00.00 This is Felicity Morgan interviewing Mr Len Amadio on 24th October, 2007 at the office of the Don Dunstan Foundation in Adelaide about his contribution to the development of the Arts in South Australia 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.

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

Good. Thanks Felicity.

00.35 Your contribution to the development of Arts during the Dunstan Decade is a big story. I wonder if I could start by asking you to go back to the beginning when you first met Don Dunstan and the circumstances which led you to being invited to apply for the position in the Premier’s Department.

Yes. Well, I think I met Don when I was working for the then Australian Broadcasting Commission as Concert Manager and I think it must have been around about 1966/67. It might have been a party out at Norwood, or through Peter Ward, I can’t remember. And then I remember Don going to concerts and I always used to make sure he was looked after in terms of tickets and things like that. He used to like going to concerts, especially during the ’68 Festival – I saw a fair bit of him during the ’68 Festival: that was the Festival where he had just had the election, but it hadn’t been decided who was going to run the State because the Parliament hadn’t met. So after the Festival, as I recollect, the Parliament met and Don lost the vote on the floor of the House and he walked up to Government House and tendered his resignation and Steele Hall became Premier for two years...

01.40 ...so that was interesting. But then some time around the middle of 1970 Peter Ward rang me and said, ‘Don’ - who had won the election about six weeks before, at the end of May, 1970 - said, ‘Don would like to have lunch with you and I next week’, so I did. And we went down to Quelltaler House, behind King William Street and Hindley there, and he [Don] said to me ‘I’m going to create a position in my Department and it’s going to be called Development Officer for Performing Arts and Tourism, and I would very much hope you would get the job and, you’ll have to apply, but I need to get your okay very quickly because I want to move quickly and advertise it...’so that was Friday, and,’ ...would you let me know by Monday morning’.

02.36 (Interviewer chuckles)

...which I did....I said yes....with some trepidation, because when you’ve worked with the ABC for some thirteen years it was a bit of a shock. But anyway, I said yes. The job was advertised very soon. I applied. I was interviewed as were others, and I got the job.

02.54 Did Don interview you?
No, no. It was a senior member of the Public Service Board and another someone from one of the Departments – it might have been one of the senior Treasury people – they were public servants anyway, senior public servants.

03.10 Right, right.

And I got the job and I started in the beginning of November

03.14 1970?

1970. Yes, I finished with the ABC on the Friday night and started on Monday morning.

03.21 Why do you think Don singled you out for this position?

Well, I suppose he knew I was interested in the Arts broadly. He’d got to know me over those few years as someone who loved music, and I’d worked in the Arts with the ABC, but basically as a Concert Manager, but I’d been interested in the Arts Council and other organisations when I was here and I think he just thought I’d be a good person to – at that stage I was about mid-thirties, a good time in my life too - to be, you know, given a challenge, a real challenge.

04.00 And that was what attracted you to the job?

Well, the challenge was very exciting. We were virtually starting from scratch. You know we were starting with just a few thousand dollars of grants going into a few disparate arts organisations and the only, the main, things that were happening of course were the Adelaide Festival [of the Arts] which had been going since 1960; the [South Australian Symphony] Orchestra - the country touring through the Arts Council; a couple of fledgling arts organisations and some support for community organisations like the South Australian Bands Association and a few things like that. And that was it. There was no body of money that was set aside for the Arts. It was in different lines in different parts of the State budget. So what Don did was set up an office, which was me with a bit of support, and a bundle of money brought together and a whole pile of files, and that was it. (Laughs)

05.02 And off you went?

Off I went (Chuckles)

05.08 Did you come into it with a sort of knowledge that Don had a vision…

Oh yes

05.14 or did he….I believe you gave a talk at the Memories of Don Dunstan event last year at the Flinders University Library, in which you said that when you started the job Don Dunstan gave a ten minute run-down on what he wanted done in the Arts area. Could you elaborate on that for me a little, and for the archive too?

Yes. Well, as I recollect, the morning I started I went up to Don’s office and he sat me down and just talked about some of the major projects. I can remember him talking
about the Aboriginal Culture Centre which was something he had very much in his mind that he wanted to develop. Originally he wanted it to be down on the Coorong area, but as you know, it ended up by being Tandanya, in the city.

05.59 That didn’t exist at that stage – it was just in his mind?

Yes, it was just in his mind. And a whole raft of tourism projects – he wanted a Cornish Festival on the Yorke Peninsular; he wanted a major international hotel in Victoria Square; he wanted to do something with Ayers House which was in a dilapidated state and was owned by the State and could be turned into a function centre/restaurant; and he wanted to do things with food and wine; and he wanted to develop some of the arts organisations that were in the very early stages, such as Elizabeth Dalman’s Australian Dance Theatre; Theatre 62; and the [South Australian] Theatre Company which was run by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust; and to give support to the [SA Symphony] Orchestra and country touring and development. So it was just a range of things

06.52 Covering not only the Arts but the Aboriginal side of things and tourism?

Yes, but all that under the broad heading of what, I suppose, later became known as, cultural tourism.

07.07 Right

That expression, we didn’t know about that expression in 1970. That expression didn’t come in until the mid eighties, but that’s what it was, basically. Yes, I think when we had that lunch I recollect Don was talking about these things as well, in a broad sense of how he wanted things to develop. So I sort of had time to think about some of those things, because I had to apply for the position, and I was able to put things in the application which was, you know a help too…

07.38 Appropriate

Yes. And then Don just gave me a quick summing up on the morning I arrived, and I was taken down to my office – I was told ‘here are the boys who are doing the secretarial work and they’ll provide you with the things you need, and I’m John Holland, the Assistant Secretary, and this is so-and-so and these are the other people’. And off I went! (Laughs)

08.03 Fantastic

A bit scary!

08.07 Yes, absolutely. Um, that run-down that he gave you, both at the lunch and on your first day, would you say they came under the category of an idealistic vision or were they actually the essence of a framework, an overarching policy, that Don was already deciding in his mind?

I think they were a part of an over-reaching policy, because that policy document came out as a public document, or quasi public within the public service, sometime in January when Don called a whole lot of senior people together from the Premier's Department; Tourism Department of which Don was Minister for Tourism; Industrial Development or
Development generally in which he was Minister; someone senior from the Treasury; the architects who were responsible for building and designing the Festival Centre, Colin Hassell and John Morphett, and a few other interesting people such as the Railways Commissioner; Des Corcoran and Geoff Virgo as Ministers responsible for various areas where development would be needed, like along the Torrens bank and the development of the Festival Centre, which at that stage was just a theatre under construction, and the second stage and the third stage were in Don’s vision but hadn’t really started to take shape.

09.38 Right.

So that meeting, that vision for the development of a total Festival Centre, plus all the other things, some of which we’ve just mentioned like Aboriginal culture, were all in this document, this tourist development brief.

09.52 And when was that?

January 1971 in the Cabinet Room

09.56 So that was fairly soon after you started and fairly, well what, within a year of Don’s…?

Oh within six months, six or eight months of being Premier. Peter Ward had obviously worked on the document with Don, it had a lot of Peter’s, you know, a lot of trademark expressions and phrases and everything, and he was there at the meeting. But it was quite an interesting meeting - all around the cabinet table. The Public Buildings Department was there as well, of course, the Head of Public Buildings, and Des Corcoran was Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works; Geoff Virgo was Minister for Transport and so they were there…

10.27 Because that was railways land

Yes

10.29 Where the Festival Centre is?

Yes. And I do remember Don going through the document, which we all had in front of us, and talking about ‘I want this, and I want this done, and Len will be involved, you know, in all of these in the broader sense and I want full co-operation from, you know, other areas of Government, and this is all originating from the Premier’s Department’. I was part of the Policy Secretariat as it was called in those days, and when he got to the vision of the development of the Festival Centre and all the land that the railways owned, and that had to be sorted out as to what the railways needed and what was needed to extend the Centre and build it along the Torrens bank, and you know it has taken twenty five to thirty years to finish it, as you know. (Chuckles). This was ’71 and it’s now 2007, that’s thirty six years now.

11.22 Mmm, uhuh

I remember the Railways Commissioner objecting about this and Don, with very controlled anger, said ‘Well, I’m very sorry, but, you know, you and your Minister, Des
[Corcoran] will be talking about this; this is going to happen, and the railways will cooperate with me on this one,’ because they were a law unto themselves; had been for years.

11.49 Yes.

And he sort of made it quite clear that he would brook no opposition; that it was all going to happen.

11.54 He had a very strong feeling about the Festival Centre right from the start, didn’t he?

Yes, yes, and that whole area. Now the decision had been made to build the Centre on that site, and not on the other side of King William Road on the Parade Ground, which had originally been recommended, and Steele Hall had started building it on the site where the old [Advertiser] Sound Shell and the [public] baths and the old printing offices were and they were all demolished. But Don wanted a full Arts Centre and not just a Festival Hall run by the [Adelaide City] Council. He said the Government is going to run this and we’re going to put the money in, and build a playhouse and a space for theatrical productions and an amphitheatre and a plaza and everything else, and the Government will take the running on this.

12.40 Yes, and it was Don that formulated the Trust, wasn’t it?

He formulated the Trust, set up the Festival Centre Trust at the end of that year with the Council represented, but basically with the Government appointing the other members of the Trust, the majority.

12.55 Mmm. So your Arts Development Branch…

It wasn’t even a branch! It became a branch, but it was one man. We ended up with about four people within two years.

13.08 Oh okay, gosh it was a small operation. Uh, so you had this policy document and from there you then got on with implementation of various policies?

Yes, yes. I had to work out how I was going to start these policies, whom I would go to. I would say, for instance, I’ll have to talk to people in the Public Buildings Department about how we could then work towards putting some sort of document together with the land in Victoria Square, where the Hilton is now, and how we were going to develop that site. I had to talk to Ian Hannaford & Partners because they’d been asked to look at Ayers House and how we were going to develop Ayers House as a restaurant and function centre and all the rest of it. I would have to work with somebody else on another project. I would have to work with Tourism [Department] on other projects. So I was spreading myself around.

14.05 Yea, weren’t you indeed….

…And getting a bit of resistance in some areas, particularly from Tourism. Because the Tourism Department – I mean they were perfectly nice people down there – but they
were sitting in those offices down there in King William Street and acting as a booking office, basically, competing with travel agencies, for people coming in and out of Adelaide and once they were here sending them around the State. There was no research, no development, no statistical information, nothing which would... no vision to do anything else for the State until Don came in with all these ideas and completely turned them upside down.

14.53 Yes, it was....wasn’t it Robert Helpmann who said it was a two week, sort of festival of all this wonderment, and the rest of the time Adelaide sunk into a somnambulistic...
torpor

...state.

Yes, two weeks of activity. Someone else said ‘get all the culture over and done with in two or three weeks then wait for the next two years’!! (Laughs) But that Bobby, he was wonderful!

15.16 (Laughs) Mmm. I can understand what you mean when you say you were a bit all over the place, doing sort of a little bit of architecture...

Well, I was making it up as I went, to some extent, because I was, you know, I had a little base in the Policy Secretariat - George Lewkowicz, David Rodway and Bill Voysey were the three key people - and I could ask their advice and call on them to help me with various things, drafting legislation and how to operate, because I was operating in a different sort of set-up. I’d not worked in a State Government bureaucracy and it was quite sort of different. Although Don had brought in a whole lot of new ideas about things in the Premier’s Department, it was controlled so much that the policy secretariat was the body that everything had to emanate out of. Everything, ideas, had to be filtered through that so Don could keep a tight control on all the major things that were happening in the State that way. So I was a part of that Department, but one little, small part; they ended up with things like Worker Participation, (Industrial Democracy), Women’s Affairs, they all kept being added to the Department. A whole lot of little sub offices were under Don, as Premier, but they weren’t portfolio areas, you know.

16.39 No, no. You said that Don kept a tight control and everything went in and out of the policy area. Did you find you were taking ideas to him or was he filtering down ideas on new projects or new strategies? Did it work in that kind of a way?

That’s interesting. At the beginning he filtered them all down, but then I would have to put up proposals for approval at different stages of the projects, and I’d do that through the policy secretariat. And every year I’d have to ask [for] how much money I needed for the budget for arts grants, for instance, and I would estimate what we needed, and I’d say we needed x thousands of dollars more and we’d normally get what we wanted. It was amazing, you know, in order to deal with the demands once Don came in and expressed a desire to develop all these things, people came out of the woodwork and said they wanted to do this or that, and develop that company, so we had to start filtering the applications, and eventually we had to set up an Arts Grants Advisory Committee to...
17.54  Arts Grants Advisory Committee?

Arts Grants Advisory Committee, yes

17.56  Yes, I was going to ask you about that because that was fairly key wasn’t it?

Yes. That was the first committee where all the applications, virtually, went through the Arts Grants Advisory Committee, although, for the major organisations we were supporting, like the Festival; the [SA] Symphony Orchestra; the Australian Dance Theatre; the [SA] Theatre Company; Theatre ’62; it was given that they would be supported on an on-going basis.

18.23  Were they already being supported before Don became Premier?

Some of them were, some weren’t.

Right. So…

But only for very small amounts of money

18.36  Mmm. I mean, when you said you took all the files together and there you were, what had been the funding for the bands [SA Bands Association], for example? Had that maybe gone through Education or something like that?

I think that may have gone through the Chief Secretary or something like that. Something went through Education, something went through another Department or through Treasury and they were all brought together into the Premier’s Department budget.

18.53  Right. Right. And that’s when the Arts Grants Advisory Committee then started to...

And then the Arts Grants Advisory Committee was set up because we were getting lots of applications from people, in for a whole lot of projects, a lot of one-off projects, and it was getting too much to make the decisions. The idea was to have an arms-length body of expert people to make the recommendations within the total amount of money we had for those small grants. But they also advised, as I recollect, on the amount of money that went to the on-going organisations. But the funding for those on-going organisations was never in question.

19.31  I understand. Do you remember who was on that original Arts Grant Advisory Committee?

Yes, yes, I do. In fact I just went to the memorial service for one of the original members, Ninette Dutton. Yesterday they had a memorial service for Nine. Jill Blewitt was on it, Rosemary Wighton was on it; Maurice O’Brien was the Chair, Rosemary was the Deputy Chair, and Jim Main from Flinders University, and somebody else I can’t remember. That was the first committee of seven, I think, members. All appointed by Don, of course.

Of course
On Peter Ward’s recommendation, basically I think it was.

20.21. Was it. So when you say the applications were coming in from all over the place, were they sort of …. it was common knowledge or it was advertised?

We did advertise. We started to advertise for grants, you know, because it was a bit of a….it sort of happened, the momentum was starting to build up because everyone knew there was mo[ney], support for the Arts, so people started to put in applications. And also we decided that the best way to do it would be to advertise that we were going to support grants for the Arts in the categories of various – literature…

21.03 dance…

…dance and all the rest of it, and we had a committee that was being set up to do it twice a year, or once a year, I can’t remember. And that was how it all started and that’s how I got a little bit of extra staff because I had to have someone to look after that committee, obviously, and I had my secretary and then I had a young clerk, as well. So by about 1973 we had four of us in what was called the Arts Development Branch of the Premier’s Department.

21.30 Right. Right

…although I was still called Development Officer for Performing Arts & Tourism. It was still at that early stage.

21.36 I understand, yes. Other than these applications coming in, which would have generated their own set of business that needed to be done…

Yes, yes.

21.48 Did you, er, keep your…obviously, your finger on the pulse with what was happening interstate, overseas and so on – did ideas then…did you then put ideas to Don or was he the one that mostly put ideas to you?. What I mean is, were you subject to lobbyist, for example?

We were, yes. I did try to keep my eye on what was happening overseas. I certainly became well acquainted with what was happening in the other States, because I would whiz over to Sydney and Melbourne and all the rest of it to do various things, and because the other States were starting to develop arts infrastructure as well in those days: Queensland was the first one and I think we were the second, closely followed by Victoria and New South Wales. Western Australia was a bit late, and Tasmania, so I think by the mid seventies all the States. And, of course, the Australia Council had already been set up anyway, and that was given a great push with [Gough] Whitlam in ’73 when it was set up with its various boards….

22.46 And the Film School was already set up

Yes, the Film School was set up, so all these exciting things were happening around Australia while we were developing a lot of it from scratch, really. In South Australia we had a chance to do things in a particular way, even though we did inherit some things,
we were able to set up a lot of new things as part of Don’s vision in craft and film and other things as well.

23.16. Mmm. It must have been a very exciting time?
It was a bit exhausting too (Chuckles). I remember one of the very first things I had to do, within two or three weeks of arriving in the job, and before we had that big tourist development brief meeting/conference, I was asked to fly over to Western Australia to meet Sir Tyrone Guthrie. He was rehearsing a performance in the Octagon Theatre, the theatre-in-the-round, for the upcoming Perth Festival in the following month, and to talk to him about and seek his views as to the design of the Playhouse for the [SA] Theatre Company – which was going to be the body, the organisation, who would live in it and have their home in the future – whether that theatre should be in-the-round or proscenium or somewhere in-between. And all this was new to me, but I went and talked to this theatrical legend…

24.20 Absolutely!

…Six foot five, a giant of a man, who sort of… I mean it was very nice… he knew about my coming, he knew what I was going to talk to him about - but it was a bit daunting. And I had to come back and write a report on what he had recommended, which was basically something in-between. So, things like that were quite exciting.

24.44 I bet they were.

And to be involved with the consultants, – Tom Brown and with the architects as that whole [Festival] Centre developed with its, you know, the designs and the approval for the construction and all that – the whole thing that went on for the ensuing three or four years – it was quite amazing.

25.07 Yes, I can imagine it was. On the subject of Don, I believe, on a professional level, he was very approachable and inclusive, and that he made good judgements on the advice he was given. Did you find that?

Oh yes, yes, I think so, yes definitely.

25.23 He was a good listener and a good decision maker?

Yes, he was a good decision maker.

25.30 Was he ever misguided by any of his advisors?

Uh, not too often, I don’t think, in the major areas. I think he was pretty well…he had some good people around him in those early days. When all the major things were getting off the ground in ’70,’71,’72,’73 and four/five, he had people like Peter Ward there as his Executive Assistant who was really very good at looking at the broad picture and the things that the State… you know, how to interpret Don’s vision. And also he had a good publicist, like Tony Baker who was great at getting the message out in the media and press releases and all the rest of it. Also he always had some good research assistants, so he had a good team up there; small but very bright and lively and with constant access to Don.
26.40 Yes. I was going to ask about your access to him?

My access was OK. I mean I would see him, but there was no regular meeting. I would see him as he wanted. He’d call me up if he wanted something or I’d request a meeting to go through something, or I’d send up documents for him to approve - in the normal way that would go through the Secretary of the [Premier’s] Department. It was an interesting way to work; I mean it’s all changed now, all bureaucratised! (Chuckles)

27.13 Absolutely (Chuckles). Actually, I’ve got questions about that. Did you… I know that Don was very, very keen on developing the Arts and as a result did you find you had… did you meet him socially to chat informally at all?

Oh yes. Well I’d go to lots of things he’d go to: the opening of that or the performance of that. I saw him two or three times a week sometimes, at various things. And during the seventies I would do things for him, such as….I’d see him socially from time to time and he’d say during the Festivals of seventy four, six, and eight, I think, he’d say ' I want to organise a series of Sunday lunches out at my house, the new one at Norwood, and I want to get a mix of Festival artists from interstate and overseas who are here, and will you organise them for two or three Sundays in a row with about x number of people?’ So I’d get that organised. It was great fun.

28.24 Mmm. I bet it was

And the parties, the lunches were fabulous. People couldn’t believe the Premier of the State, you know - a long table near the swimming pool, outdoors with Don doing the cooking, lovely wines and lovely sunny Adelaide day - you know, it was quite amazing. Extraordinary actually.

28.44 Yes. He really was sort of a Renaissance man, wasn’t he?

Yes, he was. Yes, yes, he was. And things like that, he used to love doing; he was in his element. But sometimes he could be a very shy person too. I mean, he was a funny man. He suffered very bad migraine headaches in those years….

Did he?

that would knock him about very badly. I remember we went to one of the tourist developments we were interested in looking at was that big tourist development at Swan Hill. What was it, god, we flew up in a light aircraft with someone from the South Australian Tourist Bureau, plus someone from the tourist lobby group at the time, and myself, there were about four or five us, and we were going to a dinner that night to meet the person who’d developed this major project and Don just got a terrible migraine and couldn’t stay for the dinner meeting, the whole point of going, he had to go to bed. It was just terrible, I don’t know what happened.

29.46 Was it stress do you think?

I think it might have been stress, yes, but he had them, I know they hit from time to time.
29.54  Was he a man who could pigeon-hole things, so when he was talking about a particular subject, do you think you had his whole-hearted attention?

Largely, yes, yes. When Don was in full flight he sort of set the pace at a meeting, you know. Don was also, you know, the rhetoric, the voice; he was on the stage almost (Chuckles).

30.27  Yes, sort of performing almost. But you say he was also a good listener?

He was a good listener. If he knew that you were… I don't think he ever knocked me back on any proposal I put up, or on any amount of funding. He would rely on you to come to him with a proposal which had been properly researched and was within, and part of, the overall policy and he say ‘that'll be fine’ and sign it, done.

31.00  How did your proposals go in terms of the Treasury? Were they always supportive of what it was that you and Don, in the Arts, put forward?

I think Treasury was always trying to cut everything back. But Don was also Treasurer, so that helped!

31.23  He put on his Treasurer’s hat and ticked it!

I remember when he wanted to get money to develop, to start developing the regional arts centres. He went to… who was it…. Gil Seaman? A very good Under Secretary [of Treasury], very solid, a bit conservative, but very good, very professional public servant and he would say ‘Premier, I don't think we can do that’ and he [Don] would say, ‘We're going to do it, Gil. We're going to take the money from that, and borrow from that, in order to make that happen.’ End of argument (Laughs).

32.03  So he was pretty decisive?

Yes, yes. To make things happen he would make them happen

32.12  What about when legislation went into Parliament, how did the opposition cope? Did the Arts get support?

Yes. I think, the wonderful thing that I found really extraordinary was that by and large the Arts got very good bi-partisan support, right through.

32.25  Did it?

And I found that, very much so, when I was working for the Tonkin Government, when Murray Hill was the Minister, and then again, when John Bannon became the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts, and I became the Director at that time for the Arts. And quite a few politicians from both sides used to say to me how good it was that the Arts was supported by both sides, and I always…. something that actually was always in the back of my mind was that I've got to be a public servant who is completely professional about this and you've got to get support from both sides; you've got to get to know the politicians on the other side, get them to respect what you're doing. But it was good. I mean Di Laidlaw was a wonderful Minister for the Arts. She built on so many things that had been built on by Bannon, and things that Murray Hill, who was an
excellent Minister I thought. And most of Don’s vision was kept intact. I mean they wanted to review that and have a look at that, but they didn’t throw anything out once the Government changed.

33.37 What about the opposition actually during Don’s time. Was there a Shadow Minister for the Arts or…?

I can’t remember who they even were. I don’t think they were very effective; Don was so on top of everything (Laughs). Do you know I can’t even remember who the Shadow Ministers were in those days, frankly.

33.55 Well, that says a lot in itself.

Yes. Well Murray [Hill] would’ve been, in the latter years, because he became Minister in ’79, but he also had Local Government, Ethnic Affairs and something else as well, I think. But he learnt; he was interested in the Arts in his own way, and he was a fair man, a bit cautious, a bit conservative, but fair, and not vindictive about anything. I liked working for him.

34.30 Mmm. That’s good, yes. Um, will you talk about…..in the Dunstan Decade quite a lot of boards, trusts and committees were established. How were the appointments to those bodies made, and do you think that generally they were successful?

Yes, I think they were. They were made by Don on recommendation from people like Peter Ward. Obviously Peter had a big say in all the Arts appointments; they had to go through Peter to get to Don. I would put in my suggestions as well, obviously, for things. I think basically we had a lot of good people. You know, like John Baily was made first Chairman of the Festival Centre [Trust], then David Wynn came after John. And Colin Ballantyne was the obvious one, in Don’s mind, to chair the [SA] Theatre Company once it was restructured.

35.21 Yes.

So yes, there were good people.

35.24 There was a slight criticism in Colin Horne’s chapter on “The Arts” that maybe Don set up too many committees and they were all a bit dilettante and not overly professional. You don’t agree with that?

I remember reading that. Colin, yes.

35.51 I’m going to quote a bit from it later in the interview, but it was the 1981 book, The Dunstan Decade – Social Democracy at the State level….

Oh yes, yes

… and Colin Horne wrote a chapter on “The Arts”, and he made the comment that there were probably too many committees and they were a bit dilettante.
Probably in retrospect there were too many. A lot of committees were set up as well as boards. I mean arts organisations were set up and then the Government was involved in appointments. Once the Government funding became quite substantial the Government would have a say in appointing people to those boards. For instance, the Festival of Arts [Board] already had the proposal in the incorporated rules of association for the Government to appoint a member, which they didn’t take up until Don became Premier and he put me on the Board.

37.02 Right. That was the Board of the Festival, right?

Mmm. There was a space for a Government nominee, but the Government hadn’t taken it up for eleven years!

37.13 Is that right?

But the City Council had… all the time. There was one [position] for the City Council and they shared it out. Some would go on for two years and someone else for another two years – you know “spoils of office.”

37.23 Yea.

One of the first things I did was to write a submission to Don saying that the Government should be represented, and if you want me to on, I’d be happy to do it. And he said ‘Absolutely’ and he wrote the Festival Board, I drafted the letter. They got a bit of a shock, actually! (Laughs),

37.39 I can imagine that they did.

And I turned up at the Board meeting in 1971. It was very funny. And I stayed on the Board for a long time. [1971 – 1994]

37.50 The reason I’m asking about those committees and boards and trusts and so on is I wondered if there was much patronage that went on and was it sort of jobs for the boys?

Well yes, there was bit of patronage, because I mean, there were people that Don knew, there were people who were broadly in support of what Don was doing, they were supportive of the Arts, or they had an interest in that particular organisation, or they could bring some special skills. But that’s true; Don would vet them. I remember one particular [person], I won’t mention who it was, he’s now dead, whom I put up who I thought would be a very good person to be one of the Government to chair the South Australian Symphony Orchestra Advisory Committee, which the Government had two members on, and I became one of them, and Don said ‘No. No way, no argument’, so I didn’t bother to pursue that. But that person would have been a good person, but it was a ‘No, not a Labor supporter.’

38.54 Ahh.

And he’d been a bit vocal about it and Don wasn’t going to have that. But both sides appointed their own people; the Liberals did. But I think by and large I think there were
more good people on boards than people who just didn't contribute. Much more successful I think.

39.24 OK. Now, before we got on to the next section, which is a little bit more personal about Don, you've talked about the Premier's Department when you first started, and I'm going back a tiny bit, you were not on the same floor as the Premier so you didn't have him ducking in and out of your office all the time, did you?

The floor below, I think, we had two floors or three floors. He was on the eleventh I think, and I was on the tenth. I was in the Policy Secretariat area…

39.47 Right. And that was down in?

the State Administration Centre there in Victoria Square. Don was on the eleventh floor and he had his cabinet room on the twelfth, or maybe the eleventh, I can't remember. And he had his staff around his offices, his secretary and the assistant secretary and the general office area all on the one level and we were down with a whole series of offices on the next floor.

40.11 Right. And Bob Bakewell was the….

Bob came in as…first he was the head of the Policy Secretariat on a sort of part-time basis, and then in about 1972 or 73 he became the first Director General of the Premier's Department, so he pulled all the bureaucracy together to make the Department even more high powered because Bob was a bit of an empire builder, but a very good one, and an amazingly good operator. He was originally the Public Service Commissioner…

40.46 That's right

….before, so he knew how it all worked and he sort of virtually made, restructured, the public service and the Department in the way Don wanted it to happen; basically, from that key role as Director General in the Premier’s Department he turned it into the most powerful public service position for those years in the State. And then after that he ended up by being, I think, Economic Development um …

41.15 Yes, he went on to something else after that…

…yes, Director of Economic Development

41.19 When you first started, when it was so tiny, just describe the working atmosphere – was it formal, bureaucratic, informal, hierarchical, casual??

Fairly casual, yes. Not hierarchical; people wandering in and out of offices with files chatting about ideas - quite extraordinary when I look back on it. A very small number of people, but as it grew it got more structured. You know, they had to. And as the Policy Secretariat became more influential it became, you know, more procedural, and it ended up by Don having a Friday morning meeting with all the heads of the various sections of the Department from the Director General and the Policy Division; the Women's Advisory Unit; the Industrial Democracy Unit; the Arts [Unit] and oh, I can’t remember -
there were one or two others, and one of his [Don’s] personal staff I think. There were about ten of us around the table and we’d have a Friday morning meeting where Don would come in and say: ‘This is how we’re going on this and this and this, and I want that done, and I’m happy with that, and not happy with that, and that leak to the paper was terrible, and find out who did that’, and all that sort of thing. The Friday morning meetings were a bit extraordinary.

**42.44** That was fairly extraordinary in itself wasn’t it, that the Premier was so closely involved with the administration in that way, that weekly way.

Mmm. He just wanted us all...he wanted to hear what we all had to say, and he wanted us to tell us what....I mean, sometimes he wouldn’t stay for the whole meeting, he’d just come in for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, you know. If there was a major thing he wanted to tell us all about, he’d come in and say: ‘This is what I want to do’ in a major policy area which may not have affected me, but I was there because we were all part of the one Department. So it was interesting.

**43.23** Yes, very interesting. I know that the [Arts] Development Branch became a Division, I believe in 76, wasn’t it?

Yes, well, that’s when I dropped the tourism area

**43.35** Ah, is that when it happened?

Yes. We were the Arts Development Branch in the Premier’s Department and then we became the Arts Development Division I think about, I can’t remember exactly when, it might have been sometime around about ′74 I think, ′73, ′74, when I virtually shed a lot of the tourism projects, once they’d got to a certain stage. Because the arts work was becoming so demanding I just said: Look I really need now to concentrate on the Arts and the tourism thing is becoming too difficult to go backwards and forwards you know. So we virtually moved the tourism projects out into various areas of tourism, because they had done a bit of restructuring and had some more staff in there and could do a few more things in research and development. And the Festival Centre was on the way anyway, and the Ayers House thing was being constructed, and we’d put out a prospectus on the hotel in Victoria Square and Don was overseas trying to sell it to Japanese or Hong Kong investors to build a hotel so it was in the hands of somebody else to actually make it happen; I’d done all the preliminary work. And we’d come up with a feasibility study on something else and that was in somebody else’s hands. So I could actually shed those non-specific arts things and concentrate on developing the Arts scene with the Film Corporation, with the Jam Factory, getting an opera company off the ground and seeing that the [SA] Theatre Company was properly established, overseeing the development of the Festival Centre and being involved in the development of the Festival [of Arts]. All those things were becoming, with four or five staff, very demanding.

**45.32** Mmm. Who took over tourism area?

They went off to various areas.

**45.38** I see. There wasn’t a Tourist Department?
No. There was the South Australian Government Tourist Bureau, an awful cumbersome title. And that continued on, but actually I think they ended up with... some of the older staff retired and they got someone in to run the development and someone to do the research, and they got a few more in who could actually do things, running out of the tourism area rather than me having to be like, not looking over their shoulder, but, sort of, getting involved on a day to day basis.

46.16 That was probably a big relief to you, to shed the tourism

It was a great relief because it was getting too much.

46.21 Yes. When the [Arts] Division started to grow and all these things were happening and there was an increase in staff and so on, did Don’s involvement, if you like day by day, or week by week involvement lessen?

It did lessen, yes. Because he was getting busy with all sorts of other things as well. But he would approve things all the time and there was constantly stuff going up to him for approval: proposals; one stage of a development; funding every year, the budget would be increased and I’d know that I could operate within so much for all the organisations and we knew how much we could give to the [major] arts and how much we had for the small grants. We ended up also, as I recollect, setting up another body to look after all the large on-going organisations; I think it was the...like a major Arts Advisory Committee that monitored..... I think that came into being in the late seventies; it was certainly operating during the Tonkin and Bannon years, a separate committee that monitored the development and the performance, both financially and artistically, of the major on-going arts organisations.

47.58 The flagship organisations

The flagships, yes, with the smaller grants being looked after by the old Arts Grants Advisory Committee. I’m not sure now how they intersected but we serviced them from our Department obviously, you know, we looked after them – the committees – I had staff, a secretary, to do all that; the day to day work, correspondence, advising applicants, all the things that you had to do, you know; getting the committees together, going out and talking to the arts organisations and getting them to come in and talk to the committee – the major ones – and all that started to develop over a period. So we’d actually built up a little bit more by the late seventies. We had a Visual Arts and Crafts Project Officer. I had the beginnings of a Music Project Officer. I had another sort of Senior Administrative Officer to help and I think by the time we got to ’79 when there was a change in Government and we’d moved into Edmund Wright House, I think we had about eight or nine on the staff. It built up from me, then to two and four, then six, then nine.

49.23 Mmm. you certainly saw some changes. Now I want to, sort of, get off the administration and move a little bit onto a more personal level of Don. In his range of reforms where do you think the Arts sat in Don Dunstan’s idea?

I think he loved...I think he enjoyed enormously the reforms in the Arts and the development in the Arts. I think they gave him a lot of pleasure. I think it was probably, I won’t say it was the easiest thing to do, but I think it’s the one area he really enjoyed. Probably found it more relaxing and stimulating than a lot of the others because he met
a whole lot of interesting people. You know he’d set up these organisations with boards and people he knew that he wanted to put on the boards, and we managed to attract a lot of interesting people to come in and run these organisations, so I think it was very, very important for him - a major part of ...a major development was the Arts in South Australia for him - very much so, yes.

50.44 That's what it comes out as being, in retrospect, yes?

Yes. The more I think about it the more I’m convinced. Yes.

50.55 And it fitted, not only his persona, but also his political image; that was important to him, wasn’t it, his image?

Yes. He saw the State what they call niche now I suppose, and the tourism things and the arts would complement each other. I mean the tourism things were special things, like the Aboriginal Centre that the other States didn’t have, and the arts things which he could develop from the beginning in many cases, like the film and the craft, which would make South Australia a place where people would want to come for holidays. Not just for the Festival and not just visibly having the Festival Centre there, but as a structure that said here we are, here’s the Arts: employing people in a range of areas in the arts and developing industries like craft and film which would make South Australia special and different and attractive for people to come and live and visit, you know. It was all part of the vision, the plan.

52.34 Yes. And he was knowledgeable in a number of Arts areas wasn’t he?

Yes, yes. He was a thespian, and he loved music. He was an actor when he was young and he played the piano more than passably well, and he loved music and loved literature and was fascinated by the prospect of the crafts in South Australia becoming rather special in terms of a “State” design in the craft. Yes, he had a broad range of interests.

53.27 Is it true that he was fairly influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement in England, and also William Morris’ political ideas, of course; he was a sort of early socialist, if you like. Is that true?

I think so, yes. He was very much influenced by Morris, certainly, as I recollect. I can’t answer politically. I’m not sure. I can’t tell you actually. But he did have a wide range of connections overseas in the social democratic areas of parties and governments when he was a young man, when he was a young politician and when he was Premier. For instance he was a very close friend of Lee Kwan Yew until whatever happened between them - they had a falling out. There were quite a lot of photographs of them together in early conferences in London and overseas. Who were the other ones: he was very...there were a few others. I can’t remember this now; it’s gone out of my mind. -

54.46 He was a great devotee of Italy, wasn’t he?

A great devotee of Italy. He went to Perugia after he resigned from Parliament to spend some time there learning the Italian language. He loved, he was fascinated by, and I alluded to this, he loved the Scandinavian countries and their emphasis on design-based industries and wanted to model South Australia on some of the things that happened
there. He very much wanted to develop a world class theatre company in South Australia because he felt that that was important.

55.43 Yes. He had very high arts ideas though didn't he? I wonder whether he saw the Arts as something...did he have elitist ideas or did he want everybody to enjoy them, a community thing? I know that's really hard to determine.....

It's a good question, yes. I think there was a certain amount of elitism in terms of excellence, yes, certainly. But I think Don very much also wanted the Arts to permeate right through the community, and he very much particularly, after we got all the major arts organisations re-established or established in Adelaide, he turned his eye towards developing the regional areas of South Australia and spreading the word in terms of proper facilities and cultural centres in the four major regions; and supporting tourism around the State; and more things coming into the State through the Festival Centre; and broadening the scope of the Festival, the Adelaide Festival. It was all part of a pattern.

57.08 So there was a change over time?

Yes, perhaps it wasn't a conscious thing, but it sort of happened, you know. The Arts were being disseminated far and wide with more organisations spreading it around through the State. It was quite extraordinary when I think back on it now. When you think back about what the State has now as distinct from what it didn't have in 1970; very little support it had. It's quite breath-taking really.

57.43 It is. I think we'll take a break because this [recording] is going to finish in a minute, but just one question if I could, and we may have to lay it over to the next tape. Some of the things I believe he really didn't deal with, and I've sort of headed them under Institutional Arts, and I'm talking about the [SA] Museum, the Art Gallery [of SA], the [State] Library - he didn't have much influence on those, or you didn't in that [Arts] Division. Was it because those institutions were a bit too 'establishment', or were they already well funded, which I believe is not true, they weren't particularly well funded – what's your answer to that?

Well, that really is a very interesting question because those institutions were all, as I recollect... the Art Gallery was a separate Department, [directly reporting to the Premier] and the Museum and the Library were part of the Local Government Department and they were getting funding, but they were off the radar in those days because Don wanted to get a whole lot of new things going, and whether he would have turned his attention.....We'd already started to do something about the Museum because that was the one that had the most critical needs; the Library had already gone through a major renovation, but not a particularly aesthetically interesting one, back in the sixties; and the Art Gallery was sort of being looked after but it was not very exciting really until much...until the eighties. But we started a major development with the Museum in 1978 and that's when John Bannon became [the] young Minister in the last year of the Dunstan Government, the Minister for Community Development, and we took on the Museum as one of the portfolio areas and we commissioned Bob Edwards to do a major study of the whole Museum situation in South Australia.

59.56 Right
So there was movement starting to do something about the neglect of the North Terrace institutions, which then did follow through Murray Hill in the Tonkin Government and Bannon Government, and then [Diana] Laidlaw as Minister in the Dean Brown and John Olsen Governments as well in terms of redevelopment of the Museum, and the next stage of the Art Gallery that was later. So whether, if Don had stayed on as Premier, would have…but it was happening, and it was basically because he’d set up, he’d relinquished the Arts basically, and handed it over to Bannon as……

1.00.38 That was in about…I've got a note here that it was '78?…

Yes, '78, late '78

1.00.44...that Community Development was started and was headed by Bannon and I believe those institutions came under his…

Well, the Art Gallery was still separate, and the Library was still part of [Department of] Local Government, or wasn't brought into Community Development with SA Museum with but we had the Museum…

1.00.58 Ah

…we had the Museum. And then when the Tonkin Government came in they decided they were going to set up a proper Department of the Arts, and they did eventually, right towards the end of their three years in the Government. They were going to bring the Art Gallery into the Department; in other words it wasn't going to be a separate Department, and they were going to bring the Museum formally into it, but they balked at putting the Library into it; they kept the Library as a part of Local Government. But then Murray Hill was Minister for the Arts, Local Government, Ethnic Affairs etcetera, so it was in his portfolio.

1.01.39 So it came under the same umbrella.

Yes. So we all worked together, and that was the beginning of the really interesting developments on North Terrace, and it all started, basically, with the commissioning of the Edwards Report, with the Tonkin Government and Murray Hill as Minister, picking up the Edwards Report and starting to implement it and the setting up of a Department which included the Art Gallery and the SA Museum...and I became the first Director of the Arts in the middle of 1981 – so, we had a Department, a small one, but it was a Department - at last it was a Department in its own right.

1.02.14 Yes. Right, I think we'll have to stop this tape now and we'll recommence in a few minutes.

1.02.22 END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2

00.00 This is Felicity Morgan interviewing Len Amadio, part 2. Well, here we are, back again Len. In your time with Don Dunstan in the Arts during the Dunstan Decade there are just really too many initiatives to mention them all, but if I give
you some overall headings and ask you which of these were of most importance to Don: those to which he gave the highest degree of his personal input and his drive to put through and so on, maybe you'd like to respond to those?

Yep

00.40 Well first of all, of course, we start off with the Festival Centre.

Yes

00.45 And it had three openings I believe, '73; '74 and '76?

Yes, um '77…

00.51 '77, sorry.

…was when the Queen came and opened the Plaza, yes.

00.57 And Don of course was wholeheartedly behind it?

Oh yes, well I mean, it wouldn't have happened if he hadn't been Premier: he had the vision for a complete arts centre; of a very cost effective one; and one that actually would work very well. And Don was right behind that – at all stages. Yes.

01.13 It's a marvellous legacy to him

It is. It is. And I'm glad that they've named the Playhouse after Don too, which is nice gesture by the current [Rann] Government, and an initiative of the current Premier, Mike Rann.

01.22 And apt…

Yes. Very apt.

01.24 …because I understand he did a wonderful poetry reading at the opening?

Yes. He read John Bray’s special poem – it was wonderful. That was in October '74. It was quite a nice occasion. Yes.

01.44. I can imagine. He probably received a very good applause.

Yes, it was great.

01.50 Moving on now to, but staying with the theatre though, I'm looking at the performing arts here, talk about the State Theatre [Company] briefly. (The State Theatre Company was, at that time known as the South Australian Theatre Company).

Well, it was a wonderful initiative to take the old Elizabethan Theatre Trust Company and restructure it and legislate for the [SA Theatre] Company to be a permanent fixture; legislate for it to be housed in the Playhouse with its own home and facilities; and to
enable the new board to look far and wide to get the best possible artistic director. All those things happened and were a part of Don’s.

02.31 And the first Artistic Director was?

George Ogilvie. George Ogilvie in 1972. So that was fantastic, and the Company went on from strength to strength with George Ogilvie, Colin George, Jim Sharman; John Gaden - quite an illustrious list of directors.

02.49 Absolutely. What about dance?

Well, dance was an interesting one because Elizabeth Dalman had been a pioneer and had set up the Australian Dance Theatre without any support from Government. We gave her the first [State] Government grant, [and] she built up the company. It was a bit unfortunate that after five or six years that Liz had not...well, she had developed the company as far as she could, but it was quite obvious that it needed to go to a next stage of its development. And so the company was restructured and they brought in Jonathan Taylor... It's had a rocky road, the company, I mean you know, there was the Meryl Tankard business... but I must admit it’s a miracle that it has survived so well currently, and it was in many ways, the first Government supported contemporary dance company in the country, and...of course we now have two companies in Adelaide, which causes some people to wonder how we can afford it, and don't ask me how we do it now! But Leigh Warren, who was a very good artistic director of the Australian Dance Theatre left under not very pleasant circumstances, and he decided to stay [in Adelaide] and form his own company and he’s managed to do that now for twenty years, so there you are!

04.27 Umm. Was Victoria involved with dance... with South Australia in the dance area at one stage?

There was a move back in the post Dick Hamer, days. It was Race Mathews as Arts Minister when John Cain was Premier [of Victoria] there was a move to try - it actually happened for a while - to support the... Victoria and South Australia would jointly fund the [Australian] Dance Theatre when Jonathan Taylor came, and that happened for a while, but, it didn't last. Victoria wanted to have it in Victoria or Victoria wanted its own company, but they’d had a classical ballet company that hadn’t succeeded. At the same time we were having pressure from the sort of semi professional, from the more sort of amateur, South Australian Ballet Company to support them and we steadfastly refused because we knew that the Australian Dance Theatre was something we could build on. And we, Australia, needed a modern contemporary dance company and as we had the beginnings, the makings of it, in South Australia, why would you support another company that was doing classical ballet when you’ve already got one in Queensland, one in Western Australia and a national company?

05.43 So that was very much Don, was it?

Mmm. Yes.

05.46 He didn’t go for the classical side? – That’s interesting.
He really wanted to support Liz Dalman, he did; he wanted to give her a chance to really get that company going.

05.54 Ah, that’s interesting. Music - that’s your field – we’ve hardly talked about that. Of course the ABC owned, didn’t it, at that stage, the South Australian, the Melbourne, sorry, not Melbourne, the Victorian… (Len cuts in)

Yes, the ABC built up all the orchestras, all around Australia, right through to the eighties.

06.12 So the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra is where you were?

Yes, I was there as the Concert Manager for the South Australian [Symphony Orchestra]

06.18 Concert Manager. There was a State Government grant also that went into that?

A State Government grant went to the Orchestra and there was a South Australian Symphony Orchestra Advisory Committee which had two people from the ABC, two people from the Government and two people from the [Adelaide City] Council that monitored, or was supposed to monitor, the Orchestra and recommend support, but the ABC didn’t really take much notice of it; only called it together twice a year, until I came in and decided it was going to have a more pro-active role, which shocked the ABC: again, the Government was seen to be taking a [lead]…because I had a very personal thing about the Orchestra – that it was being neglected, and needed to be supported and we needed to (a) increase the funding so they could increase the number of permanent players; and [(b)] we needed to have the Orchestra available for the young [State] Opera Company and to be able to do more interesting things apart from doing just what the ABC wanted, so that caused a lot of……

07.15 And Don was right behind that?

Oh yea, yea. In fact he was right behind setting up the State Opera Company.

07.20 That was exactly my next question. That had been the New Opera, hadn’t it?

It was the Intimate Opera and became New Opera, and we got Justin Macdonnell, who became the administrator. It needed a really good person to pull it altogether otherwise it wouldn’t have happened. We tried, when I was Concert Manager for the ABC, a whole group of people in music, we tried to get an opera company going back in, I think, about 1968, but it didn’t work. So again, once I came into the position [in the Premier’s Department], and we had someone like Justin there at Flinders University who was interested in taking hold and setting it up and making a fairly contemporary…doing some interesting new opera, modern opera, not a pale shadow of the Australian Opera, it was quite exciting. And then because Don decided then that he wanted to do what he did with the Theatre Company, he wanted to guarantee that the Opera Company would be in safe hands and it would be a permanent fixture, so he agreed to legislate, to set up the [Opera] Company under an Act of Parliament….

08.26 And the Theatre [Company] was set up under an Act of Parliament?
…under an Act of Parliament as well. As was the Festival Centre Trust. And as is now the Festival [ of Arts], which wasn’t the case in the early days.

08.36 So those were his sort of flagships?

His flagships, yes. And the Opera Company went on to develop a very interesting repertoire. Although it started off as a modern company it became more of a mainstream opera company, but it did very good productions, first in her Majesty’s Theatre, then in the Festival Theatre with the Government guaranteeing, with the agreement of the ABC, that the Orchestra would be made available for three or four productions a year. And also that the ABC and the Opera Company and the Festival would cooperate and try to mount something very interesting for the Festival which wouldn’t normally be done outside of the Festival period. And that was very much an Anthony Steel initiative when he became Artistic Director of the Festival.

09.30 Yeah, yeah. So you had those major arts organisation working in unison with one another?

Yes, and you had the major arts organisations, actually starting in the seventies, to make major contributions to the Festival every two years, where they weren’t…in part because they didn’t exist really…. [previously] having a major role in Festival programming, which was another good thing that sort of made it all work together

10.00 Do you think Don had seen that vision? Was that kind of part of it?

Oh yes, very much so. He wanted to develop those companies as really top professional companies that would contribute to the State and be part of the Festival and all the rest of it, yes.

10.17 Which is a terrific showcase of course for all those companies, yes. Now moving away from the performing arts if you like - the visual arts - and you’ve touched on these a couple of times; there was a Craft Authority I believe set up? Tell me about Don’s vision quickly, and how he drove that?

I think Peter Ward and Dick Richards, particularly Dick Richards. He was Senior Curator in Crafts and Applied Arts at the [SA Art] Gallery and who was very much the person who really persuaded Don to go with the idea of a craft industry which metamorphosed through the Jam Factory, you know, in it’s original home in the old building out on, where was it, out on Paynham Road, the old IXL Factory, hence the Jam Factory, which name stuck when they moved into the Living Arts Centre, where they had a proper permanent home with the crafts people working there with the retail outlet and all the rest of it going on. So that was very much, I think, Peter Ward and Dick Richards who drove that with Don. I mean Don… the three of them basically… that was their rather interesting development. The visual arts were a bit neglected I feel, in a way, and I think you alluded to this earlier. I mean the Art Gallery was a little bit off the radar and the Government art grant for purchases was pretty low, and the Art Gallery didn’t have a proper [corporate] foundation, the Foundation didn’t get going until the seventies and the eighties so the visual arts was sort of struggling along without a great deal of Government support, apart from individual artists who were doing things, and the
Contemporary Arts Society was starting to get a bit of funding, but crafts was made quite a priority with Don.

12.09 And do you think that was because of what he’d seen in Scandinavia?

He’d seen designs; he’d seen beautiful design work and he knew that we had the possibilities of doing it here, that we had the crafts and we could attract crafts people here. It was a niche sort of industry that South Australia could develop.

12.25 With a kind of double reasoning, I read: not only to support potters, ceramicists, and so on, but also to be a centre for the sale of these things?

Oh, yes, yes, to set up a proper outlet, you know, where South Australian design work in pottery and glass and other things could be sold and exported and this would become a very important centre within Australia for design craft.

13.04 Do you think that's.....?

Ambitious? Yes, very ambitious. It’s a miracle that it actually happened in a way because I can remember I was...it took me a while to grapple with it. I was not as directly involved in that as I was with the performing arts as such. I mean I was sort of involved, but I was not working on it the way others were.

13.26 There was a Visual Arts Officer wasn't there in your section as well?

We had Carolyn Rankin as my first Visual Arts Officer. She came in ’77. She did one or two other things as well as the visual arts and crafts, and she helped... she was tremendously good in flushing out young artists and encouraging them and supporting them with grants and keeping an eye on what was happening in the [Art] Gallery and in the Contemporary Arts Society and the crafts things, so that was good.

14.00 Yeah, yeah

Well it was... my strength was the performing arts and I felt that when we needed project officers I felt we really needed a visual arts and craft project officer because we had Chris Winzар who was a specialist in theatre and performing arts, and we got a music officer because that was a big area, but the crafts – I felt that was not an area that I was very expert in. I had a general knowledge of it all but we needed to get someone in who could develop some of these things, and that was good.

14.32 Yes. Who was your, just back-tracking, who was your Music Project Officer?

We had Michael Elwood in at first for a period, and then Stephen Block came in as the first Music Project Officer and then Stephen went on to become General Manager of the Australian String Quartet.

14.50 Indeed. Um, and now, the Film Corporation? That was a big Don item wasn’t it?
This was in many ways the most, the toughest, one to get off the ground I think because it needed a proper feasibility study to be done. It had Philip Adams running around and sort of pulling all the strings and advising Don on what you could do and what you couldn't do, and setting up the model of the Corporation with a small board and a Chairman Director, which was Gil Brealey, quite an inspired choice actually – the right person - a highly volatile person, but a tremendous creative force in getting the industry going in South Australia; building up some staff of producers and encouraging film makers to come in. Don was very keen on South Australia as a location for filming. He said we had so much; so many wonderful things in the city and out in the regions to use, so when Gallipoli was made and when Breaker Morant and those films were made the [SA Film] Corporation was able to assist in many ways with locations. And when directors like Peter Weir and Bruce Beresford were coming it gave a big fillip to the whole thing in the late seventies early eighties.

16.24 Mmm

And then the other side to it was setting up, pulling together, into the Film Corporation the ability to make documentaries and films for Government and semi-Government bodies which was another bag of money. I chaired that committee for years which went through, with the two executive producers, to decide which of the projects coming in from Government would be the ones that would be good for, you know, not only would they make good documentaries, but would also enhance Don's vision and also be able to, you know, not so much educational, but films that would be around for a long time and could be used by organisations and departments to promote their activities and all the rest of it.

17.22 And tourism films too?

And tourism films, yes. We did films for Education Department; Further Education; Water Resources; we did two or three films on the broad Arts area and Tourism. Yes, we had a lot of films that we were considering all the time coming in from Government and semi-Government bodies. So there was a great body of documentary films made over that period, in the late seventies right through.

17.55 As well as the amazing feature films…

… as well as the amazing feature films which were harder to get going, but once they got going they were great. And of course the Corporation then, of course, were finding it becoming very competitive with New South Wales setting up a film office and Victoria setting up a proper, rather larger structure and Western Australia wanted to do something and Tasmania setting up a small corporation!! So the role of the [SA Film] Corporation was constantly changing as to what it could do. I mean, they ended up out at Hendon taking up part of the old Phillips factory; they had sound stages and mixing rooms and dubbing and post production facilities so they were able to be a catalyst for people who wanted to come in. There was quite a lot of conflict between…I mean success breded conflict because young film directors who saw the opportunity at the Corporation then wanted to make their own feature films; they wanted to get away from the Corporation and make them on their own and sort of be their own people. And so there was a lot of conflict at the Corporation; it wouldn't let go of some things and let young film-makers [be independent], and of course, out of that came people like Scott
Hicks and Mario Andreacchio and other young film makers, not so young now, but fantastically good film makers.

19.46 It was a very exciting time. South Australia was right in on the ground floor. And Don, that was a thing that Don was very keen on, wasn’t it?

A major thing that he wanted to develop, a major thing.

20.00 What about regional arts?

I think out of the role of the Arts Council of South Australia, which was getting a miniscule amount of money until we came in and started to boost them and help them set up more branches around the State and coordinate touring. It was quite obvious that the Arts Council couldn’t, on its own, take the next big step which was needed in order to make country touring more viable: because you had a whole lot of small country halls and Institute Buildings around the State, but you didn’t have any decent medium sized facilities. So Don said ‘Right, we’ve got to have these regional centres set up and I want a method of funding which will allow us to borrow money in order to set them up’ And he decided the first one would be the South East, and then we wanted one in the mid North, and we needed one over in um, um … We needed one in Port Pirie and one in Whyalla, and we needed one in the Riverland, although I thought we needed something in Port Lincoln as well, but we had a good hall there that was actually developed. But we built over a period of what, six or seven years, from the late seventies, Regional Centres in Mount Gambier; Port Pirie; Whyalla; and Renmark.

21.35 Oh! Renmark as well? Then Port Lincoln eventually too?

Well, Port Lincoln we adapted – we set up a programme where we put money into expanding and refurbishing existing halls to make them better. But the other four I talked to you about were the major ones that were built as complete art centres with proper back-stage facilities with offices, foyers, one large theatre…..

22.06 And they had galleries as well in them?

And gallery space built in for exhibitions and all the rest of it.

22.13 A great achievement

A great achievement. But then we had the problem of how to integrate the Arts Council [of South Australia] in with them - because we had to set up trusts to run them, and you know, I mean, you made the point earlier, there were so many trusts and organisations you may wonder how we found people to go on these trusts! Like there were a couple of hundred people around South Australia on boards and trusts. Then getting people from the regions, getting the representation from the region on the trust was important. You know, Renmark was only one of four towns in the Riverland, all jealous of each other, all wanting to have an arts centre…

22.59 I can imagine!

…all that sort of thing. And then how to make the Whyalla one the focal point for that part of the State; how to build one in Port Pirie, which was a very depressed town: to get
an arts centre there which could be a hub for the region. The Mount Gambia one was, in many ways, the easiest one to build because there was more of a history of arts activity down there then in some of the other areas, so that was why that was the first one.

23.28 And they had Robert Helpmann as a sort of figurehead!

And Robert Helpmann, and of course the inevitable; we decided to rename the theatre the Helpmann Theatre - that was a great thing to do. And he actually came down for that – came down for the re-launching of the theatre – an amazing occasion, it was great fun. John Bannon was Premier then, but Don came and was acknowledged for what he’d done and that was quite special. The Australian Dance Theatre performed on that occasion as well.

Oh did they?

Yes.

23.59 Because they [the Regional Arts Centres] were set up under, I think, something called the Regional Cultural Centres Act, is that right?

Yes. it was a separate Act set up in order to develop these [Centres], and Don had a special way of funding these through semi-government loan borrowings, which was pretty....some new way to get the Treasury to agree. I think I might have mentioned I think that's when he had a bit of an argument with the Under Treasurer about it, about how we were going to fund these [Centres].

24.23 Oh, Okay, right.

He wanted to do it out of separate borrowings. He didn't want to take it out of normal capital funding that would interfere with capital funding of hospitals and schools and all the other things. He wanted to set it up under a borrowing scheme.

24.37 And it was later then that the South Australian Country Arts Trust sort of got going?

Yes. The Arts Trust, the Country Arts Trust was the next stage: The Arts Council [of South Australia] finally metamorphosed into the South Australian Country Arts Trust, with all the branches still intact and the Trust running all the regional things in the State. There was a lot of, you know, it wasn’t easy when you had to phase one organisation into another, but it was a necessary step in order to get the whole regional thing set up.

25.22 And that’s still going isn’t it?

Still going very well, very successfully actually, yes.

25.26 Yes, um, moving along. You've talked about the Cultural Centre in the Coorong. Can you talk about Don in terms of Aboriginal art, or art and culture?

Well, of course he, quite apart from what he wanted to do in social work and Aboriginal welfare and Aboriginal development in the land councils and everything else, he wanted to highlight… for somewhere [to be] an Aboriginal cultural centre which would be not
only for performance, would not only be for display, but would be run by Aboriginal people. And he wanted it down the Coorong. Well, we did a sort of feasibility and really it didn't stack up doing it in the Coorong.

26.16 Not enough people down there?

Not enough people, and from a tourism point of view it just wouldn't work, I can't remember all the details. And that was abandoned. And then of course the idea of doing it in Adelaide and taking over that building down on the, what was it, the building on the corner of…

Is it Grenfell?

…..Grenfell Street, the old whatever it was…a big utility building….

Was it the Water Works?

….I can't remember, water works or something like that, turning it into Tandanya. Gutting it and turning it into a cultural centre, which I thought was great idea.

26.52 It’s a beautiful building

Beautiful building, and as it turned out that whole part of Adelaide has become quite exciting and interesting with housing and development and restaurants and more people living in that area. It just seemed to be the right place to put it, as it turned out, and it's been quite successful I think. Well, it had teething problems, for God’s sake, what organisation doesn’t: it spent a lot of money and it ran over budget and there was a lot of…. things were going on and people were sniping at it. I really feared that it might not have succeeded in continuing. But anyway, both sides of Government have continued to support it and it's survived, and I think it’s a very exciting project.

27.42 It’s quite unique too

Unique, it is unique.

27.45 Um, youth arts?

Youth arts was important and in one of the policies in the policy document we talked about in January '71, Carclew was set aside with the agreement of the [Adelaide City] Council to develop, but it took us quite a while to get it going, and how we were going to make it work, and who was going to be in there doing it, and what youth company, there wasn’t a youth company…Well, there were a couple of youth companies but Don allowed one particular company to take residence in there and it held back development of the whole building until finally it was agreed that we put the [SA] Theatre Company youth organisation in there with Helmut Bakaitus, who was the Director of Youth Activities in the early/mid seventies, to run activities from Carclew. And then eventually we decided to set up a Youth Performing Arts Council to run Carclew that would be able to have a whole range of youth activities for people coming in and also be the home for two or three or four small arts organisations to fill in the spaces in the building: we had this building and we didn’t know how to use it! We had the building and the grounds….
29.14 That was the building that was originally set aside to be demolished for the...

For the Festival Hall which was a ludicrous idea, being on the flight path and everything else.

29.24 Yea.

But that didn’t go anywhere. That was in the mid sixties.

29.29 And then Don traded the building off, didn’t he?

He traded it off. He got it out of the [Adelaide City] Council – it was the Bonython family Adelaide residence you know - got it out of the Council and the Council allowed it to be turned into an arts centre if the Government put the money in to do it, basically. But we didn’t really get it going properly until the late seventies really.

29.54 You had quite a lot to do with the setting up of the constitution of the [Carclew] Youth Arts Centre I believe?

Yes. And the person who was a great tower of strength was [Dame] Ruby Litchfield. Don put Ruby on the [Youth Performing Arts] Council, and I worked with her to get it all set up and she was the first Chair, and was there for some years. And then we got Roger Chapman to come in, he took over [as the SA] Theatre Company’s Youth Activities [Director] and then he became the first Director of Carclew in the Youth Performing Arts Council, but that wasn’t until the early/mid/early eighties, I think. Carclew was one that took quite a long time to develop as I recollect now.

30.41 Well it was probably a bit ground-breaking!

It was ground-breaking: we didn’t know who was...I mean what...there wasn’t a youth... I mean there’s now Windmill [Performing Arts], which is great, but there wasn’t anything like that. There was Tony Roberts and Marie Tomasetti’s Bunyip Children’s Company, and they appropriated it with Don’s, sort of, permission, and it made it impossible for us to decide...we had to keep working around this problem until there was...until we got some plans to put in the [SA] Theatre Company Youth thing and then um......

31.17 Yes, I believe there was a very well attended fund-raiser, which I’ve been told about, with people wall to wall, and food was donated and it was a very festival carnival atmosphere?

Mmm, yes. I always found Carclew one of the most frustrating of all the projects because it was taking so long to make it work. The building itself is a weird building. I mean it was a lovely idea to say this building will be a Youth Arts Centre, but you’ve got to make it work; it was a whole series of offices upstairs and you’ve got one space downstairs - it was the ballroom - and you’ve got the grounds. So it was a bit of challenge to make it work.

32.07 But it worked in conjunction with Arts Education in schools as well, didn’t it?
Oh yes, yea, but it was funded through the Premier’s Department, the Premier’s Arts Department.

Was it?

Oh yea. We funded it. There was a line in our budget: Youth Performing Arts Council and Carclew, the running of Carclew. And capital; it needed capital expenditure done on it, quite a bit, because it was in a bad state.

32.29 Well, that’s another of the Don Dunstan [successful] legacies; I think it would be considered?

Yes. yes

32.39 Moving on to multi-cultural arts, now, I know that Don, in his electorate in Norwood, had quite a lot to do with the Greek and Italian migrant populations, and he was very keen on fostering multi-culturalism. Did he actually develop, or did you and he, or did he put forward any programmes that particularly related to ethnic minorities or…?

There wasn’t really. The multi-cultural didn’t really happen until, when was it? Was Murray Hill the first Minister of Ethnic Affairs to take on that title?

33.22 It could have been, I can't help you there

I think it was. I don’t think there was that portfolio in the [Don Dunstan] Labor Government.

33.28 I know that in 1978 [John] Bannon took on Community Arts and there was some emphasis on cultural activities in ethnic communities under him, wasn't there?

Yes, but there wasn’t any sort of arm of Government that supported that up until they set up that Multi-Cultural Arts Trust. Now that didn’t come until the eighties.

33.53 Mm. After Don.

After Don. And they had their offices in the old Treasury building before that was turned into that hotel, (The Medina), because I remember I was on the Trust, as the Arts Department person on it, and we had a person there full time developing ethnic arts projects. I mean there were ethnic organisations doing their own things, but I’m not sure how they were funded. I’m not sure how the Greek Festival, the Italian Festival, the Schutzenfest and all those were funded…

34.23 They didn’t come through your Department at all?

No, no, no, no

34.29 Because the Arts Department, your arts area, did it fund the “Come Out”?

It did the “Come Out” yes. “Come Out”
34.39  And what about the Vintage, Barossa Vintage?

That was done through Tourism. It wasn't through Arts.

34.47  What about the Cornish Festival?

The Cornish Festival was an initiative that came, one of Don's, sort of pet initiatives.

34.55  Oh, was it? Why did that one stand out?

He felt that that whole Yorke Penninsular; Moonta, Kadina, Wallaroo, needed something to bring everyone together there - some activity which would focus tourism on that area. He worked very hard to get the councils to agree. I went up to a meeting with one of the senior members of the Tourist Bureau and John Ceruto at that time.

35.27  John Ceruto? What role did he have in the Department?

He was called Project Officer Catering, but he had an idea, or Don had an idea, for the Tall Ships to come in down the Yorke Penninsular and be a part of the first Cornish Festival and we had this meeting to try to launch the Cornish Festival up in Moonta/Wallaroo/Kadina.

Yes

And I talked about some aspect of the Arts and Ron Dyer, who was the Senior Project Officer, senior person, in [Department of] Tourism talked about tourism and John [Ceruto] talked about the Tall Ships. It was all a bit bizarre as I remember, trying to get these three communities to all agree that this could happen in Moonta, that could happen in Kadina and that could happen in Wallaroo. No, we had the meeting in Wallaroo, that's right. You know there's a lot of rivalry in those towns! (Interviewer laughs). But Don had the thing that old Cornish mining towns had that tradition that [for] the descendants the Cornish type festival would be a great idea. I must say that I could never...I really found it hard to grapple with the concept of a Cornish Festival because it was all a bit, sort of, amorphous. But they managed to get it going.

36.42  Did it actually take off?

We had two or three, I think, or four, I can't remember, every second year. I went up for one I know; it was very festive and fiesta-ish and they had food and things but it was sort of...they had stalls for this and that and they had activities, but it never, it never got off the ground like the Barossa Music Festival did a few years later, or one or two other things in the regions, you know.

37.14  Yea, maybe it hadn't quite been thought out properly or something went wrong along the way.

Well I don't think anyone had.....it was not thought out. There was no driving force in the community to make it successful. Oh, I don't know what it was.

37.33  Yea. What was John Ceruto in your Arts area doing bizarrely called the Catering Officer. It sounds a little strange to me?
Well, they had to fit him into the Department somewhere so they put him in as a sort of like contracted person with a dotted line working to me. I didn’t do anything with him much except…

38.00 Because his background was in food and catering wasn’t it?

Yes, food and catering. He’d been in America and he was supposed to be advising on getting the licensing laws changed; of making it possible for restaurants to be more interesting in terms of Mediterranean-climate outdoor eating. Um cuisine, Don was a great cook as you know who tried to implant his idea of interesting cuisine for South Australian restaurants. And also, the other thing which he did successfully push was setting up the School of Food and Catering out at a TAFE College – and that was a very practical, excellent um….

38.48 You’re talking Don now not John Ceruto?

No, Don, Don. Well, I mean, it was set up under TAFE, but it was Don’s initiative that included the School of Food and Catering out in that TAFE College, out in wherever it was and started to turn out a lot of good young chefs, qualified chefs, many of which have gone on to be quite successful. And it’s still there and it’s still successful.

39.13 Absolutely, and I can’t think of the name. (Regency Park TAFE College)

And of course I remember going in to one…. I mean, developing better licensing laws in restaurants was a part of my overall tourism brief in those early days and I remember clearly going in to court with The Iliad restaurant, as I recollect in Light Square...was it Light or Hurtle Square?.....no, not Hurtle, Whitmore Square, [which] was the test-case restaurant - one of the Greek entrepreneurs owned it – to get the licensing hours extended, and it was incredible and I had no idea. I was called as a witness and I had to go into the Licensing Court presided over by this appallingly conservative and bad tempered, grumpy Licensing Court judge at the time – people will remember who he was, I can’t remember his name – who put me under a withering cross-examination, like a criminal court: ‘Why, why, what justification, and so on’. And the owner was subjected to a grilling and I was subjected to a grilling. It was crazy.

40.29 This was in the upcoming moves to change the licensing laws in restaurants and also to get rid of six o’clock closing, was it?

Six o’clock closing had already gone.

40.40 Oh OK right.

That went in ’67 when Don was Premier the first time. It was getting the licensing laws changed to allow restaurants to serve wine between the extended hours; in order to be able to set up on footpaths and designated areas with councils approval; in order to just liberalise the whole way of eating out and encouraging more good restaurants in Adelaide; to improve the quality of restaurants and encourage good people to come in and either set them up or take them over, that sort of thing. That was what Ceruto was involved in and that was what I was broadly involved in, but I must say I was never hands-on except in one or two isolated instances like being sent in to the Licensing Court for the test-case. Great experience.
Well, he obviously, well the Government and Don personally with the Government, had a great deal of brick walls to come up against in changing it the way he did?

Oh yes, yes

That must have been pretty mighty. So you must have done a good job in the licensing court?

I think attitudes changed and things changed. It was a question of time – making things happen over time; better restaurants opening up, more chefs coming in. I mean all that period right through, it's been a constant development right through the seventies, eighties, nineties. You know Adelaide's got some fabulous restaurants now, some wonderful produce. Don was on about produce and cuisine…

And wine…

We had the wineries, the wine was there, but it was the food and restaurants that he was concerned about. And we had the Mediterranean…one of his constant themes was that we've got a Mediterranean climate so [we should have] Mediterranean style eating. You know we have six or eight months of the year when the weather's good we should be eating more outside: the restaurants should be better able to cater for people in a much more relaxed way. You know, all of that – that sort of stuff. It was great.

Yes, and that was actually happening in other States at the time as well. I was living in Sydney at the time and that whole **nouvelle cuisine** started to come in at the beginning of the seventies, and so it was...so he was right there at the cutting edge. Yes, interesting.

We've talked about the Institutional Arts and I think we've pretty much covered that. Um, you've mentioned several times about buildings that he [Don] saw were in danger of either collapse [demolition], or being taken over. Was architecture part of your area?

No, but I got involved very much in Ayers House development, which took a few years with Ian Hannaford & Partners, to develop that into a restaurant and a function centre and a place where, you know, where the Government could entertain when it needed to in a showcase, lovely old home. The other one which I became involved in, not directly, but it was happening when I was in my first year, was the saving of Edmund Wright House, which Don was very much involved in. Funnily enough I ended up working in there for a few years in my early years as Arts Director. We moved from the Premier’s Department into the second level of Edmund Wright House after the Film Corporation, with three of four staff, moved out to Norwood. Then the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages took over the building, so it was used for weddings, and they had the Registrar for Births, Deaths and Marriages in there. The Film Corporation had a little film theatrette upstairs which they used, and we were able to use as well. We had our offices on the second level. It was known as the “Palace of Love, Death and Dreams”, eventually. (Interviewer laughs). Don saved that, practically single handed I think. I mean he bought the bloody building finally from the ANZ Bank to stop the nonsense going on. He said ‘I’m going to buy it’. And apparently that’s when he had the big argument with the Under Treasurer at the time, as I remember. He [Don] said ‘Well, find
the money. Take it from somewhere else – that building’s not going to be demolished – we’ll use it for the Government, we’ll find a way to use it.’ And that’s what he did.

45.21 And of course Carclew was a third one.

Carclew, yes, indeed, yes.

45.27 Interesting. Um, pop music, pop culture, did that come anywhere in the scheme of things?

No, not really. No. It was off the radar. It only became important in the eighties when the Entertainment Centre was built as a venue for major rock and pop artists and stars to come to Adelaide when there was a necessity to have one. And that was in the eighties of course when everyone was building – all the States wanted to have their own entertainment centres as you know, and Adelaide got one as well. But, no, I didn’t have anything to do with pop or rock.

46.11 So there were no pop concerts held in the Festival Centre?

Well, yea, there were from time to time, booked by entrepreneurs, but only as hirers of the Festival Theatre.

46.23 Right, because Jesus Christ Superstar was on there right in the very beginning, wasn’t it?

Of course. Well, when you’re talking about major musicals they were a big feature of the Festival Centre from 1980 on. I mean filling those weeks in the Centre, particularly at Christmas/New Year, having a big musical – and that was the era of the musical the eighties and nineties – all the new ones were coming on and the Oklahomas and Carousels were being revived. Jesus Christ Superstar was an early one, but Evita was the first major one that the Festival Centre Trust undertook to be involved in and that had a long run in the Festival Centre, and then a whole range of them came after that, before Miss Saigon and the Les Miz and Cats and all the other ones in the late eighties and the nineties. The Festival Centre was quite a bit of a pioneer: Evita was a major breakthrough because they’d had a couple of...they’d had the ill-fated Reg Livermore, um.....

47.28 Do you mean Betty Blockbuster?

No, no, not Betty Blockbuster – that was very successful. No, what was the one they tried to do in the Festival Centre and they failed, um, in the late seventies? Um, Ned Kelly - Ned Kelly which just flopped. Then with the major entrepreneurs bringing musicals in with top producers like Hal Prince, Evita was a [success]...and [with] the Centre Trust coming in as a partner and doing deals on the venue and all the rest of it, made it possible for those major venues, not venues, major musicals, to be put in annually in the Centre. And also they used up slabs of time when the Centre may well have been empty or the Festival Theatre may well have had empty nights in between opera seasons and the symphony orchestra.

48.26 Indeed, indeed
Don’t forget it’s a multi-purpose theatre so it’s got to be used for concerts as well as theatrical shows.

48.33. Yes. The um, one thing I didn’t [mention]...when we were talking about the Festival, was the Fringe. Was that something that Don supported as part of the Festival?

Yea. I think he supported the Festival and the Fringe, and then the Fringe took on a life of its own....

48.50 It did indeed!

... which no-one tried to stop. In fact it was sort of encouraged. And, as you know a whole group of people decided to pick up the Fringe and turned it into something rather special. I don’t know whether I agree with the current idea of making it an annual event, I don’t know if that’s a wise thing to do, but nevertheless expanding it and giving it a proper home led to The Living Arts Centre being established in the eighties, which was a great initiative, I thought. That was post-Don, of course.

49.30 Did.... when it [the Fringe] first came on, was Don a bit hesitant about that as a being in conflict with the Fringe (interviewer meant to say Festival)... to the sort of showcase of the Fringe (interviewer again meant to say Festival), because it worked in a completely opposite way, didn’t it?

He never worried. He supported it, but it just developed as the Festival developed, and it became increasingly important and strong and different and larger, and wanting its own identity and home. It was never discouraged. In fact it was supported by both [political] parties; supported by the Libs and then supported by John Bannon, and, The Living Arts Centre, as you know, came into being in the period of the latter part of John’s [Bannon] Premiership.

50.21 Yes. Of course the Fringe had a very good precedent in Edinburgh, so it was a tried and true thing as it was.

Oh God, yes

50.32 Were there any other things that I haven’t touched on which particularly drove Don, or that he was particularly interested in pushing through in the Arts area that I haven’t mentioned?

I think we’ve covered it all. I must get you a copy of that tourism development brief which has got them all in there. I think I’ve got a copy at home.

50.50 That would be most interesting. Well, I’d like just to be a bit reflective for a minute, if you could identify what you thought were the major achievements of Don Dunstan during his decade as Premier. We’ve probably mentioned them but if you could just sort of [re-state] where his major achievements were?

In the broad Arts area?

51.17 Yes
Well the obvious visible one was getting a major arts centre brought in on budget and also being a focal point for the City and the State. The second was, I think, setting up the [SA] Film Corporation which was of great importance in South Australia. I think the whole, broad, life-style changes that Don brought to the State in terms of food and wine was important. It mightn’t seem to be…

52.05 No, everybody seems to mention that

…but I think it’s permeated right through the whole State. I think Don’s great support of the Festival and wanting it to become, and to maintain what we felt was its pre-eminent position as a major festival despite the competition that was coming on from other States, was very important in allowing the Festival to make a quantum leap forward in the seventies in terms of programming and artistic direction and the rest of it, and having the Festival Centre as a focal point for the Festival so it could radiate out, you know.

52.53 Well, I think that’s a very good finish at this point.

(NB The remaining half minute of talking on this recording does not form a part of the interview)

53.23 END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3

00.00 This is Felicity Morgan picking up the interview with Len Amadio. This is Part 3. Now Len, we just got into the last… at the end of the last section you went through the things you thought were the major achievements of Don [in the broad Arts], I want to ask you a personal question: of what were you most proud, in your time with him?

(Interviewee sighs). Difficult - I think I was… (Sighs again)... I think the thing I most felt great satisfaction in being involved with was helping the Festival of Arts develop, you know, into something which is undoubtedly now, still, the leading arts festival in the country, and I’m not saying that just because I’d been was involved all those years, but I think it is, and I was very delighted and thrilled to be involved with all those years on the [Festival] Board; with helping shape the Festival; with helping select the artistic directors; with helping support it and just being involved with it and being a Board member and having a close association for seventeen Festivals. That I think was the one that gave me the most satisfaction and pride. Yes, I mean it’s hard to… if you ask me…yes, that one… that would be the thing which I think I’m most...

01.42 That’s the stand-out

Yes, that’s the stand-out for me.

01.45 That’s good, that’s good. Now, on the down-side of that there would have been, of course, during Don Dunstan’s period, failings and controversies. Were there a lot and what were they, in his Arts agenda, in the overall Arts area?

Oh (Interviewee sighs) that’s a very interesting question. Well I did allude to the visual arts being a bit off the radar and not much development taking place there in terms of
support – no great increase in support – and the fact that the North Terrace institutions were allowed to wait for so long for re-development. But in retrospect that might have been a good thing in terms of the city planning; it all seemed to mesh much better in all the things that were happening in the late eighties and nineties and is still continuing along there. And the whole boulevard is a much, much more interesting and vibrant place than it was then.

03.00 What about controversies?

Well, I can't think…

03.02 Anything a bit scandalous or a bit outrageous that put people off in the Arts area? That may not have happened – I mean I'm fishing here.

Well, I can't think of any real scandals in the Arts; anything that caused real...I mean there were individual controversies, like, you know, which affected organisations like the Festival Centre when Lindsay Kemp came with his company and scandalized everyone and people wanted to ban him and things like that.

(Post interview comment: This reference is made about Lindsay Kemp’s stage production based on Jean Genet’s book “Our Lady of the Flowers”, brought to Adelaide as part of an Australia-wide tour in 1976)

03.36 Ah, yes

But, (Sighs) I don't think there was anything

03.42 The appointments, the senior appointments that were made, they were all pretty successful, weren't they?

Yes, I think they were.

03.50 To the Festival Centre, to the Festival itself, to the [SA] Theatre Company, to the [SA] Opera Company, to the...?

The only disappointment was not being able to see Elijah Moshinsky development [at] the '84 Festival, but in a way, sometimes, an individual director of great brilliance in theatre or in opera may not necessarily turn out to be the right person to have a broad, wide vision right across the Arts. And Elijah didn't have the time and had too narrow an interest to develop it. And he just threw up his hands and had to be negotiated out of the contract [as Director of the 1984 Festival]. That was the only [unsuccessful appointment].

04.48 And that was after Don anyway

That was after Don, and then of course we had the much more celebrated Peter Sellars in two thousand and …..what was it…two thousand and…

05.00 Two times ago, wasn't it?

Two thousand and two, yes….. which was very sad.
But no, I don’t think there were any major scandals. I mean there were scandals that affected us all, like the whole of the last twelve months with Don and [Harold] Salisbury - there was some flow-on from that which affected everyone - because things were getting very, you know, things were on a down and people didn’t know what was going to happen: the whole State became affected by this thing and then we wondered what was going to happen with the Arts if there was a change of Government. Ultimately, there was a lot of people that were very concerned that the Liberals would undo things, but they didn’t. They were very good. They reviewed that, and did that, and had a look at that, and wanted to change the emphasis there, and, actually they took up the North Terrace thing with great gusto; they started up the S.A.History Trust and spearheaded the Edwards Report and led to all the things that have been happening on North Terrace ever since. So that was a great initiative.

Yes, indeed, that’s good to hear. I’d like to read to you, and I’m sure you’ve read it yourself, but there’s a little quote from Colin Horne’s chapter on “The Arts” in the 1981 book *The Dunstan Decade – Social Democracy at the State Level*, and he states, and I quote “Without question the rise of South Australia to prominence in the arts has been a phenomenon of national importance. Had Dunstan not dominated South Australia for a decade much still would have been achieved in the arts, perhaps along similar lines, but not with the same diffusion of excitement, the same flair and polish, and above all, with the same insistence on excellence.” Having remained in the Arts Department until 1995, well after the Dunstan decade, how do you respond to that?

I think he’s spot on. It would have happened – things would have happened certainly, but it would have been very hard to imagine what it would have been without Don. Who knows, if Steele Hall had continued as Premier, or somebody else in the Labor Party. I don’t think it would have been….things would have happened, things would have developed, but it would have taken longer and it wouldn’t have been as interesting and there wouldn’t have been the vision there to make things happen. No, I think Colin’s…

One word always seems to stick out when people talk about Don Dunstan in the Arts, and that’s the word “excellence.”

Yes.

And you’d agree with that?

I’d agree. We always aimed for excellence obviously. Yes we did, yes. I suppose in a word that word has become so like “elitism”, and excellence - it’s been devalued in some ways. We did aim to…we did aim high all the time whether we consciously knew that we were. But we were inspired to aim high, somehow.
08.30 Do you think Don inspired you people?

Oh yes, yes, there’s no doubt about it; the presence of Don was always there with you and around you in the State - you felt it. It was a unique time you know.

08.48 Yes. Now, if I could very quickly ask you a few final questions. You knew Don for a long time when he was Premier and you worked closely with him. Would you describe yourself actually as a personal friend?

I would, yes. I think it’s funny, I saw a lot more of Don after he was Premier when he came back to Adelaide, than I probably did…. I mean socially, when he came back, when he was older and he came back to live in Adelaide…. than I did when I was busy working and I’d see him at functions and occasionally at meetings, but not so much socially then because he was so busy then and I was busy so we didn’t, but a lot more in the mid/late eighties and through the nineties up until ’95 when I left. Yes, yes, I enjoyed Don’s company a lot at meals. I had some lovely evenings out at the house; some wonderful impromptu dinner parties with friends just invited back on the spur of the moment; wonderful recipes were tried out on us; lots of nice parties on Sunday afternoons with swimming in the pool. No, they were wonderful days.

10.05 I’m sure you miss him

I do miss him, very much.

10 08 Yes. The years following his resignation from Parliament have not been sketched in particularly well, when he went off to Victoria and so on. How do you think he was treated by the State, the people of this State when he retired, after such a tremendous input that he’d had into changing things here?

10.35. It’s a very interesting question, isn’t it? I remember…in a way the Corcoran Government tried to, you know, do its own things, and made a terrible hash of it by calling an early election which was unnecessary. But I think there was a great sort of acceptance of Don and what he’d done, by the opposition…but no-one really wanted to do anything for Don and even when the [John] Bannon Government came back I remember, and I can say this now, I tried a few times to suggest that Don be put on that board, or asked to chair that, you know, the Festival Centre Trust was one proposal that was rejected. He ended up being asked to chair the Jam Factory. The Film Corporation didn't happen – it would have been nice if he’d had that chance, like with the Jam Factory. So there was a bit of reluctance in a way, disassociating oneself from Don as a person, I don’t know, or whether there was a sort of conservatism, I don’t know. Adelaide’s so small it’s hard to tell, but there was a bit of resistance during the eighties to have Don too far up front in the Arts for some reason.

12.22 Interesting

So the Jam Factory was about the only major role he was given, as the Chairman. I don’t think there was any other thing. Obviously he was invited to this, and he opened that, and he did that, but…..I don’t know whether he was a bit upset by it or not or whether he…..
12.46 Yes, I’ve heard other people mention the fact that he was not given what he deserved after his retirement which was some high profile chairs of boards or trusts and so on.

Yes. But he wasn’t. And I find it hard to explain it actually, although I might have my own personal views about the need for people to disassociate themselves for a variety of reasons, and aspects of things, but it’s very sad that he wasn’t. I don’t know the reasons, I can only guess at them.

13.28 And you stayed friendly with him right up until his death, did you?

Yes, yes. I was in Adelaide. I flew over to see him two days before he died, when I was told that he wasn’t going to last much longer. I flew over and had a lunch on the Wednesday and he died very early on the Saturday morning. So I was very glad I did that, and I came back a week later for the memorial service, which was a pretty interesting occasion in the Festival Theatre – a nice tribute the State gave him; a nice service with the Adelaide [Symphony] Orchestra and all sorts of people were involved in it – it was quite a nice farewell.

14.07 Yes.

You know. But yes, I just think it would be wonderful, one day, for somebody to write a very interesting biography of Don because I think he deserves it. But somebody better hurry up and do it.

14.27 Yes, well that’s part of the reason we’re doing these recordings. I think that just about takes up all my questions that, in one way or another, you’ve managed to answer magnificently. Unless there’s any specific thing that you think I’ve forgotten to ask you or that you would like to add?

(Interviewee coughs) No, I think we’ve covered everything actually. You caught me a bit on the hop about Don and after and the State because….

15.00 Do you want to think about that? Do you want to stop for a second and think about that? We can easily pick up the recording.

No, I think I’m…I think it was just a general feeling that people wanted to do their own thing – Premiers and Ministers – wanted to do their own thing, and they stepped back away from Don a bit while accepting and supporting and keeping all the things going. I think Don, the man; they wanted to keep at a distance.

15.29 Do you think they perhaps might have thought (Interviewee coughs) that he would overshadow them in some way, or take things in his own direction rather than theirs….

Look it might have been a lot to do with a lot of the personal things that happened in Don’s life, and I don’t want to say any more than that, but I think that might have had some bearing on it, you know.

15.51 Yes, yes. Do you think Don died a happy person, other than the fact that he was sick? Do you think he had any bitterness or any regrets?
Oh I don’t know. I never...he never showed it if he did. He was very pleased that something like The [Don Dunstan] Foundation was already set to go and that was going to be happening. Um, look I don’t know, it’s hard. I never really spoke to him closely to him about...I think there were disappointments in the last few years, such as the second restaurant which didn’t work out and was a bit of a disaster financially, and that obviously pushed along his illness unfortunately [because] I knew he was very excited. He’d had the first restaurant and that had worked well, but the second one was probably overly ambitious and lots of things happened which I think were unfortunate and I think that was very sad, and that contributed towards his – you know, he got the second [cancer]... he got the cancer that came back after he'd had the initial cancer.

17.03 Yes.

It was nice to be able to help organise a couple of decade birthdays for him – his sixtieth and seventieth, it was great to do that. Look I think he had a pretty amazingly good life and, I don’t know whether.... I can’t answer it actually, it’s very hard....

17.27 Well, I think you've done fantastically, and it must be very sad for you to talk about somebody you were so close to for such a long time, and I thank you very much. Well, I think that just about concludes the interview, if you’re happy with that?

I’m very happy Felicity, thank you for bearing with me. (Laughs)

17.45 Well, thank you very much indeed, Len. Thank you.

17.48 END OF TAPE 3