arts all my working life. I started, I guess, in the ABC back in 1960 and I did almost five years with the ABC in Adelaide. I worked in radio. I worked first of all as a dispatch rider in the ABC radio area in Football House in Hindmarsh Square. Then when television started in this state I was promoted to floor manager and went out to Collinswood to an old crumbling mansion called Tregenna, where the ABC had its studios and worked there as a floor manager, and nobody knew anything about television so it was sort of learning as we went along. I was involved in amateur arts. I was involved with the Adelaide University Dramatic Society; the Masquers, which was an offshoot of that; the Elizabeth Repertory Company and a few other odds and sods. I thought myself a bit of an actor so I took the audition for NIDA and was admitted to NIDA in 1965 and after that I graduated two years later and did an Elizabethan Theatre Trust tour of New South Wales, southern Queensland and northern Victoria. Then I went across to Western Australia and worked for two years, almost, with the National Theatre of Western Australia, which was a government subsidised theatre, one of the first, and worked with various English directors – notably Edgar Metcalf, Barry Gordon – names of which are probably not heard of these days, but in those days were considered to be the people to work for in Australia. Then I did a ground-breaking, literally, of the north west of Western Australia in an old WAGR bus and we did three plays: two for schools and one at night for adults which was a play by Peter Shaffer [The Private Ear & The Public Eye]. We did that for nine months and then I left at the end of my contract and travelled to Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Burma, then, and India and worked for the British Council presenting an anthology of Australian music and literature with a guy called Barry Underwood, who’s still around – an actor from NIDA – and we directed various plays in India. Then, we got to India, and I worked for the National India, the Indian National Theatre.
Came back to Adelaide in about 1969 and renewed my acquaintance with Don at that time. I'd first met Don in 1962 and that was under rather strange circumstances in that, being a member of the Adelaide University Repertory Company, or AUDS, Adelaide University Dramatic Society, and Masquers, we used to gather for convivial parties, because it was 6 o'clock closing in those days, at someone's house in Gilbert Street, an actor called John Adams. He lived next door to the president of the RSL, and we were all communists in those days, or we pretended we were (Interviewer laughs). It was all Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, existentialism, and reading Dylan Thomas at midnight at Victor Harbour and all that sort of stuff, which everybody did, going to the British Hotel and buying booze and going back to John Adams’ place and having a jolly good time. And we used to sing the Internationale (Laughter) when we all got nice and merry and the RSL guy next door, he thought it was the Horst Wessel’s song! So he called the police one day and everybody was arrested save me – I scampered over the back fence – and Don Dunstan came into my life then because they were arrested, and a copy of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx, which was immediately pounced on as Nazi literature, was seized by the vice squad…

5.55 …from inside the house?

From inside the house, and there were all these women’s dresses hanging up because John lived with another lady, and they thought that he was a drag queen, so they arrested him as well (Interviewer laughs). And then someone had the bright idea that the member for Norwood, who was also a lawyer, might be the best person to put their case. So, before the hearing at the magistrate’s court we actually caught up with Don, and he had been a member of AUDS, and that was when I first met him....

6.30… AUDS, the?

Adelaide University Dramatic Society, that was my first encounter, and there were a few others between then and when I went to NIDA.

6.40 We might come back to those personal reminiscences a bit later…

OK. Sure.

6.45…but the party that was raided by the police, you’re talking 196?

1962

6.52 OK, and of course Don was a young...

A young member for Norwood in those days, I think he went into parliament in 1956 or something like that. He was member for Norwood and also I think he was part of a law firm. I had seen him when I worked for the ABC and spoken to him several times when he did acting, radio acting, for various dramas.

7.17 So it was a serendipitous meeting even though under rather peculiar circumstances?

Yes it was. So, that’s my background in a nutshell. So when I came back in 1969 I went into Theatre 62 with John Edmund and we got Theatre 62 off the ground as a
subsidised theatre, and that was under Dunstan, Dunstan's government. I met Don again many times during that period and in 1975, 76 he suggested I come in to the Arts Development Branch, as it was then, of the Premier’s Department, which was shared at that time with Tourism, and Len Amadio was the officer in control of that. I was appointed as senior project officer in 1976, and I remained in the Arts Development Division... first of all the Arts Development Branch, then the Arts Development Division, then the Arts Development Division of the Department of Community Development under Minister Bannon, then he lost, Corcoran lost, government, and the Liberals came in and it was transferred into a Department, a fully fledged Department...

8.34 Right, OK

And I remained there until 1988 and quit because I felt I'd been there too long, and I had some difficulty working with Bannon at the time, so I thought the world's my oyster, as it turned out it wasn't, but never mind. (laughs)

8.54 Perhaps that's another story

That's another story, yes

8.56 So, it was Don that personally invited you to join?

He suggested I applied. He was always very careful with the way he phrased it. That was followed up by a suggestion from Len Amadio that I apply for the position as senior project officer, and then he [Len] sent a friend, a mutual friend of ours, who worked in the Department, David Brown, who now runs a fashion business in Milan, to see me and said, “Look, you know, you’d better apply for it.” And I said I really wasn't interested in bureaucracy, and he said “No, it's not like that at all”. So I did apply for it; there was no interview, and I got the job. So. I mean in those days they were different times, and HR was unknown, and Don just picked the person he wanted to fill a job, and we followed public service regulations to the extent only that it was advertised and I did a written application.

9.56 Right. And you initially didn’t find the idea very attractive, but once you got there what was your reaction?

I thought well, I'm a doer, a hands-on person. I had previously spent some time in Glyndebourne, which I neglected to say in my, in the beginning of this, doing an assistant directorship - that sounds very grand, but there were about four of us, under Sir Peter Hall, and we did the ultimate Don Giovanni. And I was working at the State Opera before it was called the State Opera, it was called Intimate Opera, and then it became New Opera and I worked for it in those periods. Worked for Theatre 62; did a film about Daisy Bates, and thought, well, this is what I want to do – hands-on directing or acting and let's leave it at that; I've got a NIDA diploma, which has since been turned into a degree, and I don't really want to get involved with the pencil pushers. But David and Len, David Brown and Len [Amadio] assured me it wasn't about that; it was about breaking new ground. And Don said to me “Well, why don't you stay for two years?” And I said “OK, I'll give it a go.” And I did. I stayed until it became tedious, and it was...

11.30 A lot longer than two years!?
A lot longer than two years and it was very, very exciting in the first instance.

11.36 Was there a....How many people were engaged in the Department, the Branch, at that stage?

There was Len Amadio, myself as senior project officer; a lady called Caroline Rankin who looked after visual arts and stuff like that; David Brown who was a sort of general dogsbody; a couple of clerks and that was about it. We had established, at that stage, an Arts Grants Advisory Committee, and that looked at small grant applications and it really didn’t have much to do with policy; it was all about small funding. When I got into the Department I found that I could do just about anything I liked because it was a clean slate. So we decided to look at regional arts, which was very important, because Don had set up the Festival Theatre and the State Theatre Company and eventually the State Opera and people in the regions were saying “Well, what about us?”

12.50 What about us, yes. Just hold it there for a minute because I wanted to ask you – when you said it was a clean slate, I presume you mean you and your little team, Len and the other people you’ve mentioned. Had there been any sort of strategic vision laid out for the arts earlier in Don Dunstan’s premiership? Did you have a blueprint about how you were going to develop the arts during that time?

No. I thought you’d ask that question because strangely enough we didn’t. We knew vaguely, vaguely or we interpreted what Don wanted, but there wasn’t the sort of day-to-day meeting with Don and Len and myself and others that you would expect; that didn’t happen. If I got anything out of Don in those days it was from extra curricular meetings outside of work, at his home, firstly in George Street and later in Clara Street in Norwood, and some of the ideas that we got from Don we actually put into practice, but there wasn’t any blueprint. The blueprint was, perhaps, that Don wanted the Festival Theatre; he wanted a film corporation; he wanted eventually, and I think he was persuaded he wanted, an opera company; he certainly wanted the State Theatre Company and there had been many occasions when he’d discussed this with Colin Ballantyne. Colin was very much the man of the theatre in Adelaide at that time, and I was privy to those discussions, which were completely outside the office, usually at Don’s house. Those were the sorts of things he wanted. He wanted excellence in everything. It would be very, very difficult to translate his style in the seventies into 2007 - it would be extremely difficult.

15.07 Yes, I’ve suspected that that’s the case.

The public service kicked up against all this sort of thing, and Treasury particularly, and there were a lot of battles between Dunstan’s Department – the Arts Development Branch, then Division - and Treasury and other petty officials, or which I considered petty officials, pooh-bahs within the public service system. So, there wasn’t a blueprint. Len Amadio I suppose was the single catalyst to implement all this, basically. Len Amadio did enormous service to this state and a lot of it is unsung. Because he was able to translate what Don wanted into reality, and I was on Len Amadio’s coat tails and was able to do things that I thought were good, and would bounce them off Len, and, if the opportunity arose, bounce them off Don privately. But there was no blueprint.
16.15 But, okay without the blueprint, and you’re saying you were on Len Amadio’s coat tails, you did work as a team?…..

Absolutely

…but in a tight little group?

Very much so

16.27 So were the ideas then, coming, if you like, down from Don, through Len and then they were implemented, or initiated and commenced in whatever way…

That should be the way, yes

Was that not the case?

It wasn’t entirely the case. Some of it was by osmosis – that we sort of knew what Don wanted - and a lot of the big decisions were, of course, run past Don, and a lot of them had to go to Cabinet, and he was the Minister [responsible for the Arts] and Premier responsible for putting them before Cabinet, but in my view and in my remembrance of it, there was no structure to the way things occurred. Len and Don had many private conversations when Len started up the Arts Development Branch and Tourism – they were linked at the beginning….

17.21 That was back at the beginning of Don’s premiership in 1970 wasn’t it?

Yes. And Len was working for the ABC as a concertmaster, and he and Don hit it off, and Peter Ward was in the picture in those days and Colin Ballantyne very much so. So there was an exchange of ideas and that’s more or less how it happened. And it was a great team because we knew, almost instinctively, what…and this is difficult and perhaps I’ll come to that later, about Don’s communication style. But there was a tremendous team spirit and I think that was due to the fact that we were small, but with a huge agenda, much bigger than the Arts Department now would have, or Arts SA now would have: it was an agenda that saw the building of the Festival Centre; an agenda that saw a myriad of cultural change and it was change at a very rapid pace that we achieved.

18.39 Quite a lot of the high profile changes had in fact taken place prior to your arrival in the Branch. Did you replace somebody else?

No, no, it was a new position

18.41 How was it then seen necessary to put a senior project officer on when so many big changes had already happened without one, if you follow what I mean?

Yes I do. Um, I was privy on the sidelines to some of those big changes, because of my friendship with Don, and to a lesser extent with Len, because Len and I really didn’t begin our friendship until I joined the Branch. They wanted, I believe, they wanted a person who could look after the theatre side of things and then that sort of, by some sort of chemical change, changed to somebody who could also do youth performing arts, youth arts, community arts, community theatre, fringe, regional arts, regional arts
development and so on. And gradually the position grew from senior project officer entirely looking at the theatre side. Caroline, the other officer, was looking at the visual arts, and later we were joined by a music project officer, Steven Block, but Len, of course, had all those skills in music. And my position grew like topsy and then the position changed when we became a Department. Len became director of the Department, I took over Len’s job as director of Arts Development Division and then we had a very clear blueprint of what my role was.

20.24 That was way after Don had left?

Way after Don had left. But initially, I guess, I was brought in to add some more things to the meld.

20.35 I was going to ask you a bit further on a question about whether or not there was a change over time in the focus of what the Development Branch did. And my question was, which you partly answered, but I’d still like to ask, if you don’t mind, the way Don Dunstan approached the arts. His initial approach, I would think I’d be right in saying, was more geared towards the ‘high’ arts: the opera, drama, classical music and getting a venue for those in the Festival Centre, and when he [the Arts Development Branch] moved into the community, to get involved in everything from visual arts to popular music, libraries to children’s theatre, arts education to museums. Am I right in thinking that community aspect, that regional and community aspect came after those high art things were developed?

Yes, and certainly I think it came during the period when I became senior project officer. And having said that, I don’t claim to have… I was just an initiator. I don’t claim to be solely the perpetrator in those great things that happened in those areas you’ve just described. No, those came after my time. When I came in there was the high arts: there was the Festival Centre, the Film Corporation. The Opera had not become a statuary body yet, though funding was gradually going into Intimate Opera and then it became New Opera, and Justin McDonnell was one of the great catalysts also in that change, and Justin joined the group of us, not as a paid employee, but he was at Flinders with Wal Cherry, and he came in and talked to Len and talked to myself about changing the New Opera South Australia. We were doing new opera works, meaning a lot of Australian works, as well as a lot of contemporary, British opera. His vision was eventually to have a statuary authority in the same way as the State Theatre Company, and that became State Opera of South Australia. And I did the first production of *La Boheme* during that change-over, at her Majesty’s Theatre.

23.12 Oh, okay. Uh, such a lot was happening at that time!

Absolutely. You couldn’t catch your breath! It was working round the clock and loving it, and it was all exciting, and a tremendous sense of we were doing something, and all the good press we got nationally, locally and internationally was grist to our mill, you know.

23.42 And you were working in myriad different areas at the same time. Was it Len who was responsible – who was responsible for prioritising?

Len was responsible for prioritising that sort of thing. And he did it instinctively I guess.
Don was the creator of the climate in which these things could grow. Don had got what he wanted, I believe, and that was all those major things in place. Don, I think basically, after 1976, the government and Don came under pressure for all sorts of other reasons aside from his portfolios of either Premier or Minister for the Arts; there were all sorts of things in the wind, such as books, rumours, the Salisbury Affair. He was very distracted about all those things, so virtually we were able to interpret and grow the seeds of all those things you described like community arts, regional theatres and so on, from the fertile ground that had been there, that he had created.

25.00 And up until '76 I presume Len had had a pretty direct contact all the time with Don?

Yes

And a great interchange of ideas?

Er, yes, yes. But Don was eclectic with his ideas; it was a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend (Interviewer laughs) with Don around the dinner table. He would have guests that he would invite from various sectors of the arts – people like Rudolph Nureyev, Bobby Helpmann or people like that. And I was at a number of those lunches or dinners in which ideas and discussion emanated about “We should be doing this, or we should be doing that”, but there was no fixed agenda you know, it just came out. And Don was very much, wanted to be, the ‘renaissance man.’ He did want to be remembered, as he rightly is, as that type of person, a Medici that controlled all these things. But you’re right, there was really looking back on it, I can’t say that there were blueprints or fixed lines of communication, and of course, Len handled all this superbly as only Len could. The problem was, for all of us, after ten years of this we all got burnt out, Len as well as myself.

26.41 One question that I’m interested to know. Did Don ever change his mind? Was he gung-ho about projects or about particular things and then back-tracked because he changed his own mind, or other people changed his mind. Do you recall if that happened at all?

Not much. No, I don’t recall any significant incidences. He found the concept of community arts, community theatre ( Interruption by interviewer asking Mr Winzar to turn towards the microphone). He found the concept of community arts, community theatre not quite to his liking, but he recognised the trend. There was a relationship between our Department, our Division, and the Australia Council when it came to the development of community theatre, particularly through local government. And Don, in my view, found that slightly beyond the pale, but nevertheless I think he supported it. Don was always a person who wanted great excellence and he was unashamedly elitist, and that is something that has disappeared again from the arts because we needed that sort of elitist attitude, elitist manner, we needed the ‘Anthony Steels’ who were absolutely elitist and why not? Anthony did a tremendous job, and our Festivals, our Festival Centre, is so well known because of the work that he did. And John Morris at the Film Corporation would be the same type of person.

28.27 And for Don you’re suggesting that community arts somehow smacked of amateurism, or not quite the high excellence...?
…Not quite what he had in mind if he was going to be the Medici!!

28.41 (Laughter) Yea

You see Don was like a Babushka, a Russian doll: you saw this figure, wooden figure of Don and everybody said “Oh, that’s Don”, but when you approached it and opened it up there was another one inside (laughs) and then you said “Okay, well he’s really that and that” and then you opened another one and yet there was another one inside. Don, in my view was... he terrified a lot of people, because sometimes at meetings, and I remember well Anthony Steel saying “Well, he didn’t say very much” or “He was very uncommunicative.” He terrified a lot of people because he had this amazing charisma and presence and being alone in a room with him was the terror of most public servants, because he created this aura of “I’m here, I’m Lorenzo the Magnificent and you are just one of the painters!” (Interviewer laughs). And he created this aura which was very useful for him because a lot of the time people said “Is he always like that?” And I would say “Yes, yes, that’s Don. He doesn’t give much away.” I remember Anthony saying to Len and myself “God, we didn’t get very far, did we?” And Len would make reassuring noises. But Don took it all in: panning for gold he would take the nuggets out of the dross. But Don deliberately cultivated that charisma, and I often felt, and I mentioned it to Don once and just got a wry smile. I said “Don, you’re actually playing this role because you really don’t know (laughs) anything about what the person in front of you is talking about, do you?” And he just gave a wry smile.

30.47 Was it haughty though, this [manner], standing back?

Oh no. He was ultra polite. He wasn’t haughty. He made you feel comfortable then immediately made you feel uncomfortable! (Interviewer laughs). So he had this aura that people would be terrified of, and because I’d had a glimpse of Don in his early days I wasn’t quite as intimidated as a lot of people were. I remember a ‘Heads Meeting’ (We called it a ‘Heads Meeting’ of all the directors of the Divisions in the Department, the Premier’s Department), and there was something scurrilous in the newspaper. The meeting was in progress being chaired by Bob Bakewell, I think, who was head of the Premier’s Department. Len was there, I was there for some reason, and I remember that Don burst into the room and everybody kept quiet, and he slapped the paper down on the table, the board table, and said “I don’t ever want this repeated again.” And went out and everybody was terrified. He had the ability to scare the bejesus out of you. That was just one of the Russian dolls.

32.08 So he wasn’t a haughty man, and whilst he made you feel comfortable, he wasn’t a close man, he didn’t get close?

No, he gave nothing away, and…

32.21 But was he an angry man? Did he get angry?

Yes, oh yes.

32.25 I mean with an instance like the bad newspaper report?

Oh yes, he was terribly angry, white with [anger]
32.31 And in the case of, for instance, if he didn’t approve of something you and Len had done would he get angry, do you know?

Yes.

He would?

Yes, he would assume being angry, but that was just one of his personas. He was a man with a multitude of facets, like my analogy of the babushka, the Russian doll. He used that, I think, also as a safety mechanism for himself. I mean, don’t forget he was a man that, in the latter years I worked with him, the latter years of his premiership, he was under enormous stress from outside influences - you know all about those so I won’t dwell on that. It was one of the ways that he coped with things and he was reluctant to show anybody his various other facets. And that even went down to the construction of his house in Clara Street, because he decided that he would….and I think he got the idea from when he went to…we had a relationship with Penang as a sister city….

33.42 I was going to ask you about that, yes.

….I think he got that idea from visiting various Chinese houses, where the business of the merchant was done in the first two rooms and then you crossed into the family area. And if you’ve ever been to Clara Street you’ll note the first two rooms were an office and a library and then there was a big wooden sliding door, which is still there today, through which no-one, unless they were invited, could ever get through. And that epitomises, in my view, how Don was. He kept everything in one box: that was my Premier’s bit; that was interviewing public servants area at home. Beyond this was another set-up…

34.27 That was his private [area]

…this was another version of Don, and then there was the garden, and that was again another version of Don.

Interesting.

He had so many different roles it was very difficult. That’s why I really laughed when I saw this thing in the paper about Rob George doing a play about Don. I thought “How would you know about Don, because I can’t claim to know all about Don.” I know a lot more than probably many people who encountered him on just one aspect of business, because I was fortunate, like Len, to be able to go into the other side of his life.

35.13 You were allowed in beyond the big door?

Yes. And my partner built up a friendship, close friendship, with Adele, and she and he were as thick as thieves, so Don actually used to come to my place at Torrensville, and we would eat lunch – my partner would cook it – Chinese – and he and Adele knew each other through other connections and we all got on famously, and that was another side of Don. He always made sure that he knew who was coming. He’d say “Who else are you inviting?” And I would say “Such and such”. And if I said I’d invite Len or somebody else from the Division, he would say “No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.” (Subsequent clarification by Interviewee: Don didn’t feel relaxed if we invited anyone from the Arts
Division, as he felt the occasion would be given over to work issues or lobbying over projects.)

35.56 So he wanted to keep his business and his private life very much separate?

And yet he would sometimes ask Len for dinner and so on. It was an enigma.

36.08 Yes. Just getting back to the Arts Development Branch, you’ve told me that Don took his ideas from all sorts of private and public areas, perhaps other countries as well, other states, looking at what was going on in other places. And all that builds up a picture of the sort of man he was. He also set up a lot of boards and committees and funding bodies, and you mentioned, the Arts Grants Advisory Committee. But before you came along there were other boards, committees and funding agencies. He’s been somewhat criticised I believe, at the time, that the committees and boards were rather amateur and didn’t perform their roles very well. Can you explain how those appointments were made and if that sort of criticism is actually true?

Those appointments were made by Don himself, sometimes with the advice of Len. The appointments were made, I think certain people fitted certain roles. Like for instance with the Arts Grants Advisory Committee he appointed Elizabeth Silsbury, and she provided a great input into that. She’s a music critic and music professor, or whatever, and you would know her, and yet he would appoint a public servant from the Education Department because he wanted some sort of representation. But I don’t think...he didn’t give those boards or committees very much say in the wider picture, in my view. I mean others might think differently. They [the boards and committees] were there to sort out the wheat from the chaff in very small matters, such as funding some sort of theatre project, or funding, for instance, me to go to Glyndebourne, which they did. That sort of thing.

38.30 What about the Trust of the Festival Centre?

The Festival Trust. Again, David Wynn was an ideal choice as, I think he was, the founding chairman. No, John Bishop and then David Wynn came in.

John Baily

John Baily, that’s right. He [Don Dunstan] picked people within the community that would satisfy the establishment as well. Don’t forget he appointed Ruby, Dame Ruby [Litchfield], and she was a tireless worker, but didn’t know Shakespeare from, Shakespeare from (Chuckles) whatever! She was a person who had a natural ability to be able to raise money and a person that was great on a committee because she could do that, but also she was a bit of a sop to the establishment, though she did a tremendous job when she took over the Youth Performing Arts. But he [Don Dunstan] did a lot of that, I think basically to appease certain persons in the establishment and I think that’s why those boards and committees perhaps came in for criticism.

39.54 Yes, which may or may not, in fact have been justified, or maybe there was some jealousy involved?
Well don’t forget we were all learning on the job and I mean, in hindsight, of course those committees weren’t constructed correctly from the position of 2007. What on earth would that person know about the particular subject or the particular board he was on or she was on? That wasn’t at the time considered as important as putting the person there who represented a sector of the community. Like for instance when we did the Regional Theatre Trusts I can remember on the board of the Whyalla Regional Theatre, which became the Eyre Peninsular Regional Theatre Trust, there had to be a union member because Whyalla was a union city. And there had to be a member of the Adelaide establishment on the Festival Centre [Trust]. It was all about weighing up those political niceties.

41.02 I was going to say, he had his eye on the political agenda.

Absolutely. Well he knew that he faced enormous criticism through the cost of all these innovations and young Turks, like Dean Brown, would get up on their feet and rant and rave in parliament about the cost of everything, which the opposition did.

41.25 Indeed. Talking of costs: two areas that might have raised the ire of the opposition – can you speak briefly about both multicultural arts and aboriginal arts? Did they feature in your time and in Don’s time in the Branch?

They featured. Aboriginal arts featured only to the extent of the political agenda that Don had with the Pitjantjatjara people and the Andyamathanha people about land rights. Certainly he - and I’m trying to remember the name of the collection - um, it was a collection of aboriginal artefacts. It was very, very important, that had been - it’s on the tip of my tongue…

42.21 Collected by a white man?

A white anthropologist – [TGH] Strehlow – yes. That collection was acquired under sort of acrimonious circumstances and then placed in the museum, in the vaults as it turned out. The museum wasn’t then part of the Department. But those sorts of areas - aboriginal arts - didn’t really become an issue with me until the Bannon government decided it should do something about aboriginal arts and I did a consultancy for the Department and set up an Aboriginal Arts Committee.

43.01 That was well after Don.

That was well after Don. The other one…

43.07 Multicultural arts?

Multiculturism. Really, yes, Don encouraged multiculturalism to the extent that we funded the Italian Festival and that sort of thing, but it was always at the ‘high’ end. The Italian Festivals at the beginning were tremendously high art. They aren’t now, if they still exist.

43.32 Importing Italian opera companies and that sort of thing?

Yes! Multiculturism really didn’t flourish until Murray Hill. Murray Hill. I would give the credit to Murray, and it’s a credit he’s never received publicly, and his assistant Di[ana]
Laidlaw, who then went on to be minister. I remember Murray saying to me “This is an area that we’ve got to look at”. Murray was much more approachable than Don, and, shock, horror, he was a Liberal, but it didn’t matter. He really took the ball up that Don had left him with and ran much more so than Bannon did.

44.22 Is that right. Interesting.

Yes, interesting that Murray Hill set up, with Bruno Krumins, the Ethnic Affairs Committee and the Ethnic Affairs Trust. (Clears throat). For Don, he didn’t go into any great depth with that, in my view.

44.43 Although of course he was a great party giver, or his supporters were, to the Greek and Italian communities in Norwood.

Oh absolutely. I can remember at the opening of the Festival Centre when Whitlam boomed away his opening on stage and Don was there, and after the opening we were all gathered having drinks, and Don said “Let’s get out of here” and we all went down to Franklin Street and joined a Greek dance with the Greek community and he was greeted with great shrieks, and he did the Zorba dance. And yes, he had a lot of Greek friends; he had a lot of Italian friends. He was fascinated by their culture, particularly as it applied to food. He bottled his own olives under recipes that he, and I’ve still got one bottle (Laughs), that he’d got from the Greek or Italian community. He knew how to get, where the best olive oil was; he knew how to make mama’s type of pasta (Interviewer laughs). He was good at this, he embraced that.

45.53 He was certainly a man for all seasons, wasn’t he?

Yes Indeed.

46.00 Now, you touched on the Penang initiative a few minutes ago. It’s a good example of Don being ahead of his time in a way, and it’s appropriate to talk about this because we’re just now having the first Oz-Asia Festival at the Festival Centre. The initiative that Don Dunstan was involved in was a cultural exchange programme - was it called *Adelaide in Penang: Penang in Adelaide*? Did you have something to do with it?

Yes. I had a lot to do with it.

Right. Maybe you’d like to describe it to us?

1972 I think we had a representation from Penang who came down to Adelaide to show off some of their cultural things, and that was very much in conjunction with the Adelaide City Council and also with the Penang Development Corporation. The people that were responsible for the relationship in the beginning were Don and Bob Bakewell. Don had visited Penang in 1972 also, and he’d met with a kindred spirit in Lim Chong Eu – nothing to do with the Lim in Singapore – Lim Chong Eu, um…

He was Lee Kwan Yu

Lee Kwan Yu was in Singapore. Lim Chong Eu was....
Nothing to do with Lee Kwan Yu?

No. No. Same Hokkein name. Lim Chong Eu and Don… I was in Penang at that time because I went there quite often and I was quite good friends with the man who went on to be the general manager of the Penang Development Corporation, a man called dato, which means sir, a knighthood in other words, Dato Chet Singh, who was a Sikh, and he was the man with a great sense of what great things could be done in Penang, because Penang was a sleepy hollow, and Lim Chong Eu had established that development corporation in order that he could promote Penang as more than just a tourist destination. So, Dato Chet Singh and I were quite good friends, and he’s got some relatives still in Adelaide, but I don’t know whether he’s still alive. And Lim Chong Eu lived in the house that was where the chief ministers lived in Penang, so he was elected, [but] he wasn’t part of [the Alliance Party]. He was the opposition to the Alliance Party, which is Mahathir and his predecessors – that was the Alliance Party in Malaysia. Penang was predominantly Chinese so it was a different party. I think it was… no, I can’t remember the name of the party.

49.30 Who initiated the exchange?

Both of them. Don found he had a lot in common with Lim Chong Eu; Adele was related to a lot of very important people in Penang, although she came from Kedah, which is a north Malaysian state. Don was also influenced, and not many people know this, Don was influenced to an enormous extent by Lim Chong Eu’s brother. Lim Chong Eu’s brother was Dato Lim Chong Keat. Now Lim Chong Keat was the archetypal eccentric: he lived in a crumbling mansion near Gurney Drive in Penang and he had several interests – he was very wealthy – and he had a lot of interests; the first of which was biology. He was interested in native plants that were dying out in Malaysia and Indonesia. He was interested in Malay, Javanese culture, and he was a great collector if items that would simply have disappeared. And he maintained – it was a two-storey house – he maintained on the top storey a museum of all these sorts of Malay things from the old Malay states……

50.57 Artefacts

Artefacts - things from Java, from the sultanates of Java. He also maintained a group of very handsome young men who played the gamelan and did fetching and taking, most of whom were either Malay or Javanese.

51.13 So it was a kind of personalised cultural centre?

Yes. And on the top of that he did a lot of… he engaged a lot of people, like botanists and so on, charged with preserving things like native orchids and so on. And in the middle of the great hall downstairs was an air conditioned room, completely surrounded on three sides by glass. And he was so fond of western music that he used to have concerts, and some of those Chinese pianists that had made their name in London would come to play. I was present at one concert where one of the Chinese pianists, [the one] that wrote the score and played the score for Pride and Prejudice, I can’t remember his name, played. You know the BBC series?

52.08 Uh-uh
And Lim Chong Keat – Don was absolutely fascinated by this guy!

52.14  He was there when you were in attendance at this concert, Don and his wife, Adele, were there?

Yes, Don was there. Adele I don’t think had married Don at that stage.

52.25  Oh, okay, So…

Steve Wright [Don Dunstan’s private secretary] was there, I think, Bob Bakewell was there, Chet Singh was there, Lim Chong Eu was there for a while [although] he wasn’t interested; he thought his brother was completely mad. (Chuckles). But for Don, this image of the eccentric, the Medici -which Lim Chong Keat pervaded with all this set up of total eccentricity – [it was] something out of Somerset Maugham! It just intrigued Don, and I think that to a certain extent he copied a lot of his lifestyle.

53.08  I wondered if you were going to say that. And you think the house in Norwood might have been a sort of small version?

Yes. We all got a great lecture from someone, I can’t remember if it was Lim Chong Keat, about feng shui and the importance of placing the building in a certain spot. And I know that Don went to some pains, although he didn’t say much about it, to ensure that it followed the tradition of a Chinese mansion where all the business by the merchant was done in front. He visited the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion in Penang, which is still there and has been wonderfully restored, and saw that, Lim Chong Keat took him to see that, and he became so enamoured with the Penang relationship and based on the very, well it was true, but it was the very, loose link of the Light family: Francis Light having founded Penang; William Light brought up as a Malay in the kampongs where William Light built his house and William Light not speaking terribly much English and being packed off to England, and never returning to Penang, to learn English. (Laughs)

54.30  So somebody had worked out that there was a link way back and had exploited that to develop [a cultural initiative]?

Absolutely. This is where I came into my own with Don because he loved that idea, that concept, of doing something, and the trade benefits that would emerge from it. Everybody, the streets were going to be paved with gold! We set up a joint arrangement with the Penang Development Corporation and South Australia, which Bob Bakewell and Chet Singh were involved in. Bob Bakewell loved all this. We set up links between the State Theatre Company and so on with Penang: they had just built a theatre in Penang called the Dewan Sri, which just means ‘theatre’ in Malay. It was a wonderful theatre but it was hardly used, so Don said, “What do you think we could do for the 1975 visit to Penang?” So I said “Why don’t we write a play and get some of the chief actors like Teddy [Edwin] Hodgeman and Daphne Grey and Denis Olsen from the [State] Theatre Company and we produced, and I still have the script and the photos, a play called Why is Adelaide the Capital of the World Show. We involved… we did a lot of research on this. It was written by an unknown playwright called Joe Inguanez, who’s disappeared, but it was a great occasion. Don was there on opening night in Penang. I was…myself and a designer called Axel Bartz, reporting through Len, and I hadn’t joined the Department then in 1975, was the sole consultant of all that was cultural and artistic. And we took up sheep shearers, we took up an aboriginal group, Michael Angelakis was
a young man then, we enlisted him, he was a mate of Don’s, to put together a Greek dance company and we had Silver Harris from the Festival Centre put together an Andyamathanha Dreaming exhibition. The Film Corporation did a cinema-in-the-round. We hired a jumbo jet, which could just make it into Adelaide airport and [Bob] Bakewell got a Hercules from the RAAF to take up the sheep and the sheep shearers.

57.30  The expense must have been enormous!

The expense was enormous and the parliamentary questions…

57.36  I bet!

Like who was going to go on the aircraft

57.40  This was a junket supreme!

Supreme junket! (Interviewer laughs) And there was a guy from the United Nations, I did a lecture on it at the [State] Library some years later, something to do with the United Nations, and this guy said “This was tremendous - nothing has ever been done like it.” And then, of course, they [the Penang Development Corporation] wanted to up the ante.

58.00  In Penang?

Yes, in Penang. So they came back to do something in Elder Park where I was again involved. They brought kampong houses; they had sellers of satay and we used the fledgling [Regency] School of Food and Catering to do all this. We brought in all the hawkers that the Penang government could get their hands on from the streets of Penang, and we brought them into Adelaide, and I think that began, what we’re so used to now and what we find at the Central Market, where you just go from the table to buy your satay or your curry or whatever and then come back to the table. It was unheard of before that happened. And the photographs are amazing – of the kampong area we built in Elder Park. And there were all sorts of problems like Quarantine saying “Oh, you can’t do that because all these things have got to be fumigated; you can’t possibly do that, no you’ve got to go through customs.” So, Bob Bakewell and I came up with this idea that we would declare the whole of Elder Park a customs, er, area, what do you…

59.18  A quarantine area?

A quarantine area, and a place that was outside of customs things, as long as they were exported. So it was fenced off, Elder Park. (Interviewer laughs). (Subsequent clarification by Interviewee: Elder Park was declared to be a Bond Store – a Duty Free area)

59.29  People were fumigated when they walked in, were they?

No, Oh no, no!

59.34  What year was the return visit?

I think it was ‘77
And were they the only two, ’75 and ’77?

Major ones. After that it sort of ……Well, Bannon wasn’t interested; Murray Hill, Minister of Community Development, wasn’t at all interested and hand-balled the whole thing back to the Adelaide City Council. I still maintained my role through the Adelaide City Council and the ‘Sister City’ visits that they subsequently made, the Council, with some government funding. I was involved in every one right up until 1985.

Oh, they did continue?

Yes, but very small scale

Not so spectacular?

No. People like Steve Condous when he was Lord Mayor was very good at this, so was the guy that was the perfumier who became Lord Mayor, [Henry] Ninnio, he was also very interested in it. We did a lot and now it’s sort of become more commercial and it petered out. We founded the Friends of Penang Association… (Subsequent clarification by Interviewee: The Friends of Penang Association was an incorporated body that was to continue the relationship between the sister cities on a people to people basis.)

So did it eventually become just a foodie festival sort of a thing?

Yes, it lost its impact. And of course the politics changed in Penang. It was absorbed in fundamental rationalism with Islam, like every other state in Malaysia, and it lost the oomph that it had.

Well, it’s a good time, I think, to make a break, if that’s alright with you.

Okay. That’s fine

END OF RECORDING 1

RECORDING 2

This is Felicity Morgan. This is the second part of the recording with Mr Chris Winzar on 9 October, 2007. We’re picking up after a short break.

Now Chris, I believe that there were some changes in the Branch in 1976 which did have some effects on staff and the operations of the Arts Development Branch. Could you describe those to me please?

Yes. Prior to 1976 it was very much a one man show: Len Amadio and I think his secretary and I think David Brown ran a little unit in the Premier’s Department which was called Arts and Tourism, and that became the Arts Development Branch. Tourism was one of those things that was quickly shed, and they moved it to Edmund Wright House when I joined, and shortly after that move it became a Division rather than a Branch. A Division of the Premier’s Department means that, on the hierarchical chart, it had more autonomy than the unit that was previously there, the Branch that was previously there. Because of that structure it was necessary to probably engage me, and we’ve spoken about that. But also to then go on to engage a music project officer, Michael Elwood I
think was the first, followed by Steven Block, and to enlarge the staff, particularly the administrative staff as we had the burden of what we were doing increased so there was need for extra staff. The Division operated right through to the end of the Dunstan premiership, into the Corcoran premiership, still located in the same place, and then it came under the aegis of John Bannon who was Minister for Community Development in the Corcoran, I think, government, and then he was Minister for the Arts. Then the Corcoran government fell and Murray Hill came in as Minister for Local Government and Minister for the Arts. He was the only minister in the Tonkin government that had any experience in Cabinet. For some reason he grabbed the portfolio of the arts and translated the Division into a fully fledged Department, and was instrumental in a lot of changes, as I’ve said before, which he hasn’t been given the credit for.

03.05 That’s good, because for the record now that’s made it quite clear. Going back to your original days, when you were first with the Branch, you have somewhat, to some extent, described how Don Dunstan interacted with you and it was fairly ad hoc - sometimes outside the office, sometimes inside the office and so on – what recollections do you have about Don Dunstan sharing his creative ideas with you?

The only time he ever shared his creative ideas with me was outside the office, either during social occasions or occasions that we were together at a theatre production or a dinner table or lunch table, or whatever. The only time I got to share anything with Don was very, very briefly, and it wasn’t very adequate from my point of view, was once when Len was on holiday and I assumed his position: I had to go and brief Don on some specific matter – what it was isn’t really important – but I didn’t find it an enlightening experience. But I did find that privately it was enlightening, so any feedback I got from Don came privately rather than during the course of my public work, which is strange.

04.39 Yes it is.

Whereas I spoke about Murray Hill and he was quite different. Murray Hill ran his office in a different way. He was very old fashioned; he liked to be called ‘Minister’. Don didn’t mind whether you called him ‘Don’ or ‘Premier’. Murray Hill would discuss these things at length in real discussion in his office with myself, or Len, or both of us together, and there was a sharing there that didn’t happen with Don.

05.15 The Department when Don was… when it was initiated, before it was a Department, when it was a Branch, it was both a policy area and then it implemented the policy, is that right?

Yes, absolutely.

05.30 So, the policy was formulated by whom?

The policy was interpreted by Len, and formulated by Len. Some input obviously from discussions with members of the Arts Grants Advisory Committee, most notably Elizabeth Silsbury; some discussion, a lot of discussion with people like Justin McDonnell; some discussion with people like Peter Ward; John Morris from the Film Corporation; Anthony Steel when he came on line, when he came into the picture, of course; David Wynn who became of chairman of the Trust of the Festival Centre. But it was from this perspective, you find it hard to believe, but that’s the way it worked, and it
worked brilliantly. Going back to our earlier discussion there wasn’t that hierarchical thing or blueprint or anything like that, but it worked. The ideas were obviously sent to Don, and if the opportunity arose there was some non-communicative discussion with him. He was a terror on Cabinet submissions; you had to use the correct grammar and stuff like that or he would send it back. He deplored the use of “i-t apostrophe-s”, it’s.

07.00 Instead of it is.

Yes. Apart from those sort of things, there wasn’t the blueprint, in my view, in my recollection, that you would have thought existed.

07.15 I guess what I’m trying to get into my mind, and I realise, of course that times were different and bureaucracies were different in those days, [but] when an idea came to Don or came to Len and they discussed it together, how did the project, if you like, get signed off on and “Yes that’s what we’ll do”.

Well we had meetings of the Division staff, the key staff

07.45 Yes

And we would hold those meetings at a certain time every week. I remember Mondays before Cabinet was always a ‘Heads of Division’ meeting, either Monday or Friday, and then Len would report on that, on those particular meetings and we would all discuss what we were doing and what ideas we had. And if there was a blueprint it was known only to Len and he may have played those cards very close to his chest. But he was the sort of person that was very open so he didn’t reveal that there was any formalised blueprint. He did say sometimes “Don wouldn’t like that” or “Yes, that fits in with what we’re talking about”.

08.36 Yea, yea. Because the Department had certain functions, I guess, once the decision had been made, the Department had functions to propel things forward, the bureaucracy and so on, but Don also had functions didn't he in terms of - you said - Cabinet submissions, obtaining funding from Treasury and so on.

That’s right

08.57 And you worked in parallel, in harmony, in that way?

Yes. Yes. For instance a good example would be the Regional Cultural Centres: Don was absolutely adamant that he wanted a theatre in Mount Gambia, Port Pirie, Whyalla and Renmark and that theatre had to be, to have, similar facilities as the Playhouse. His grand vision was that [those] theatres would be used by the populace in those particular towns. We then translated that into dividing the state up into regions and making the Centre[s’] management into looking after the arts in, not just the specific theatre, but the entire region. So, in that instance, Treasury dug their heels in about the cost of building these Centres, and I was at meetings with Treasury and Len, and I think once or twice with Dunstan, where the idea came that we would make them statutory authorities, rather than the first idea which was to give them to local government, and [instead] have local government represented on statutory authorities. So there had to be a whole series of Cabinet submissions done, and the money that built those theatres came from the borrowing power of a statutory authority guaranteed by the government, rather than from
Treasury itself. It was a very smart way of building those theatres without directly encroaching upon the Treasury.

10.58 The, I don’t know whether I’m right, but I believe, the State Theatre Company was also set up as a statutory authority?

Yes eventually. When it first started it was a constitutional association incorporated, and then, I think either just before or just after I joined, it became at statutory authority. Certainly the Festival Centre was since its inception.

11.20 And the State Opera Company?

State Opera, no. It didn’t become a statutory authority until later on in the piece. And there was some struggle in Cabinet to get that done as a statutory authority. It was an association incorporated as New Opera South Australia, but there was a lot of work behind the scenes to get it to become a statutory authority.

11.46 Right. Um, George has just handed me a note which is completely and utterly unreadable. (Interviewee laughs) I shall say that for the record! (Laughs). Yes, the statutory authorities were quite a useful tool, weren’t they?

Yes.

12.01 And there were quite a lot in fact?

Yes

12.10 Yes, I recall reading that there were. Did they have to be enacted?

Yes. The trustees were appointed by the governor. I became a trustee of the theatre at Whyalla and then it went on to become the Eyre Peninsular Cultural Centre Trust. And that was, I guess, one of the things I did, that I can take credit for – for forming the Cultural Centre Trust in conjunction with the Arts Council of South Australia. We brought over Elizabeth Sweeting to start the administrative course at Uni SA, I think it was. She was a well known British theatre administrator that had written a particularly key book on theatre and arts administration. Then she took over the job of the Arts Council of South Australia, and then we amalgamated the whole operation of theatre arts and visual arts and what-have-you in those regions, centered on Whyalla and its theatre, but reaching out into other areas within the region.

13.15 There were more than one, weren’t there three?

There was Mount Gambia, that became the South East Regional Cultural Centre Trust, big mouthful; then there was Port Pirie which became the Keith Michell Theatre in Port Pirie; the Robert Helpmann Theatre in Mount Gambia; Port Pirie became the Northern Regional Cultural Centre Trust; Renmark, the Chaffey Theatre I think it was called, not sure, became the Riverland Regional Cultural Centre Trust, and then Whyalla the Eyre Peninsular Cultural Centre Trust, and that was the Middleback Theatre.

13.50. Right. And there’s been one since then hasn’t there? Am I right in thinking there’s one at Port Lincoln?
Yes. That’s always been on the cards. I had various angry and not so angry meetings with the council in Port Lincoln, and my role was to always calm them down because we weren’t ready to build it, but they needed a theatre and one was subsequently built.

14.16 Mmm. That’s good. When you were working on projects how did you relate with the government? Did you coordinate through Len, your section through Len on these weekly meetings that you were talking about?

Yes, but also putting up recommendations to the minister, which was Don, or whoever was the minister in the future. Usually we would do it in such a way as we would make recommendations which Len would look at, on say a specific instance involved with the Regional Cultural Centres arts development, and attached to that submission would always be a Cabinet submission in draft. He [Len] would okay it, or not okay it. He would discuss it with me and then it would go up to the minister, and Don would usually, through Bob Bakewell, the head of the Premier’s Department, Don would look at it and send it back if there were things he wanted changing. And there would be marks all over it, all over the Cabinet submission, and then we’d do another one and it would go up and then get final approval. That sort of process.

15.45 And what about when you were interacting with people outside government: the artistic bodies or the committees or the authorities, the statutory authorities. How did that work?

Um, if needs be I used to attend meetings, if it was required that I attend meetings, particularly the Festival Centre Trust when things were being developed there, or the State Theatre Company or the History Trust, but that was not in Don’s time, the History Trust, (Coughs) so that the Department’s point of view was always put forward. We were always in the comfortable position that our word was law, which now of course wouldn’t be the case (Laughs) at all. Umm, and interacted with artists, we did that by attending first nights; by having an ‘open door’ policy which Len always had and I had; long lunches, that was a part of that era.

16.53 The wonderful days of long lunches!

At Rigonis [restaurant], yes, those were the days. A lot of business was done at Rigonis, with Christopher Pearson at another table trying to listen to what we were up to! (Interviewer laughs).

17.09 So you didn’t sort of abandon your ‘babies’ all around the place, you kept in touch from time to time?

Oh yes, absolutely. It was very much part of the process, you had to keep in touch.

17.19 Yes, because there was ongoing funding of course?

There was ongoing funding and we then established while Don was still there, but it was further developed under Bannon and more so under Murray Hill, the Arts Finance Advisory Committee. Now the Arts Finance Advisory Committee was the watchdog, the financial watchdog of the major expenditure of the Division when I was director of the Arts Development Division. The Division was responsible for the major expenditure on
things like the Festival Centre Trust budget; State Theatre Company Trust budget, and so on.

17.58 Yea, yea.

And the Arts Finance Advisory Committee had, by its structure, a member of Treasury on it, and we always managed to blind them with science so when a new member came along they always started to try and out-fox us, but we were always cleverer than they were (Quiet laughter).

18.23 In the early days though, when there was just the Arts Grants Advisory Committee, who was on that? Do you remember? Was it a big committee?

No, no. Elizabeth Silsbury, because she was the only one who had an opinion, in my view, that was of any worth. And that's not said harshly because people did do what they could. Maurice O'Brien from the Education Department, and he said very little. The membership was renewed every year and David Brown became the executive officer of that committee and we sat in on those, particularly if things relating to my area were being discussed. We sat in on that and pushed everything through if we could.

19.22 Yes. And if there were things to come up which related to the visual arts, I presume the visual arts projects officer would have gone along?

Yes, Caroline Rankin, yes. Things changed a lot when Elizabeth Sweeting, who was the lady I referred to at the Arts Council (of South Australia), came on to that committee. She injected some sense of “I'm not going to be a rubber stamp. I'm not going to be railroaded.” So she and Elizabeth Silsbury were two people that stood out in my mind.

19.57 The two Elizabeths. And do you think it was better, when it was more controlled?

Oh sure. Elizabeth Sweeting was very much in favour of arm's length funding; peer group assessment. That was her big thing. Don was ambivalent about all that sort of thing, and probably in the beginning he was quite right to be so. (Subsequent clarification by Interviewee: Don was not very concerned about the notion of peer group assessment. He was more interested in a 'Medici-like' patronage of the arts rather than a committee making decisions, although he was aware of the political necessity to be seen to be at arms length from the funding process, particularly in relation to grants for arts projects, etc. So in that regard he was ambivalent.)

20.24 Yes. Of course any sort of patronage or favouritism is so odious these days. Do you think it was there, in Don Dunstan's time?

No no. It may be perceived towards the end of his 'reign'. It may have been perceived by some people in the community, but, no, I don't think so. I think now it would be totally unacceptable, totally. And maybe that's a good thing. Maybe it's a pity, but we can't have those days again because there isn't the climate or the culture to support it.

21.07 Yes, indeed, indeed. Um, I wanted to ask you: Where do you think the arts sat in the range of social, cultural and economic reforms that Don Dunstan was implementing?
Very high, because don’t forget the arts was something of a total revolution in South Australia and it sat very high, along with the enormous legislative work that Don did in making sweeping community changes in other areas. The arts got a lot of press. A lot of press, and it didn’t matter that it was good or bad; I mean it got an enormous amount of press and coverage, particularly in other states, what we were doing. It was mandatory for The Age to have a representative at the Adelaide Festival to see what we were up to. This was in the era, the time before the Sydney Festival got off the ground and the Melbourne Festival. We were really front runners, and the Film Corporation. The arts was very prominent, and we made sure it was. When Anthony Steel came along he really developed that idea and did all sorts of controversial things like naked women playing grand pianos on blocks of ice being lowered in by crane, (Interviewer chuckles) and all that sort of stuff. All that was grist to the mill - it was great. And the arts became…people who normally wouldn’t be associated with the arts had a sense of pride: “Oh, we’ve done this” you know; “we’ve got our own theatre company” even though they might never go. You know there was a lot of that. We’re a parochial lot in Australia, particularly then, and we still are in things like footy and so on. But we were a parochial lot and we wanted to outdo the Victorians and New South Welshmen.

23.03 Well, it certainly led the [Melbourne] Moomba Festival and, what was it called, the Waratah Festival in Sydney.

Yes. To evolve into what now have become two major festivals which, to a great extent, have surpassed the Adelaide Festival, unfortunately – my view. Because things are shared, a lot of programmes used to be unique to South Australia: if you wanted to see a particular programme – say the Wuppertal Dance Company – you’d have to come to Adelaide to see it because it didn’t go to Perth, it didn’t do the rounds of the other big theatres in other states, and it made our festival unique. Now we do share a lot of product I’m told, and from my own observation.

23.56 Yes, I’ve heard other people say that the other centres are surpassing Adelaide in terms of the festival, and that’s a shame, an enormous shame. I guess the other centres, of course, have much larger populations and more people from overseas perhaps want to go to Sydney than Adelaide, I don’t know.

Yes, that’s maybe true, but Adelaide had the name like Edinburgh, and that was Don’s responsibility: he was given the credit for that.

24.32 So even though he certainly had his detractors when he was Premier, do you think his arts, the development of the arts here helped to reduce the criticism, or did it actually increase the criticism?

Well it increased the criticism from certain sectors, most notably from the LCL, the Liberal Country League party.

25.00 Thought too much money was being spent on the arts?

Yes. And certain people in the establishment, although Don was clever enough to involve the establishment, which I said earlier, with various board appointments, so a lot of that evaporated. Towards the end of his period it was added to the litany of criticism that came upon him following the death of Adele; the Salisbury Affair; the scurrilous book
and all that sort of thing - the John Cerruto thing and all that. All that added to his departure, and then the arts came in for special criticism because of all the money that was being spent, rather than spending it on other priorities.

25.52 Uh-uh. I’m going to ask you some reflective questions in a minute; we seem to be coming to that part in the interview, but just a couple of personal things about Don. You knew him, obviously, before he became Premier, and you’ve told us about your meetings, and so on. Did you stay in touch with him after he resigned from the premiership and from parliament?

Yes I did. We’d got a special friendship based on food. My partner’s a fabulous cook and he and Don would go into a huddle and do things like make bean curd, because you couldn’t buy bean curd. Can you imagine that in South Australia you couldn’t buy bean curd?

I can well imagine!

It’s taken for granted now, even in Woolies you can go and buy some bean curd. Don and Winston, my partner, would make bean curd with plaster-of-Paris and all sorts of funny ingredients. So we kept in touch through that particular aspect, and I knew Peter Sarah, who became a partner of Don’s who was with the Arts Council and I knew him very well. (Subsequent clarification by Interviewee: Peter Sarah was a same sex partner of Don’s for about two years. He died in 2006). I was always on Don’s guest list as someone to fill up the numbers at lunches or dinners, as was my partner. When he [Don] went to Melbourne I went to visit him a couple of times and we were always on about food. He was also very interested in the way that I had a long term, long standing relationship, that he found unusual and…. I mean, this is probably going into more personal matters, but he was interested in that. That may well have influenced him with his relationship with Steven [Cheng], I don’t know. Steven and Winston were very good friends.

28.00 And your partner was also a good friends with Adele?

Oh absolutely, yes, and Don. Winston would take no notice of Don’s nonsense. He was always at a level that Don could laugh about. He had found the final ‘doll’, which a lot of us didn’t. Winston to this day was never intimidate by Don, never had the feeling that he was in the presence of greatness, it was always down to the level of “Oh, there’s too much salt in that” or “This sauce is not thick enough” or “My mother said we should do it this way when she taught me this dish.” It was always at that level and that was something that I didn’t quite get to, but he did.

28.47 I suppose there was a difference because at some stage in your life he had been your ultimate boss, and so I suppose there was always a slight...

A slight thing, yea. But that wore off a bit as we got to know each other in a different way.

29.03 After ’79?

After ’79. And then in Victoria we met up with him after he came back and Steven was on the scene and we spent a lot of time together, mostly culinary, and he was always
someone that we would invite because Winston was never worried about inviting Don. He would say “Oh, get Don over, he’ll come” and he always did.

29.31 In those years after 1979 how do you think this state treated Don Dunstan?

Abysmally.

Do you?

Yes. I think they treated him without…I think the fact that hurt him most deeply was the appointment of, I think it was Rod Wallbridge an accountant, to the…Don wanted to be the chairman of the Adelaide Festival Centre [Trust]. Bannon resisted that; there was an enmity between Bannon and Don.

30.07 Oh was there?

There was an enmity between Bannon and Dunstan, and he wanted to be, more than anything else, his departing gesture, Don wanted, longed to be, the head, the chairman of the Adelaide Festival Centre [Trust], and Bannon never quite…when the appointment was up for grabs, he, Don, was never considered. His name was put up I know, because I looked at the Cabinet submission and helped prepare it. A number of other people…and Rod Wallbridge was appointed and Don never got over that. There was an occasion when the Labor Party decided that they would hold a special dinner for Don and present him with two unique folios of Flinders’ voyages around Australia – very precious books – and we held the function in the Renaissance, there used to be a restaurant there, and Bannon, of course, was the Premier and he was officiating at this function as head of the Labor Party, and Don was determined to make a point: so, at the official table, Don’s table, he stacked with friends of his that had nothing to do with the Labor Party, and he knew it would put John Bannon’s nose out of joint. And it did! (Chuckles). When Don became ill I think the relationship between him and John really came back together again. I think John went to see Don and the relationship came back on to an even keel. But there was a lot of jealousy between the two men and that played a part. And I felt to an extent the Labor Party didn’t do enough for Don until his final years, certainly not in the Bannon years. I think it’s a measure of people like John Olsen who gave the imprimatur for the state funeral at the Festival Centre.

32.20 There were two funerals: Don had one for his friends at Charles Berry [Funerals] in Norwood, which I attended. There were about twenty people only, and one at the Festival Centre

32.30 A public, official funeral?

Yes, a public, official funeral. And John Olsen, I think, gave funding to this [Don Dunstan] Foundation, if I remember, and Murray Hill, as a Liberal, Don used to refer to him as ‘Oil Can Harry’ “How’s Oil Can Harry treating you?” he would say, and I’d say “Oh. Okay” but I never gave anything away, trying to be a good public servant. But Murray Hill and Di[ana] Laidlaw when she was Murray’s assistant, then probably later when she was minister, always acknowledged Don’s contribution, and Bannon didn’t. And I think that was a pity because Don could have been a great Festival Centre Trust chairman. He would have done great things; he still had it in him when he came back from Melbourne after falling out with the Cain government.
33.22 Yes, but that appointment in Victoria was extraordinary. It was in fact a slight by this state?

It was a slight. I mean the Labor Party, probably [with] all the Cerruto affair and the Grossly Improper book and all those sorts of things, Don’s legacy was tarnished, but nevertheless Don had a part to play and he was denied that. He should have been appointed a chairman of the Adelaide Festival Centre at least and he would have made a fantastic chairman and who knows what would have happened in this state, because that’s quite a position of power. But he wasn’t, and he regretted that and he was very bitter about that.

34.17 I can imagine, yes. Before we just start a few reflective questions, have you got a single word, or a short phrase to best describe your time working with Don Dunstan, in a work situation?

Exciting, exhilarating, fulfilling, the best years of my life! After that, for me, it was downhill, (Laughter) which is circumstance and other personal things that occurred. But those were the years that I look on with the most affection and pride.

35.05 Was the…the magician had gone, the wizard, the wonderful wizard had left?

Yes. And when he passed on, I remember Bronwyn rang me and said “You’d better come over.” Bronwyn is Don’s daughter, “You’d better come over, Don won’t be lasting the night.” Winston and I came over and he was propped up in bed. And contrary to what the press said, he wasn’t watching television and nobody was drinking champagne. That was the way they played it – that Don to his last was propped up in bed, the Medici, with the glass of white wine or champagne – it was not like that at all. Steve Wright and Steve Cheng, Bronwyn and Rodney, Bronwyn is the daughter and Rodney is her husband, Winston and I and a nurse. We stayed there until the final end and he was unconscious throughout the whole time. He had arranged his private funeral with great theatricality and I was amazed as we walked into the Charles Berry [Funerals] chapel, they were playing Elgar’s Enigma Variations (Laughter), and I thought “You got it so right.” All the pieces of music he chose; he chose the wake; he chose Maggie Beer who did all the cooking for the few of us who were present; there was only twenty people or so. One of the most interesting things was that this strange lady arrived, and everybody who was there was invited, so I thought “Who the devil’s that?” This strange lady, very theatrical looking arrived at the end of it, not the end of the funeral, but at the end when everybody had gathered and sat down ready for the director of Charles Berry to start the proceedings. And she stumbled in and sat at the back, and I thought “Who’s that?” And it turned out to be a drag queen that knew Don from his time in Sydney. Now, nobody probably knows that, so whether you print it or not, I don’t know! (Laughter). Imagine him/her at the wake afterwards, it was amazing. He said “Don always said to come to his funeral in drag, so I did!”

37.38 It’s a wonderful story!

And there were people like Warren Bonython there, and his family, of course, and Steve Cheng. Len wasn’t there, I don’t know why, he went to the official one. Winston and I were both there and just a few friends who were no-one of any import – at that stage we
weren’t of any import either – and it was an amazing ceremony. I didn’t go to the public one; I thought I’d done my thing and I don’t want to go, so I didn’t.

38.13 That was quite understandable. Chris I wonder if we could just get back to a few, sort of, if you like, the professional side of things? Do you think that South Australia became the artistic centre of Australia because of Don Dunstan?

Yes, absolutely.

38.30 How do you think that status was achieved?

I think because he had the foresight and the courage to push these things through while other premiers in other states were involved in more mundane matters than Don, despite the opposition to them and despite the opposition that probably existed in Cabinet, he railroaded these things through. I think it was because of that that we became pre-eminent in the arts and we had, Adelaide had, suddenly had, a sense of place that it didn’t have before. It changed the whole aspect of Adelaide, not just the arts but things like restaurants on the sidewalk; six o’clock closing finishing; all those other reforms that came in. It changed the whole focus of Adelaide. Adelaide became a different place. It was very much Don’s vision of the ‘City State’.

39.33 Yes, well he did have a patrician view

He did, he did. Sure. And it changed over time from being very classical Greek or Roman to adding a bit of Asian into it.

39.49 Yes, yes. (Laughs) What do think, in the arts, if you could juggle with all the things that he did, what were his top two achievements?

The Film Corporation and the Adelaide Festival Centre: and when saying the Adelaide Festival Centre I mean all that goes with it including the [Adelaide] Festival of Arts and the [South Australian] Theatre Company, and I put Adelaide Festival [Centre] meaning the [South Australian] Opera Company as well. It became the centre for the theatre arts in Australia.

40.24 Yes. Interesting that because of course that gets back to right at the very beginning: the ‘high arts’ end things. Do you think his arts programme has been sustained in the years since he left the premiership?

No unfortunately. I think that, as I said earlier, certainly Murray Hill sustained it. John Bannon was Minister for Community Development and he, of course, was in mid-programme, so his tenure as minister in the Corcoran government, I think it was, was only short lived. When the government fell Murray Hill picked up the ball and ran with it. I was very surprised, I expected the worst, and then Bannon came in. I worked with Bannon and all sorts of things came in to play: economic rationalism; we had to devise a system how to quantify success in arts called ‘programme performance budgeting’ on a monetary basis. In other words how to analyse the money you give to the Festival Centre or to an art gallery or to the Jam Factory – how to analyse the performance of that with the budget that you put into it. And that was very difficult; to define yardsticks - like bums on seats is an obvious one, or attendance, and things like that. But he [Bannon] got very involved with the early days of economic rationalism.
42.05 What about now, up to today?

Well then HR came in. I look at some... occasionally I dwell on applying for jobs and I look at the HR um...

42.17 Specifications?

Specifications and the way the culture of all that, and it didn’t suit the arts then and I don’t think it suits it now. Of course the arts has to be accountable, like everything else that’s got government money behind it, but there has to be a different approach to its accountability: there has to be funding set aside to fail which is most important, and Don would have agreed with that, in fact, did that.

42.53 He had a buffer did he – a fail buffer?

You must. You must give the chance for an artist to be creative. And goodness, look at the great artists of the centuries: Mozart and whomever - Shakespeare, any of those great Greek and Roman artists, thinkers – they all failed in one way or another and then learned from their creative experience to develop those things that are irreplaceable today. And that has gone because you cannot define it. You have to find a way of defining it in terms of the economic rationalism; the conservatism of this time.

43.40 Because it doesn’t meet the bottom line either. It didn’t have a line on the budget saying ‘failure’.

No. It didn’t. I mean no-one would have bought Blue Poles unless Whitlam did it. Now.

43.55 No, I suspect not. There were some programmes, I suppose, when you think of Don’s achievements, there were some programmes that didn’t quite realise his expectations; that development you mentioned of the Jam Factory and the whole development of this being the ‘Design State’. It didn’t quite end up as that?

No, it didn’t. That was a failure, and other states have subsumed that, Victoria particularly. That was a failure, but it was a great idea and people like Milton Moon and others like that were really behind it. It was a fabulous idea; having these creative artists working and living in South Australia. It was a failure, but it wasn’t. If we hadn’t have tried that we would never have known. And we are blessed with things like Bert Flugelman’s “Balls” [Spheres] in the Mall and things like that from those days when people were allowed to have more freedom than they have now.

45.09 And the Jam Factory has some fabulous stuff which wouldn’t have been there, perhaps, without that original impetus.

It wouldn’t have existed.

45.16 It might have been a case, I don’t know whether you’d agree with this, it might have been a case that that particular initiative was a bit ahead of its time?
Yes, it was. And Don had picked that idea up, I think, from his visits to Europe, Scandinavia in particular. And he enticed people from overseas to live and work in Adelaide. It was a failure, but, why not?

**But there have been other successes – Carclew [Youth Arts Centre] is a huge success isn’t it?**

_Carclew_ is a great success, yes. And that’s where [Dame] Ruby Litchfield came into her own. That was one of my projects: we lured Roger Chapman over [from the SA Theatre Company] to become director of _Carclew_ and Roger got the place off the ground. I can remember long lunches with Roger as we plotted all these things. And that is a great achievement.

**46.12 Yes. Now, I want to finish by quoting from ‘The Arts’ chapter written by Colin Horne in the 1981 book _The Dunstan Decade: Social Democracy at the State Level_, which you no doubt know, and I quote “By the end of his decade, Don Dunstan had established a well integrated and well tried supporting structure for the arts” What do you say to that statement?**

Yes, I would agree with that.

**46.39 So you think he formed a good platform?**

A good platform. Some of which has been eaten away, unfortunately

**By subsequent governments?**

Mmm

**46.50 I’m just going to give you one more quote to end on a more up-note. It’s from the same source: “Without question the rise of South Australia to prominence in the arts had been a phenomenon of national importance…had Dunstan not dominated South Australia for a decade much would still have been achieved in the arts, perhaps along similar lines. But not with the same diffusion of excitement, the same flair and polish, above all with the same insistence on excellence”. Having stayed on in the arts area until well after the Dunstan decade, how do you respond to that, firstly, and how do we recreate that sense of excitement and activity?**

Well, I would respond to it positively and say that was the case. How we recreate it? We need some thinkers, we need people that are willing to be courageous, people that can stand up to conservative governments. We need a revolution - perhaps that’s a very dramatic term to use but - we need that. We desperately need that if we’re going to ever get back to that pre-eminent role we had. It’s achievable – we have the talent in this town – a lot of talent is lying fallow. (Interviewee’s mobile phone rings) Sorry.

**48.12 That’s alright. (Interviewer speaks direct to tape) Just a mobile phone ringing – we’ve only got another couple of minutes.**

_(Interviewee answers mobile phone and speaks: These words do not form part of the interview)._
48.29  Just recommencing after a quick telephone interruption. We’re almost at the end, Chris. We were talking about the sense of excitement and that incredible buzz of activity that happened in Don Dunstan’s era. What do you think about the current situation? Does it need a Don Dunstan to bring the arts up to where it was? Will it even happen because the climate is different? What’s your sense of it?

I think at the moment it’s lying fallow, as I said earlier. I think there are a lot of people in the community, perhaps in a small way myself included, and people a lot younger than me, in South Australia that can be used. It needs someone, perhaps the director of Arts SA, someone with the guts to be able to do it. I think the current portfolio, which lies with the Premier [Mike Rann] and [John] Hill, Mr Hill, is not where it should lie; perhaps it should lie with some other minister. I think conservatism is with us and I think we do need someone with the charisma and the guts to be able to take it forward. But there are a lot of people out there that are useful in developing the arts again that are ignored and not used, which is unfortunate. It may never happen again, but I hope it does and I hope I live to see it.

50.15  Absolutely. Well, unless you have anything specific or anything in general you’d like to add?

No. I think it’s been a great interview.

50.23  Good, well thank you. I think it’s been a terrific interview and thank you very much indeed Chris.

You’re welcome

Goodbye.

END OF RECORDING 2