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BBC HISTORY - Mr.Humphrey Burton (Audio)

FRANK GILLARD INTERVIEWING HUMPHREY BURTON

Side 1

GILLARD 1995 - I must get this right - and this is Frank Gillard for the BBC History Archive recording in his home in London with Mr. Humphrey Burton, distinguished broadcasting figure indeed, but who's been in and out of the BBC in one capacity or another ever since 1955. We might begin, I think, by .. by your .. your arrival in the BBC in the ... What brought you into the BBC anyway?

BURTON 1955 means that it's forty years this year I see. So a very pleasant anniversary for me to celebrate. I am an under.. I was an undergraduate at Cambridge where I read Music and History. I didn't do Part II Faculty of History .. of Music because I was not a sufficiently good musician. But that led me to think that I wanted a career in .. career in Music nonetheless and I tried to get one of the, in those days, fabled general traineeships, of which there are only a few - I think perhaps a dozen a year - dished out and I wasn't even short-listed. So I had a chagrined moment of thinking, well perhaps I'm not much cop, but it's of course one way of measuring yourself in the national stakes .. is this .. this general trainee scheme which was very important in bringing, as you know, people like Alasdair Milne into the Corporation in the fifties and was a bit like Foreign Office selection as far as I can see. Anyway, I failed that but I did pick up that there were studio management vacancies where you were trained in the .. it's a kind of twilight world between engineering and production, the balancers, and as I was determined to work in the field of Music, I applied and was lucky enough to get one of those jobs. So I joined the BBC as a studio manager, wanting to work in the field of Music as a recording engineer/producer, not at that time raising my heights even as high as joining the BBC Music Department, just happy to be part of the great - because it was in those days - the most wonderful church-like organisation or Foreign Office-like organisation, which I'm sure has been a recurring theme of many of the interviews you've held. And my pleasure in .. in becoming a .. even a lowly lay clerk as 'twere in those .. in that field was immense. I really thought that I'd .. I remember thinking to myself, if I can be earning a thousand

pounds by the time I'm thirty I shall be very - a thousand pounds a year - I should be a happy man, I shall feel I've succeeded. And I did manage to just about do that. I think I was on B1 earning about twelve hundred pounds a year in 1959 when I went into Television. But I .. my opening salary was four hundred and eight pounds a year.

GILLARD Well in .. in those .. those times, I mean 1955 and onwards, I mean, there's some peaks of .. of BBC history I'd like to draw you out on. One is the Suez affair. Now, you were .. were involved in that in a way, weren't you? We .. I may say we have some very vivid accounts from people like Harman Grisewood and others at the top ..

BURTON Yes.

GILLARD .. of all the manoeuvrings and all the bluffings that went on over it and that sort of thing. It'd be very interesting to know how you saw the Suez affair in the BBC?

BURTON I was at that time still under my apprenticeship. The Suez affair was November .. October/November '56 and in fact I'd completed my six months of going round the various parts of the BBC because as a trainee studio manager you go to Bush House and what was then Oxford Street, the General Overseas Service, as well as time at Broadcasting House. And I'd got an attachment to the Music balancers and I was learning my trade and was enjoying it enormously, learning how to become a music balancer, doing everything from the BBC Singers doing the Morning Service in concert hall to symphony concerts at Maida Vale. And then suddenly this goddam Suez thing blew up and all of us who were trainees or weren't absolutely at the top of their particular career branch, were pulled in to service the twenty four hour news broadcasting that went on because the BBC really treated Suez, as your .. you know Frank, with enormous responsibility and made damn sure there were round-the-clock news broadcasts and that ... I just remember the excitement of thinking, thank goodness the BBC

is .. is holding out and that Gaitskell's getting time to match the Government, that it wasn't treated as a wartime situation and that the BBC showed its independence. But in my own terms it meant a tremendous hiatus, which in fact probably pushed me into Television because my disaffection with the BBC, not being able to get a permanent post as a Music studio manager was such that I was really meditating getting away - emigrating - and I actually went to the Canadian Office and got papers to emigrate to Canada. That was in January 1957. Luckily, Pip Porter I think it was, who was then the .. in charge of Engineering, and the studio managers hauled me out and said, we've got a vacancy, an attachment in production. So I went into Radio production in a little unit based on the Recorded Productions Programme Unit, which was based I think at Rothwell House, one of the outposts of Broadcasting House, which is now, odd enough, occupied by my own solicitor's firm. (LAUGHING)

GILLARD Now, it .. it .. I'd like to hear more about the Recorded Programmes Department 'cos it was not just .. Recorded Programmes was not just a resource, I mean, they actually made programmes.

BURTON Yes, that's correct. The RP production .. well there were .. there was .. the thing was based on the Recorded Programmes library and it .. it had built up an enviable archive of recordings which included such marvellous things as bird songs and folk music and things like that. And they had decided that they would create a production unit in the library in order to deliver programmes of various kinds, many of them based on the archives, of course, but usually with an input of new material as well. And that's where a marvellous man called Harold Rogers, who later had a distinguished career, not in the higher echelons - he'd wanted to be a producer all his life, I'm familiar with that syndrome - and he ended up I think as Head of Radio Medway. But Harold Rogers was a remarkably enthusiastic person who was constantly looking for openings and found work for his newly-fledged unit so that we had three or four programmes a week on the air and were a very busy little production unit. Dennis Geroult took over from me and later on I think somebody called John Robertson .. John .. no, no, the

name escapes. First of the examples of .. of my im.. impending Alzheimer's. I hope not. Anyway, the .. the Recorded Production Unit was a very busy unit. It's part .. which is part of course of a huge output department. BBC Radio in those days was a wonderful place to work in and I was very happy working in Radio except that I couldn't get into the Music Department which was what I really wanted to do.

GILLARD Did Recorded Programmes, in this production capacity, did .. did it cover a range of programmes? Or .. or I mean were they all documentaries or talks or discussions or music or what?

BURTON It was like a miniature BBC on its own because as well as the .. the obvious exploitation of the great voices of the past - we had a programme called **SOUND MIRROR** I think, or something like that, which meant looking into the archives thoroughly and bringing out the great names who'd made recordings before the War as it were - Bernard Shaw or Oscar Wilde or whatever - but also we had - I'm not sure about Oscar Wilde, I'm sorry about that, I mustn't give you false leads there to any recording researcher. Anyway, we also did programmes which exploited the enormous wealth of American tapes which were being sent to the BBC every week under the **VOICE OF AMERICA** scheme and one of my jobs was to make programmes out of the seventeen or were they nineteen inch shellac records that came - LPs, nineteen inch wide, huge things, on which some programmes were stored - and also masses and masses of tapes upon which programmes like the Newport Festival of Jazz and the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts were given to us. And we .. nowadays, in the nineties, Radio 3 broadcasts twenty operas a year with great song and dance, live from the Met, but we already had those operas available to us in the fifties. And I remember doing a series called **TRANSATLANTIC TURNTABLE** where we'd have recordings from the Met and we'd interview American singers and conductors who were coming through, much in the way that BBC's Radio 3 and Classic FM do nowadays. But this is an early example of us exploiting the possibility of the quality of personality that you get if you have a Thomas Schippers, who was one of the conductors I

remember interviewing, or Paul Anka, who was then a sixteen year old pop star in the making. He wrote "**My Way**" a few years later. And this was all grist to the mill of this particular unit.

GILLARD Mm. This was also the period of course when the BBC started Talks programmes in the early morning. Earlier on they'd just been putting out teashop music ..

BURTON Yes.

GILLARD .. for breakfast-time listeners but .. but along came the **TODAY** programme.

BURTON The **TODAY** programme in the late fifties, '57, early '58, was a tremendous example of the BBC responding, I think, to a new atmosphere in the world and creating a kind of a diary/entertainment gossip column of the air in which news was mixed with featurette .. feature interviews. And such was the freedom of operation in those days that I, working for the Recorded Productions Unit, could bid for time on this Talks Department output. There .. there was enough cross-fertilisation and there were no great .. well there were barriers but it was still possible to break out if you were, as I was, a young and relatively thrustful reporter/producer doing features they would take my stuff. And so I got a .. the sniff of being at the cutting edge of the showbusiness world as you might say. I was delivering mostly highbrow stuff. I remember interviewing for this **TODAY** programme Francis Poulenc when he came over to do the **Dialogue of the Carmelites** and Joan Sutherland was one of the stars and he hadn't met her and I .. I took him - I spoke French, I knew Poulenc from working in France when I was a student - and I took him across the bridge over the orchestra pit onto the stage and he said, "Ah, Madam Sutherland, vous chante de si merveillessement bien ma musique, merci bien." "Oh did you think so maestro," she said, "I had a terrible cold." And this Australian accent deflating the great French composer was a little happy memory. Not on tape I'm afraid.

GILLARD Oh pity.

BURTON (LAUGHING) Or maybe it was on tape, come to think of it. Why not? Yes, I walked around with the old .. the same machines that you'd used in the War, more or less, those modified tape recording. I mean, rather heavy, sort of five or six pounds weren't they, or more, eight pound.

GILLARD Well you .. you were luckily on tape. We .. we were on a portable disc thing in the War which was quite different. And when tape came in, I think .. I think it was called the EMI wasn't it? Called "the Emmie" if I remember .. anyway, it came .. came in round about '52, '53, something.

BURTON It was a .. it was a revolution undoubtedly, the .. the flexibility that these tape machines provided because when I was a studio manager we were still in the days of cuing up record .. the reports came in from foreign correspondents on disc and if, for the purposes of editing, you had to cut from one minute to forty seconds, let's say, and get twenty seconds out of the middle, you'd put chinagraph yellow marks on the groove and you froze the record at that first groove, first china groove, lifted up the .. the recording .. the needle, moved it to the next yellow groove and fast forwarded the thing so that with a gap of maybe quarter of a second you had an edited report done live on transmission. And those were manual skills which I'm glad to say I learned, just as in the army - I was in the Royal Corps of Signals and learned how to put two pieces of wire together and keep them in place. So they're skills that I really enjoyed mastering but it wasn't what I went to university for. (LAUGHING)

GILLARD What used to be called a jump cut if I remember.

BURTON Indeed a jump cut, literally. (LAUGHING)

GILLARD The .. the BBC in Third Programme as it was called in those days became Radio 3 in ..

BURTON Yes.

GILLARD .. 1967 or something like that but Radio 3 was flourishing under John Morris and you had some association there I think.

BURTON I'd met John Morris, who was one of the first notable BBC executives to quote "come out" and was .. was recognisably of a .. a .. I don't know how you can put it nowadays - he wasn't married. And .. he was a confirmed bachelor, that's what they say, and I'd met him as a confirmed bachelor - I'm not a confirmed bachelor by the way - but I'd met him on a swimming pool at Aix-en-Provence in the late fifties, 1956, when I was moonlighting as a music critic for **The Times** and John was down there because there were broadcasts going on and we talked a lot. We had mutual friends in the French Embassy who'd brought us both down there I suspect. Anyway, John took a liking to me and .. and gave me one or two jobs on Radio 3 as a commentator for operas and things and I think probably helped when they were headhunting over in Television for young people, not necessarily trained people, but young people who were interested in the Arts to help found this new cultural magazine called **MONITOR** which was beginning in January 1958. I suspect that John put a good word in for me behind the scenes with Grace Wyndham-Goldie who was at that time the chief headhunter for new talent. But he was a very civilised man and Radio 3 in those days was - as it is now - the Third Programme was .. was something which we grew up with a took for granted, just as we took the whole ethos - we young graduates going into broadcasting - we took the whole ethos of the BBC for granted. I don't think many of us questioned the authority situation that was in the BBC in those days, the sense of it being a hierarchy and you were ushered into the presence of your head of department as if you were a young clerk going to see a bishop and you perhaps occasionally at the foyers of Broadcasting House might catch a glimpse of Sir Ian Jacob or in the Music world the Controller, Mr Howgill, who was, I discovered later, really a sort of jumped up administrator rather than a .. a musician of any great standing. But the BBC was a great hierarchy and it was a great privilege to work for it and you accepted your four

hundred and eight pounds a year with .. with gratitude.

GILLARD (LAUGHING) Well you didn't stay long in Radio. You .. your eyes were looking westward and there .. and there was Television drawing you. And when was it? About '58? Thereabouts, that you moved over to Television.

BURTON I was not at all somebody enamoured of the world of Television before I joined Television. I didn't have a sense of mission that the world of Television was where all the action was. I was very happy in Radio. My first love was Music and Drama not far behind and ... Are those sort of noises alright for you?

GILLARD That's alright.

BURTON Yes. And I was not in the least bit seduced to begin with by the excitement of Television and I didn't have a television set when I applied for a new post of production assistant on the new arts magazine, started on January 1958, called **MONITOR** which Talks Department was doing in Television as a partner to, or a sister to, the **PANORAMA** programme which had begun earlier in the fifties and the **TONIGHT** programme which had begun in the mid-fifties. And **MONITOR** was to be the third of these great programmes of weekly or fortnightly or, in the case of **TONIGHT** daily - so you had a daily **TONIGHT**, you had a weekly **PANORAMA** and you had a fortnightly **MONITOR**. People don't remember that **MONITOR** was fortnightly, I think for its entire life, because Huw Wheldon, its .. its chief architect, and Peter Newington argued that with a small team, and the homogeneity was important with a small team, they couldn't deliver good programmes on a .. on a more quick turn-round than once a fortnight. It's a very wise choice and left the planners with an interesting challenge of finding alternative programmes of similar calibre to put in the weekly slots that were opposite **MONITOR**. However, getting ahead of myself. I went into Television because I was frustrated in Radio because I couldn't get a permanent

post. I was constantly on attachment for more than a year in fact, which I think now wouldn't be allowed, to have such a long attachment. And when I saw this thing advertised, and I expect friends of mine mentioned it to me, I quickly got a .. borrowed a monitor .. borrowed a television set, went to have a look at a couple of programmes, went to this board and, as luck would have it, I was selected so that my life did change dramatically. This was March 1958 when I was selected and I joined the programme at the end of May and the very first programme I remember that I was involved with, Huw Wheldon said, "Burton, you know about Music, you must look after Callas." "Callas," I said, "Maria Callas?" "Yes, Callas. she's coming to the ..."
(SOUND OF TELEPHONE RINGING) Oh, my wife's at the top of the ... Sorry. Hello? Can I call you back?

GILLARD Going back, resuming after a brief interruption.

BURTON My very first job on **MONITOR** was, I remember, Huw coming in, saying, "Burton, you know about Music." 'Cos we were quite officorial (ph) in those days - militarist, military. "Burton," (he didn't know me well by that time, I'd only been there for a few days) "you know about Music, you must look after Callas, Maria Callas." She was coming into the studio to do an interview and she'd insisted on being interviewed, not by Huw Wheldon but by Sir David Webster, who was the General Manager of the Opera House, and Huw was not allowed to talk to her. That was the deal that had been cut. I .. my job was to sit in the dressing room for an hour while Maria Callas made herself up and a gentleman in a grey raincoat and a homburg hat hovered in the corner. That was her husband at the time, a rich Italian industrialist. And I didn't know what to do, how to .. I didn't do anything very much, I just sort of made polite conversation. But when the interview started, live - everything was live in those days - David Webster sent a few pat ball questions to Maria Callas, who answered them all exceedingly soft and not at all what one really wanted because she was a temperamental tigress according to all accounts, and after a bit Huw couldn't contain himself any longer. He burst in and he said, "Madam Callas, if I may

interpose for a moment. Why did you insist on having David Webster to do this interview?" "Because sir," she said, "Mr Webster is a gentleman." (LAUGHING) Which .. that's there on the archive. And it was a charming moment. But of course the world of Television was so different from the world of Radio. As a young man ..

GILLARD (OVERTALKING) Yes, was it a culture shock for you?

BURTON It was a tremendous culture shock. I was twenty seven at the time and I'd done a couple of years in the Radio and I'd got a little reputation. I'd done quite a bit of broadcasting by then and then that all went and .. it'd only been, I think probably .. how can I describe ..? Not phoney broadcasting but I didn't .. I wasn't ever a cult figure, I didn't have a .. I got a few letters but not a lot, but suddenly I was away from all that personality broadcasting and .. and half-hours of **TRANSATLANTIC TURNTABLES** and **RECORD MIRRORS** and so on and I was into the mainstream of broadcasting as it .. as it seemed to me of Television. Of course, Arts broadcasting has never been perceived by the central democrat.. the central bureaucrats as being the mainstream. I test you, Mr Gillard, as I look at you - it's not the real mainstream but when practitioners were of the calibre of Huw Wheldon and .. and John Schlesinger and Ken Russell, it may not have been mainstream in the sense that it was a large audience but it was mainstream in the sense that it was where the, quotes, "the action" was, and we argued very firmly. All of us had got this ethos that **MONITOR** was an audience .. was aimed at an audience of a small majority rather than a large, or any kind of, minority. In other words it drew its audience not just from A's and B's in the advertising jargon but from all sections of the aud.. of the public because broadcasting went into everybody .. Television broadcasting went into everybody's home and we put on programmes which did not turn anybody away, so that our **MONITOR** series in the 1950s and sixties did get audiences regularly of between two and three million people on Television, which is more than any Arts programme gets now. Because there wasn't the division then that there is now of channels.

There was simply BBC-1 and .. there was simply BBC and ITV, from 1955 onwards. We did have a flurry in the early sixties, or maybe it was the last fifties, when Huw .. when the Earl of Harewood fronted and Ken Tynan edited an Arts programme called **TEMPO** for the ITV network. (SOUND OF TELEPHONE RINGING) It was a half-hour slot rather than an hour slot but it was very good, now I think about it, and was the first attempt to create some kind of opposition to BBC's Arts programming, but in the end it didn't last. ABC couldn't get the ratings for it and in fact when I went to ITV much later, I really was the first person to create an Arts magazine - it was called **AQUARIUS** - which LWT put on and that provided seven years of broadcasting before it was replaced by **THE SOUTH BANK SHOW** which is now one of the bastions of .. of Television. So that the seeds which I was, as it were, cultivating in **MONITOR** in the 1950s still, forty years later, are flowering, both in **OMNIBUS** on BBC-1 and **ARENA** on BBC-2 and **THE SOUTH BANK SHOW** on ITV. So that although I said this wasn't mainstream broadcasting, I really must correct myself and say that in the perspective of half a century, I think Arts broadcasting, both on Radio and much later in Television, is a very important factor in .. in British artistic life, and I'm glad to have put my little bit into it.

GILLARD Well you certainly have, and it unquestionably is a major strand, that's how I'd describe it. I mean, I don't like this thought of one being pre-eminent over another one, though I .. I do ..

BURTON Well the ..

GILLARD .. I do put in a word for saying that .. that .. that news and journalism generally and particularly the politics cannot be ignored and they .. they must loom large as they say in the minds of the top people.

BURTON You allow me to digress for a moment, I would say that if you look nowadays, for example, **The Evening Standard** publishes a weekly top of the ratings in .. on all four terrestrial networks. There's never an Arts programme on any of them. The fact is that .. and there never was probably, in

the Top Twenty in each channel. Arts have never been an absolutely central issue in the way that .. an essential interest, in the way that good situation comedy is or good drama is or good sport is. But what's remarkable in British broadcasting is just how good the broadcasts have been and how substantial. Given, for example, the pressures that are going on now in the field with satellite and other channels pressing hard, still BBC, if it wants to, can clear the board and drop all the programmes announced and run **La Traviata** live from the Royal Opera House. Which I was glad to be part of, 'cos I directed it and actually made it all happen so, I was quite pleased about that, so the BBC is still responsive. Sorry, now that's the end of digression. Back to our ..... (unclear)

GILLARD Only to say that if the BBC's going to survive it has to be different. If it's not going to be different it might as well not exist, and this is one of the great areas where it can be different.
However, I want to take you back to .. to .. to your early days in **MONITOR** to ask you whether you were greatly handicapped by .. by the .. the sort of primitive nature of Television. I mean, presumably your programmes had to be live, they were in black and white, they were on four or five lines, recording was .. pre-recording, that sort of thing, was .. was primitive wasn't it?

BURTON Thank goodness that the technical ability to transmit film was something that was mastered early on so that one could make films of a very high quality and I think, looking back, you'll see that the television programmes of the fifties and sixties were clearly a continuation of the stylistic developments and ambitions of the Crown Film Unit and the Coal Board films and the other State-subsidised, State-run film organisations of the thirties and forties. And being able to show, and have .. to have a documentary tradition which the Arts programme **MONITOR**, which I worked on, contributed to of making good films, meant that one of the main ingredients that one had at one's disposal was the ability to communicate an artistic experience through film. And this meant in one case John Read's very good films about artists, including Henry More and Barbara Hepworth and other main figures, so that the BBC already in the fifties was

communicating a sense of the joy of great works of art. As it indeed had been in the thirties. If you look back into the schedules of the early Television, Alexandra Palace days, you'll find that David Piper was giving talks about exhibitions and .. for .. in the 1937/38 period. In other words they always took Art seriously. But the films that John Schlesinger and Ken Russell made, for example, for the **MONITOR** programme, which began as a fifty-minute slot but would sometimes be allowed to expand to a longer slot, those films remain high water marks in the history of British documentary. And in Ken Russell's case in the history of that twilight zone between documentary and .. and feature film and invented incident the fact.. the factu.. what do they call? Fict..

GILLARD Faction.

BURTON Faction or docs which are based on real life but invent dialogue and so on. Melvyn Bragg, who's now one of the main keepers of the flame, as 'twere, wrote a beautiful film script I remember for a film about Debussy which Ken Russell did for **MONITOR**. Never been seen more than the once that we transmitted it because the Debussy family came down like a .. clappers of hell 'cos they did not like the way that Ken Russell had interpreted their .. their family and their .. their .. their .. Debussy being a sort of faun of a figure who was constantly chasing girls. The fact of the matter is that Ken always got a sort of essence of whoever he was filming, whether it was Debussy or Elgar. The .. the .. the sort of sum total of all the vibrations that make up Elgar I think was admirably caught by Ken Russell in his .. in his Elgar film for BBC, which I produced back in 1961. But you were asking generally about technique. You were asking about technique and you said .. you used the word "primitive". But of course at the time we didn't think that what we were doing was primitive, we thought it was at the .. the top end of the range as it were, because we were using the latest equipment. We didn't have zoom lenses yet in the studio but we had three turret lenses so that we could produce medium, long and close-up. We didn't have tape-recording but we did have telecine and you could record on black and white thirty five millimetre telecine, go away and cut it up and tighten it and

sharpen it and deliver it back as a film. We had the joy of working with thirty five millimetre. I'd never .. nothing's ever matched the pleasure of being in a cutting room with bins of thirty five mil film hung up all round and with a moviola where you can actually see the film as you looked at it, going through the .. through the gate and so on, and the ... I remember the lovely process that - lovely, it was a very very boring and lengthy process but it had a physical quality about it - of the assistant to the film editor would, once he'd made the joins in paperclips and marked them all up with pieces of paper to show where they were on the reel, then the editor would .. the assistant would take them away and would cement .. she'd laboriously - usually a she - she'd laboriously join the .. the .. the bits of film so we had a .. a thing that could run through so that we could look at our rough cut. But woe and behold if you had to change it. You had to break the cement join and start again and put in blank frames. It was a very lengthy process. So to that extent it was primitive but it didn't seem like primitive conditions because we'd not had known anything better. Sixteen mil didn't come in till the mid-sixties, sixteen millimetre filming, which is much more lightweight and of course things changed then.

GILLARD Where were you located for **MONITOR**? In Lime Grove?

BURTON **MONITOR**'s studios was up on the seventh floor of Lime Grove, at the top of a lift, and they all had basin.. every office had a basin in so it'd obviously either been makeup or .. or sleeping accommodation. I think they were makeup rooms for the old film studios before the War. But in those days you spent a lot of time trundling to and from Ealing because the Ealing Film Studios had been bought in the mid-fifties by the BBC and **MONITOR** was one of the main users because we would shoot lots of our stories or elements - sometimes we'd shoot interviews if we couldn't get studio time. We didn't want to record on telecine because we didn't like the quality enough, we preferred to record on .. to make things on thirty five mil. So we trundled back and forth from Ealing. We hardly ever went into the West End because Broadcasting House was where Radio

was and Radio was .. it wasn't .. it was just not part of our calculations. It's not that it was beneath contempt, we knew there was .. the BBC Radio was there but as practitioners, not worrying about the politics of the thing, we just got on. I mean when Hugh Carleton Greene came down to .. to visit us it was a red letter day. And then in early sixties we moved to the Television .. newly opened Television Centre, where the ... No I beg your pardon, that's wrong. **MONITOR** stayed at Lime Grove until it closed. **MONITOR** closed in about 1962, '63, but that's really to move on to ... Perhaps we should just have a word or two about the team at **MONITOR** and how it was done. Would you like my ..?

GILLARD Yes, mm.

BURTON **MONITOR** being a main story. **MONITOR** has been fairly well chronicled on television. I did an essay for the Royal Television Society about Huw Wheldon's years as editor, but there may still be .. it may still be worth recording my take on its origins. It wasn't founded by Huw Wheldon. Huw Wheldon was at that time working as a producer in the Talks Department, laughingly called Talks Department, of Television, which was run by Leonard Miall, who looked after the political side mostly and was steamed up and got going all the time by Grace Wyndham-Goldie. And Catherine Dove (?) was the .. the power behind the scenes who said, let there be an Arts magazine, and she put together a team which also involved Jack Ashley who later became an MP and .. and Peter Newington, (?) who was brought in from Children's Programming 'cos he was awfully good at working in studios and also had an artist's perception of Television. And Huw was working side by side but managed somehow to get in very early on so that he was presenting the programme from the first edition and I think was very soon after that had put Catherine Dove to flight and was determined to produce as well as edit .. and as well as present.

(Side 2)

BURTON No need to spend a lot of time talking about Huw here, because he has been well documented both in the not-very-satisfactory Paul Ferris biography. In fact very unsatisfactory. And in countless memoirs I'm sure. But ..

GILLARD But just a minute. I mean, that .. that's all in print.

BURTON That's in print, yes.

GILLARD We're .. we're dealing with broadcaster memoirs, if you don't mind.

BURTON Fair enough. I'll start again.
Huw Wheldon was the most important person, and remains the most important person in my professional life, because he brought out what in that .. up to that point had been, I think, relatively latent. He made me .. he forced me to express my feelings about things as well as my knowledge and enthusiasm. And he taught us all, I think, who worked on the **MONITOR** programme, to .. to .. to extract the maximum emotion from any subject that one .. so that one, at the end of a film on **MONITOR**, should be able to say, "Well I enjoyed that and I was touched by it," rather than simply that, "I was interested by it." It should have .. carry a .. a .. a kick which perhaps came from his nati.. natural Welsh soul, I don't know. But he was .. exceptionally good at bringing out everything that one had to offer and turning it into something better than what you've made yourself. One was .. I was very grateful very often for the way he would take a film of mine and, by the commentary added to it, by the shaping of it, the reorganisation ... He would talk about a programme before you went off to shoot it and we tended, by the way, to think that our films were more important than our studio work. The studio work is still there in certain recordings in the archive - major features on what modern music was about or Orson Welles's film-making or the nature of modern art were done in the studio with lots of captions and blow-ups and so on - but most of us felt that our most important work was on film. And he would discuss every film

before you went out and you would write a script before you went out because in those days you didn't point at the camera and .. and grab stuff and then come back and shape it. You had to know what you wanted to shoot because everything had to be organised in advance because you can't walk into a situation with a thirty five millimetre camera the way you can with a sixteen mil. You've got to really have a very clear view, an auth.. an authorial view before you start so that you're almost instinctively a .. a writer as well as a director. But Wheldon would help with that writing and Wheldon would help when .. in the editing process, of shaping it into something. I'll give you just one example. I made a film about a string quartet. It took me a year or two to persuade him to let me do it because he thought that it was caviar for the General to be making for a mass audience programmes about chamber music. But I wanted to do it and made a programme which would be lasting about twenty five minutes, which oddly enough was based on Dick Cawston's mammoth film, **THIS IS THE BBC** which was a portrait of the BBC without commentary in which everything was self-explanatory and different aspects of the work of the BBC were captured, rather wonderfully in my opinion. And my film was to capture the work of a quartet rehearsing together at home and doing stuff in the studio, being .. having their schedules planned for them by concert management, the tedium of going down to a local music club in the country and meeting the ladies who make the tea and put the programmes out and so on. All this was put together and then it would end with a **MUSIC AT NIGHT** programme or a quartet. It was a quite charming film. But what Wheldon caught on to was the fact that all these musicians, the four members of the quartet, were all family men, all passing on the tricks to their children, 'cos I'd filmed at home with each of them doing rehearsals and things, and all of them in a sense like Mastersingers in the .. in the medieval days, people devoted to their craft and to their .. to their art more than their craft, and making peoples happier and more .. giving them spiritual refreshment. And he brought that out in commentary in a way which I've always been grateful to him. It wasn't a prize winning film, it was a quiet little film, but it was nevertheless something I really enjoyed working with and his gifts there, and his gifts in giving Ken Russell a sense of structure ... Ken Russell's films, I think, never got as good again as they had been in the BBC.

They're always flawed in the feature .. in his feature films. He gave John Schlesinger his satirical head, he liked having Robert Robinson in to do satires in the days when Robert was doing more than just quiz programmes. He had that maverick figure, Kenneth Robinson, also came in to do satire and Alex Atkinson. We .. we had a very good time and we loved also in **MONITOR** discovering or pushing talent. We gave Harold Pinter early coverage .. the Theatre Workshop. We had wonderful times when the Theatre Workshop came into the studio. I remember them .. all the actors descending on Hospitality and eating all the food before anybody else had come in from the breaks, and I was trying to fight them and Tony Booth, the father of the .. John Blair's wife, Cherie Blair - Tony Blair's wife, Cherie Blair. This fellow called Tony Booth actually threatened me with a knife and said, "Do you want to make something of it?" I think .. that may be libellous, it may not have been Tony Booth, but it was certainly a rough actor from the Theatre Workshop world. Those were heady days in which every programme almost was a first time. First big interview with Henry More, first big interview with Ezra Pound, first feature film with Robert Graves in Majorca, first film with Carl Ebert at Glyndebourne. Whichever art you dealt with, you were dealing with the greats, and we made sure that we were. In a way that, you know, Melvyn Bragg now after twenty years of **THE SOUTH BANK SHOW** simply can't compete because it's .. it's all been done before. You've got to find new ways of doing it.

GILLARD Yeah. But you moved on then, to wholly Music work didn't you? You became Executive Producer of Music Programmes.

BURTON That's correct. In 1963 there was a .. a big shake-up. There were two different shake-ups. One was the forthcoming .. the White Paper which announced the agreement .. the agreement that BBC-2 should be created, which was a terrific feather in the BBC's cap, that they got this vote of confidence in the early sixties. And it was clear from that the expansion was going to need a whole lot of new types of programmes and new s.. approach, and I was hived off away from the **MONITOR** programme to look after the preparations for BBC-2. At the same time, managerial changes of some .. the first time I was really

aware of management changes because Huw Wheldon became, in '63, Head of Documentaries and kept Music with it, so it became Documentaries and Music. The old tolks (sic) .. "Talks" name was dropped in favour of Documentaries and Music which Huw headed up. And then two years later, in '65, in a palace revolution of sorts, Stuart Hood left overnight. He'd been the Controller of Television and he left overnight and Wheldon was leapfrogged over to take his place.

GILLARD Let's talk about the place of music in television because on the face of it you would think that television wasn't the medium for music.

BURTON I suppose I .. the subject of music on television, and in my view music on television is a natural element but it's not a view which has been widely accepted. Musicians, on the whole, want to listen to music. I argue that listening is a process which involves the eyes as well as the ears, that until the twentieth century there was no other way to perceive music except by being in the same place, room, cathedral, palace, as the performers because there wasn't any possibility of recording. And in the twentieth century the gramophone and the radio broadcast perverted the natural way of listening to music by emphasising the sound at the expense of the human element, which is part of music-making. And I argue that television res.. and film restore that possibility because you see the musicians making the music and the body language which they impart, whether it's a conductor like Karajan or Bernstein or whether it's a soloist, violinist, like Yehudi Menuhin or Kyung Wha Chung. What .. how they play is part of the communicative act and of course doesn't change the notes that they play but nevertheless it .. it changes the way you perceive music and that therefore music is .. it is good to see music as well as to hear it. The disadvantages so far as television was concerned used to be the very poor quality of loudspeakers that were in the sets and of course the lack of colour, which is part of music, the .. the .. the lovely varnish. We never mentioned when we were talking about **MONITOR** generally the problems of doing programmes in black and white in doing Art

programmes, and yet we persevered and did programmes in black and white about paintings and made sense of some sort, which is where Kenneth Clark was also so successful. Just closing that digression now and continuing.

My cri de coeur is that music is one of the basic Arts, one of the finest Arts, and one of the ways that human beings express emotions and go to the core of their very being in works like Beethoven string quartets and whatever, and that television can communicate this. And if you watch opera on television you'll know that it looks magnificent. That's the most obvious case where television is superior to radio. If you watch a ballet on television it's again .. there's the whole thing whereas if you just listen to ballet music it's lovely but it's not ballet at all. And symphony music, and above all chamber music - singing and .. and room music I .. I .. I've always thought were naturals. Now I've lost that battle. There's hardly anybody now who'll .. who'll accept that. There's very little programming of .. of chamber music on television, very little and .. by comparison with the early days of BBC-2 when we had major slots. We had an hour slot every week by prescriptive right almost, called **MUSIC SIX TWO FIVE** which Michael Peacock invented, effectively, and we had .. the **OMNIBUS** slot on BBC-1 remained and we had other programmes like **COUNTERPOINT**, **MUSIC AT NIGHT**, and we invented various titles which meant we could have small-scale music and we'd have symphony serieses (sic) .. a series of symphony concerts with Leonard Bernstein in 1967 called **THE SYMPHONIC TWILIGHT** on BBC-1 and we had **THE YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR** on BBC-1 for many years. But that's jumping ahead. I did .. In brief, I think that music is an essential part and I .. most of my career - no, not most, but at least fifty percent of my career - has been working on music programmes ranging from symphony concerts and chamber music concerts to operas and ballets. And I think that it's extremely important that we should continue, not only to .. we, broadcasting organisations; I'm not any more in power, but it's most important that they shouldn't neglect these possibilities 'cos television does them so well.

GILLARD Is it fair to say - it .. it struck me this way, anyhow, that until the .. the coming of Television, broadcasting saw itself as .. as

a performance medium and when Television came, you .. because of the limitations you've already referred to ..

BURTON That's very good.

GILLARD .. that the .. Television pushed out the boundaries it seemed to me ..

BURTON Yes.

GILLARD .. and you did things like master classes and so on.

BURTON That's quite correct.

GILLARD Which for some reason or other, that Radio had never even thought of doing?

BURTON I'm sixty three now and in 1964, when I was thirty three, I won what was then Television's top award - so I've been going downhill ever since - but that was the Desmond Davis Award and that was for creative programming. And it was just at the end of the first year of broadcasting on BBC-2 And what people were, I think, thanking me for or noticing was that with this happy band of .. of programme makers at Television Centre by then - Herbert Chappell was one of them, Barry Gavin, Christopher Newpin, people who were themselves good musicians - we were creating a sort of mellifluous explosion of programme ideas and we were using Television as an educational means, not merely as a transmitter of performance. This is something we'd been doing in **MONITOR** as well. We'd been doing features about musicians for the previous five or six years. My own string quartet film is a case in point. But with the coming of BBC-2 we were able to expand and one of the things we did was to develop educational programmes in Music which would match those that Kenneth Clark had been doing in Art already for ten years. Our model was never seen by the public

because we couldn't get quality programming at .. those days. That was the works of Leonard Bernstein in America, who since 1955 had been doing programmes about music using symphony orchestra. And we sought to emulate that. We found a number of different people .. we looked for and found a number of different people who would communicate their own knowledge and love of music, so that we could use Television as an educational medium for development of music. This has gone on ever since and .. in the eighties Simon Rattle did many expository programmes; in the seventy (sic) Pierre .. seventies Pierre Boulez and at a lighter level Andre Previn. But no-one ever quite matched Bernstein's combination of talent and .. and .. and ability to put words .. put music into words, but nevertheless we had a good shot. We did do some with Bernstein himself too. But as .. but as well as the educational programming, we felt it was important to expand on performance programming and this is where the repertoire expanded and instead of doing fifty minute recitals with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf or half an hour at the most, there was a very good set of .. of recordings in the BBC's archive of great singers doing stuff for television. But by the time we got to the sixti.. late sixties when John Culshaw took over from me particularly, we were also doing Winterreises, complete song cycles. Peter Pears and .. and Benjamin Britten. And that was something which I think was also important. I mean you have to .. the whole world is your oyster, you give a greater emphasis on .. on educational work while you haven't got the quality of .. of sound but nowadays when there's a greater .. when you can get stereo sound on your speaker and you can use Radio 3 sound as well ... I was a great believer in getting Radio and Television to work side by side and to do programmes with simultaneous broadcast on sound. Then you can .. the public is more interested than anything else I think in .. in great performance than they are in being taught so that, while you have to have some educational programmes still, hardly any I'm afraid now on BBC, the .. the .. the pendulum has swung back now towards performance away from educational programming. But that may change. I've noticed now in my nearly forty years of broadcasting that pendulums do swim back - swing backwards and forwards. I'm sure you've felt the same, Frank, that .. that people come and go.

GILLARD Oh yes. Well ..

BURTON Well, not that people come and go. That's true too but that .. that priorities come and go.

GILLARD Yes.

BURTON Nowadays the BBC does hardly any concerts except at the Proms. And planners say, "Well we can't do concerts unless they've got a gimmick." And it's not just enough to have the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Colin Davis doing Berlioz or whatever it is, even though it's a great concert. In my day, when I was planning, that was a raison d'etre, was to give the public fine music-making. Now the BBC - and I'm being critical now rather than being historical - the BBC tends to do far too much of its broadcasting in the Prom series where the performances are not always of the highest quality, and doesn't pick out the orchestras around the country on a regular basis all through the year, so that the listeners .. the viewer who wanted to listen to symphony music has a very weird period where you get all of it stashed into July and August when the Prom's on and nothing else the rest of the year.

GILLARD Mm.

BURTON Sorry, I've gone off onto a tangent of contemporary planning. Let's get back to ..

GILLARD Well it's an interesting comment.

BURTON .. the 1960s.

GILLARD Well .. are there any personalities in the department at that time you've not mentioned you'd like to say a word or two about?

BURTON Yes. Music was to begin with run by Kenneth Wright as I remember rather .. certainly he'd had an early hand in it. He'd been a radio producer and administrator and knew everybody. Then for a time it was run by Lionel Salter, who was a practising musician himself of some quality, and he developed wherever he could the notion of popular music being good and good music being popular - I think that was his catchphrase, which was fairly easy to say - but he didn't do anything other than performance plus he developed a lot of studio productions of opera in which ... Those are the years when Menotti's operas were being done, **"Amahl and the Night Visitors"** and **"The Consul"** and **"The Saint of Bleaker Street"** and Rudolph Cartier was one of the finest of the directors. I think he was an Austrian Jew who'd come to live in London either during or before the War and his great claim to fame was his work on the .. **1984** and on the .. what was that one about digging up the bomb with Andre Morrell? The **QUATERMASS** affair. Rudy Cartier, as well as being a very skilled theatre director, was also a very fine theatre .. opera director and he did a lot of television opera. I did a number of other people. He was one of the characters when I first came to Television. More importantly in the history I suppose of music per se, not of opera, was Walter Todds, who'd had a long career in Radio producing Tony Hopkins and talking about music, he came over to Television the same day as I did and he worked in the Music Department when I was working in Talks Department, and he developed the style for shooting concerts which is still used to this day. He and Anthony Crackstone, who was the son of Harold Crackstone who was a great music teacher, a piano teacher, and Anthony was rather an aristocratic fellow but he did wonderful OBs. He didn't only do concerts, he liked doing coronations as well. (LAUGHING) I think he did coronations and the enthronements of archbishops and so on. But he was the kind of man who could do the **"Verdi Requiem"** with Giulini at Festival Hall or Rostropovich and Richter playing Beethoven cello sonatas at the Edinburgh Festival late at night. He could turn his hand to anything and he had immense style and unimpeachable musicianship. He and Sir Walter Todds and .. and .. and Crackstone - Anthony "Crackers" as they called him - were .. were my gods in this field. Later we developed Anthony .. took on somebody called Brian Large, who was a director, a Doctor of Music in his

own right, and he developed a style of shooting which was also very effective and in the sixties and early seventies, when we still had money, Brian did a lot of studio production of opera. But the money dried up and his taste wasn't perhaps of the most impeccable, as a result of which there were no more studio operas and Brian went off to become the world's leading director of relays from opera houses, which is something which we developed in the sixties and more importantly in the seventies when the technology made it possible to do opera without too much extra light and so on. But that's a different category. I think if we just round off my life in the BBC in the sixties, in terms of great personalities, it was a time - the Talks Department of the early sixties - it was a time of tremendous vitality and .. and one looked forward to going to the weekly Programme Review Meetings of the Talks Department .. not the .. not the big staff meetings later on, the Heads of Department, but the Talks Department meeting when Bernard .. when Donald Baverstock and Anton de Lotbiniere and Stephen Hearst and other distinguished producers were banging about - Michael Peacock, Alasdair Milne, when .. and Gordon Watkins. These were all names which I'll never .. they .. this was the most formidable period of my life and the most impressionable one I suppose, when there was so much talent all gathered together in one department. And it is true I think probably, that there was more talent then than there is now. I think .. I .. I may just be an old man grumbling but ..

GILLARD What .. you haven't said much about Grace Wyndham-Goldie. Did you have much to do with her?

BURTON I was .. I was one of Grace's young men, in the sense that she picked me. She was on the board that hired me and David Jones, who had a distinguished career in the theatre later on, was another. We were both working on **MONITOR**. She was horrible to women who worked with her - Nancy Thomas and Anne Turner and people like that. She was very harsh and unkind. She was also generally rather rude to people and I was disappointed with this. But I came to realise that there was a very sensitive soul behind this hardness, this toughness, and she did working .. probably did as much as anybody in the BBC to

loosen up the political situation so that there was less hide-bound rules. She .. I think probably Granada led the way but she wasn't far behind in .. in loosening up the political approach to programming and also it was I think she that brought in the consumer programmes for the first time, which .. which were fine. So far as the Arts programming .. programme was concerned, although she'd been a Radio critic before the War, possibly even a Television critic, I don't remember, she .. she didn't actually have a great deal of sympathy for the Arts. She didn't know much about the Arts I don't think. Literature, yes, possibly, drama perhaps, but painting and music were not her bag. And I'll never forget when John Schlesinger made a film about Benjamin Britten in 1958, just soon after I joined, the first few weeks of my being there, and it was a charming film about Benjamin Britten putting on a festival at Aldeburgh with the first rehearsals and in fact all the rehearsals for **Noyes Fludde** which was the key work that year, and you saw Britten tinkering with teaspoons on teacups and things and kids playing recorders and Owen Brannigan being Noah and it was a really nice film and it also .. lots of nice shots of Britten walking along the beach saying he'd .. he got his inspiration while he was on these long walks and that he loved working with children, so on and so forth. And I'll never forget the .. 'cos I helped to write the commentary - Grace came in after seeing the transmission .. the run through, saying "Phew, interesting film. Much too long, much too long. Very self-indulgent." It was twelve and a half minutes long. (LAUGHING) And I think we cut off the first ten .. ten .. ten seconds in order to try to show her that we approved of her criticism.

GILLARD Yes.

BURTON No, she was a formidable lady and I .. I .. although I didn't enjoy her company all that much I .. when she moved on I remember saying that the best tribute one can pay is if one would always think, well what would Grace have said about this? What would she have thought? She .. she had that influence. Much more than Leonard, who was a genial fellow - Leonard Miall - a genial fellow, but I think he spent most of his time over at Broadcasting House arguing his corner. I don't know - or up at Television Centre. I didn't see to much

of Leonard. But he's certainly still very much the historian. I wonder whether he's written my obituary? I must have a word with him.

GILLARD (LAUGHING) Well he's in Australia at the moment. Let's move on. You .. you became Head of Music and Arts in 1965. Were you the first one or ..?

BURTON Yes. We were .. the BBC was constantly evolving .. evolving in the sixties to face up to the .. the reality of being the senior partner. I mean it .. it was in my time that Television moved ahead of Radio. When I went into Television, Radio was still the senior partner, when I left the BBC in '67 there was no doubt that Television was way out in front. And all through the sixties, as I understand it, the licence income was expanding as more and more people bought television sets and so the financial situation at the BBC was like it never will be again, because it had an expanding income every year and so they could go on ... I mean for example, in budgetary concerns, we had a budget I guess, an annual amount of money we could spend on **MONITOR** but it wasn't something that kept us up at nights or had a staff of accountants doing it. When we saw the money was getting a bit low we would schedule a studio interview or something for forty five minutes and .. I mean that's perhaps a little bit coarse putting it like that. But the .. the constant evolve .. evolution of the BBC led in 195.. '63 to the creation of the Documentary and Music Department and in 1965 to the Music and Arts Department. And these were really, I think, convenient umbrellas to make sense of the personality who was to be the leader. It was really the lead.. the person who was put in charge who defined what his or her area would be and Wheldon's in '63 had been Documentaries and Music. When he moved into the driving seat in March '65 he created a programme department specific for Music and Arts and he turned another programme department into Documentaries. So that his own previous department, Documentaries and Music, was redefined. Dick Cawston did Documentaries and I did Music and Arts. And Stephen Hearst, who'd been a distinguished documentary-maker, became my deputy as Assistant Head. And

when I left three years later, the department was split. I was somebody who had interest in all the Arts and experience in all the Arts as a programme maker, through six years in **MONITOR**, but there was no obvious candidate who had that coming up behind me and so Huw split it and in 1967 the Arts Department was made a department under Stephen Hearst and the newly re-created Music Department was headed up by John Culshaw, who was head-hunted from the Decca record company, at my suggestion, because I was extremely nervous about leaving the BBC, as I did in 1967. Perhaps we should make that the subject of a separate paragraph.

GILLARD Please.

BURTON I .. I was .. for two and a half years I was Head of Music and Arts in the sixties. Marvellous times, when we created **WORKSHOP** and **MASTER CLASS** and **IN REHEARSAL** and the various book programmes and film programmes. We had a chance to really create a very wide range of programming, not all of it totally successful but nevertheless it was a very good time. And yet I was strangely frustrated. I was in my mid-thirties and I was being sort of talked about in gossip columns as the next Controller of BBC-2 or the next Controller but one at least, and I remember there was a lot of .. there was a newspaper story in '67 when I was away in Canada and I .. all I knew was a cable from Huw Wheldon saying, "Ignore .. ignore gossip. Continue to produce Glenn Gould as you're doing at the moment." I was doing a series of Glenn Gould programmes out in Toronto. And when I got back the gossip was that I .. there was gonna be a shift-round and I was gonna become Controller of BBC-2. But I didn't really want to become Controller of BBC-2 at that time. At least I .. looking back I'm trying to remember whether I did or didn't. I suppose part of me wanted to, but part of me was rather aghast at the .. the self-satisfiedness as I saw it of the BBC management, even as led by Huw Wheldon. There was a sense that .. that we were the only pure and proper church and Peter Dimmock was its leading sort of apologist. Not quite right, Peter Dimmock was wonderfully patriotic for the BBC figure, as was Huw. But there was perhaps the feeling of .. of .. in my case, a feeling of rebellion that I also

had done too much under Huw's aegis and that it was important for me to do my own thing. I can remember going to a conference at Evesham or Wood Norton or one of those places where the BBC used to go for weekends and examine its navel, and Michael Bakewell, who was then Head of Radio Plays .. no, Television Plays, and I were both feeling that we weren't part of the same very, sort of, almost like a .. a Conservative Party Conference one felt. It was very much everybody .. the BBC was right and everybody else was wrong. And I remember Adrian Malone, who was at that time a very successful producer who'd just done **THE ASCENT OF MAN** I think saying, "Well I don't know what a departmental head does. What do you do? Why are you there at all? Why can't we just make our programmes? Why do we ..?" And I explained the need to organise, find work for everybody, 'cos in those days I had a department of fifty or sixty producers working for me, and to be the spokesman, to get the right amount of money and so on. But I wasn't totally convinced, so that the long and short of it was that when David Frost came to me one day outside Lime Grove and said, "Come and have lunch. We're thinking of starting something different," I had lunch and I didn't take long to .. to say, "Yes, I'm interested, I'd like to be part of this venture." (Which eventually became London Weekend Television). And I lacked the courage - it's one of the black spots of my private personal life - I lacked the courage to reveal this wooing to Huw Wheldon or his, at that time chief henchman, David Atten.. no I beg your pardon, it was before David Attenborough came back. Huw was the boss and Michael Peacock was controlling BBC-1 and Michael Peacock said, "I've been asked by David Frost .." And he was given leave I think. He took the open way, I didn't. Because there was no certainty that London Weekend would get this and I didn't want to offend people. That's the way I rationalised it. And David Attenborough said to me afterwards he understood why I had not gone public with this, because Huw Wheldon would have just talked me out of it. He was too strong a figure. Anyway, the long and the short of it was that Huw didn't know about it, was extremely hurt when I telegrammed to say we'd got the contract. I was appalled in a way that we had got this contract but at the same time, once the break had happened and I went off into commercial television, which presumably is not part of the remit of this conversation ..

GILLARD It's not.

BURTON .. but once I got off to commercial television, Huw was .. for years wouldn't see me or talk to me. And wouldn't see me when I wanted to say goodbye and so on, because he felt I hadn't behaved honourably to him. But eventually that all worked out. I went to live in Richmond near to where he lives and we became personal friends again and in 195.. 1975 I was asked back.

I'd just like to put a footnote in about the appointment of John Culshaw, however, if I may. Because, as you can see from these remarks, I approached the idea of leaving the BBC with some trepidation. It's more or less the same as renouncing your religion and saying I'm going to be a Catholic after all. Or I want to become a Catholic, having been a .. a fairly active Protestant. And I didn't want to leave the Corporation in .. in a bad way so far as my own work was concerned and so I .. and I'd always been taught it was important to train your successor, to pick out and to look forward to .. in BBC terms it was important to .. to .. to look to the future. And I had worked a lot with John Culshaw who was at that time the very top man in the recording business and had made **Wagner's Ring** with Solti and an infinite number of recordings with Benjamin Britten, some of which I'd filmed, so that Culshaw was known to the public too. And in the long .. and he wanted .. he was interested 'cos he'd reached the end of his .. what he could do in broadcasting. And so .. when I suggested that I might be wanting to move to fresh pastures, would he be interested in taking over my job, the music side of it? Yes he was. And I reported this to David Attenborough, who was then Controller of BBC-2 and the long and short of it was that David Attenborough approached John and John was brought in. So that I thought I'd done a very good damage-limitation task. I should also say that I had a small part in getting David Attenborough back into management, or not back into, getting him into management at all. 'Cos David was working for me in the sixties - in '63 - making a film about the LSO on tour and at one club, drinks, we discussed the future of the BBC and he said, "Well the only person I would ever work for would be Huw." And I could imagine that .. he hadn't worked for Huw up to that point. Even though they were close friends but

they'd never worked together. Is that all right?

GILLARD Yes.

BURTON And .. and I reported this conversation to Huw when .. when .. when he was made Head of ..

GILLARD When he was made Controller of Programmes.

BURTON Yes, when he was made Controller in '65. And that is, I think, probably the reason why Wheldon went to .. (end of tape).

This is interview with Mr. Humphrey Burton by Frank Gillard. And we're now on the second cassette and this is **Side 3**. Mr. Burton was talking about Huw Wheldon, Sir Huw Wheldon.

BURTON Just one footnote to add as to why I left the BBC because I sometimes wish I hadn't and might have had a very much more - how can I put it - traditional BBC career, working your way up through departmentals to Channel Controllers and who knows what. And when I see what people do, I guess I could have coped with it and gone right through the BBC to senior management, had I wished. But I loved programme making so much that I have to question whether I'd have been in the right job if I had gone past being a departmental head.

Wheldon, Huw Wheldon summed it up when I left. He rationalised it for me and for the whole wide world .. because he was certain .. certainly a bit upset by .. as the three .. that I was a victim of the "three C's" or had fallen to the call of the three C's and those were - change and cash and challenge. But that was a nice way of putting it because in a way that was what it was. Because the BBC was in a sense, too safe and certainly because of my being under his protection, at least, as that's the way people saw it, I wasn't able to strike out on my own. And when I came back to the BBC at his invitation, eight years later, I was a different person, there's no doubt. And the BBC was very different.

GILLARD Right. But I'm not going to let you go eight years ahead of me at this stage because I still want to ask you one or two things about your period as Head of Music and Arts.

You now had Television Centre, of course. You've described Lime .. Lime Grove to us in .. in very graphic terms. What about Television Centre? I mean, was it .. was it the ideal?

BURTON Lime Grove had all the pleasure of a folk industry about it. It was very very domesticated even, as I said, to the dressing rooms being turned into offices. Television Centre was custom built and had these .. this ring

of studios around the base, all of which had easy access for delivery of scenery and so on, which at the time seemed so important because so much of the BBC's output was studio based, rather more I think percentage wise than it is now. At any rate, I enjoyed working in the Television Centre. There were certain things I didn't like. The fact that the senior Management had their own dining room and had waitress service without having to go and see the staff. I think that was a mistake ever to have allowed that to happen at all. The Television Service catering arrangements at Television Centre were that there was a canteen and then there was a sit down waitress service and then there was a separate private dining room. And then there were sort of all sorts of coffee bars and so on and so forth. I mention this because daily life at the Television Centre was not as pleasant as it should have been. There were no shops, for example. If I go .. travel .. and I see in Austria or Germany, all the television centres have considerable shopping areas. There were no creches for women to bring their babies so that they could go on working; the role of women was not a satisfactory thing .. too big a can of beans to open up here. But the .. and the Television Centre meant it was even further out of London somehow than Lime Grove was. So there was a certain sense of putting down a great big bastion, a great big frontier here .. a great big something isolated from the rest of the world. It was too far away from the heart of London, I felt. I .. from that point of view, I greatly enjoyed going to work for London Weekend once it got its South Bank centre up and running. But the studios were quite wonderful at Television Centre and there was no question that one was working in a very fine production atmosphere. And the things that were made in the early sixties out of those studios .. tremendous. I mean, in my field the opera, **The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny** which was directed by Philip Saville and produced by Cedric Messina, I think, or possibly even by Sidney Newman. Those were programmes .. Sidney Newman it was. Those were programmes which really pushed the frontiers of production as far as they could go. They were the best days probably.

GILLARD You were now head of a department so you were dealing, of course, with the Channel Controllers. I mean, they were the people who held the moneybags presumably and they .. they controlled the air time.

BURTON Yes. In the sixties there was a great deal more freedom for the departmental heads than I understand this .. pertains now. I would get my bag of money and I would discuss the number of programmes that would be produced in the **MONITOR** series or .. it wasn't .. by my time it was .. moved on .. we were spending a lot of time on BBC-1 trying to work out what to do after the demise of the magazine programme **MONITOR,** which happened when Jonathan Miller ran it - into the ground, I may say - with entertaining programmes which the public didn't want to watch. (LAUGHS) But that's a separate little episode that. But I wasn't required in the way that programme Controllers now appear to. I wasn't required to deliver and discuss every episode of my music programming. And I can remember vividly in a later life, in the seventies when I came back, being called in by Alasdair, saying, "What's this about .. why are you doing Gagaku Japanese art as the first edition of **OMNIBUS**? I don't want that, old boy." And I said, "Well I'm sorry, that's what you're getting. It's the **Radio Times** cover." But it was a surprise to be reprimanded by the Director of Programmes at that time because we were the ones that made the decisions for individual programming. I think Grace and Leonard had created that world in the late fifties and early sixties when Cecil McGivern and then Kenneth Adam were .. were running the shop. Baronial freedom was part of the name of the game, part of the joy of being a departmental head. And that's not to say that I didn't enormously enjoy working with my de.. my Controllers who were .. Michael Peacock was the first Controller of BBC-2, and Donald Baverstock was much less fun, he was rather .. rather blatantly philistine, despite his tremendous achievement when he was running **TONIGHT**. I'll never forget him calling me into .. with Huw Wheldon who was the head of department at that time .. must have been there for '63/'64 Edinburgh Festival and we'd recorded Richter .. we were very excited because we'd got Sviatoslav Richter, the Russian pianist who was .. hated doing any kind of recording - particularly television - and we'd got him doing the Six Cello Sonatas with Rostropovich, another great Russian artist. And Baverstock said, "Who is this Richter, anyway boy?" And was sort of flaunting his .. his philistinism and Huw and I were both very shocked at that kind of reaction. But on the whole, both Peacock and later Attenborough were exceptionally well disposed towards the arts

on television and Peacock took a great pleasure in creating for BBC-2, **THE MUSIC ON 2** series which was a weekly programme and .. I remember the very first week of our transmissions on BBC-2, we were able to schedule the entire Verdi Requiem live from the Royal Festival Hall, with Giulini conducting a fine cast and a young man called John Drummond was in charge of the interval feature, I remember for that. And we felt we were making .. breaking new ground all the time and that I think I felt as an expanding departmental chief that my Controllers were really very much behind me, which is a very satisfactory feeling. It was a good time from that point of view.

GILLARD But how did you break down your output between BBC-1 and BBC-2? Was there .. did you have a writ from each Controller or was it up to you to decide this is suitable for that network?

BURTON In the sixties I remember feeling very strongly that because BBC-2 had come, if you remember, regionally bit by bit and that it wasn't a national programme for some years, that it was important not to dilute BBC-1's output and it was not .. it was important, although BBC-2 provided more chance for minority or for specialist type viewing, one must keep faith with the major viewers on BBC-1. The majority of viewers were stuck with BBC-1. Which translated in terms of my programming, that the **OMNIBUS** retained a remit to be as inventive as .. and .. it wasn't called **OMNIBUS**, it was called **SUNDAY NIGHT** in the sixties and I programmed it myself. I didn't have an editorial team. It was where our Music/Arts documentaries went on BBC-1. And to some extent I retained that policy when I returned in the seventies, of keeping an outpost of adventure, artistically speaking, in the BBC's .. BBC-1 programming. But the .. the problem really was one of time, you know because music takes a lot of time to perform and so do ballets and so on and so forth, and so consequently, BBC-2 did take up an increasing amount of the performance programming. That was what it was there for - to provide alternatives. But the thing was it was not done by writ. It was done by discussion. There's no question that they listened and one sat down and we argued and .. I can remember for a time, arguing with myself and with

colleagues that perhaps the best thing to do was to bring **MONITOR** back and have **MONITOR 1** and **MONITOR 2.** And have a **MONITOR** for BBC-1 which would be the lighter stuff and the tougher stuff .. in other words, using the trade name of **MONITOR** as something which the public would recognise. But we were already in difficulties because once Huw Wheldon, the father figure of broadcasting who hosted **MONITOR** disappeared - because he couldn't cope with doing that and running .. running the BBC Television Service, which he did from 1965 onwards - once that happened we couldn't find a substitute for Wheldon. We tried the author, Henry Livings, I remember, the playwright, Henry Livings had a go. Later on people like Dicky Baker, myself were tried. But we never really found anybody who could run .. be the Dimbleby figure for the arts. Many would argue that was just as well because no-one could really know about all the different arts in the way that was needed to be a good host. But I regret in a way that time. It was .. it may have been too parentalist, too much handing down of the tablets, too authoritarian but in the good hands, and Wheldon's were good hands, that was in a way of imparting information and enthusiasm which we very much miss now I think. No-one trusts the managerial figures and the editorial figures in quite the same way as they used to.

GILLARD How did the other departments, particularly the show-bizy departments and the journalistic departments view you in Music and Arts?

BURTON I think that the Tom Sloan's of this world and the Sidney Newman's of this world felt that we were the grit in the .. in the .. in the machinery. That we were a little bit .. we had a certain amount of nuisance factor because we perhaps caused more stir with our films by Ken Russell and things like that than our viewing figures or .. warranted and that we were taking away valuable programme money. But at a .. at a professional level, I'm thinking more now of the .. yeah, the mid-60s, Tom Sloan and Peter Dimmock and people like that .. we had a very good relationship. It .. to that extent, it was a happy band of pilgrims. It's just that I felt there was too much of .. there was too much

consensus, there wasn't enough arguing of the toss. There wasn't enough radicalism in the way people approach programming. I think Wheldon recognised that and gave time to mavericks of film .. Ken Russell was an early example. But he was relatively harmless. The most important maverick in Wheldon's managerial period, I suppose in the sixties, was Peter Watkins and there there was the most terrible hash, I think, made of the transmission of **THE WAR GAME**. My .. my evidence is marginal because I was a colleague of Peter Watkins's and of Huw's. I saw the agony that Huw was going through in stopping it. But the problem was he should never have allowed it to get the way it was - he hadn't supervised it sufficiently close on. This was the downside of allowing people to get on with things, which is part of the laissez-faire of the ethos in which BBC Television was working in the sixties. You commissioned a film then you let them get on with. You didn't supervise it. One of the strange things that we were very often called directors and producers in the Music and Arts department, particularly, people would produce their own films and direct them and there was therefore, very often not a supervisory figure arguing the toss all the way through. And **THE WAR GAME** I think fell into that .. the trap of being .. he was allowed to get off .. I mean, he was a madman anyway, Peter Watkins - a very gifted one. But he was allowed to get too far down the road to get his position too entrenched before Huw said, "But you can't say that .. it's not true". That's why in the end I think it was stopped.

GILLARD Huw was of course .. he'd done a fairly lengthy explanation from his point of view of this. He said that Watkins was totally obsessed with tyranny and oppression and that sort of thing. That was the dominating thing in his mind twenty-four hours every day of his life. And that he felt that this man would produce something quite brilliant and quite original and unique .. and then found that it was indeed all that but it was too terrifying to screen. After all, a newspaper doesn't think it's too bad if it occasionally has to spike an article on which it's spent a lot of money, why should broadcasting feel that?

BURTON Ah .. well it was a huge amount of money by comparison with spiking an article. It was a very very big commitment. Wheldon was right to back Watkins from the point of view of his talent. The film called **CULLODEN** which he'd made .. which was an eye-witness account of the Battle of 1745 was a remarkable piece of film making and really gave you the sense of being in there. My argument is that because managers were stretched too much, Huw didn't actually come across that programme realistically in terms of looking at rough-cuts until such an enormous .. he had the right to spike .. of course he did and he .. didn't .. I mean, Alasdair Milne spiked a Dennis Potter film twenty years later.

GILLARD **BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE.**

BURTON And it's good when they flex their muscles but it shouldn't really get to that stage, I don't think.

GILLARD And .. did you find that the great ones in the worlds of arts and culture were ready to take to television? Did they .. I mean, you've got some marvellous names in your own particular catalogue. I mean. Britten for example, Glenn Gould and others. I mean were they .. were they .. were they producible even?

BURTON I think that where I led the field in the early sixties - I don't wish to sound self serving when I say that - I led the field 'cos I was in the department that had the .. and had the brief to go out and make this kind of programming. Other people like Christopher Newpin did very well with Jacqueline du Pré and Ashkenazy and his films about the trout and so on .. the Schubert Trout Quintet but I took a general policy that we will go out and we'll make films about interesting artists. In the music field, Benjamin Britten was one that hated, in theory, the idea of being filmed, didn't like having cameras around, was self conscious. But we had already with John Schlesinger in '58 managed to pin him down and I managed to get him to come to the studio in 1963 when we started

BBC-2 or maybe it was early '64 and actually do song recitals and play with the Amadeus quartet. I had to use all sorts of stratagems like employing Basil Douglas who'd done the Radio **MUSIC IN MINIATURE** series as my go-between and John Culshaw with whom I'd made films in Vienna with the Decca recording group, and I'd made films with John recording Ben. So that there were documentaries about doing **The Burning Fiery Furnace** up at Aldeburgh and one was generally wooing Benjamin Britten, and to a lesser extent, Michael Tippett because one wanted to have these people as part of the mainstream broadcasting experience. And we got it. There were a few people who resisted - Graham Greene was .. in my day was the one that resisted the most outstandingly, and Christopher Burstall managed to get a film of him in which you maybe saw his glove at a railway train window but you .. and you heard his voice but you never saw him. But that was a quirk in which Burstall in the end played .. played into Graham Greene's hands. It just managed to increase the .. the Graham Greene mystique. But on the whole, I think that artists appreciated being .. being monumentalised .. or whatever the word - of being .. being put down on .. on film. Henry More's a wonderful case in point of liking .. he loved to talk about his work and explain it to a large public because they .. artists who are in their prime .. in their fifties and sixties in the sixties were, many of them, products of the .. (PAUSE) optimistic days of pre-war socialism when one felt that these new media .. broadcasting Radio and later Television, would somehow transform everybody's lives. And I think to a large extent they have transformed .. not as dramatically as one would have wished but .. so many more people now are interested in classical music than there ever were before the war. The quality of that interest is very much something which we have to work on and by the insights we can provide - whether it's with Hans Keller and Robins Landen talking about music .. they were the people that I brought forward a lot on television or Bernard Keeffe who was a gifted and in my view, undervalued commentator on music. And Tony Hopkins, too, who did such a wonderful job on the Radio. These people helped .. and I think that our educational role in educating a generation or two is probably the most important, if you actually get down to it .. our most important achievement.

GILLARD Now, what about relations with Radio? There was William Glock called Controller, BBC Music.

BURTON Yes.

GILLARD And yet he only controlled Radio.

BURTON Yes and never made any attempt. William Glock never made any attempt to .. to put a handle on Television and I think all Controllers of Music have fought shy of trying to make a real impact. They're still called Controller, Music; course though in recent years I suppose, in Drummond and Kenyon's day that was dropped in favour of Controller Radio 3. And there is no longer a Controller, Music now as there was then. But in my day, of course I worshipped William Glock along with everybody else - I once or twice played piano duets with him and enjoyed his personality and his writings about music. But he didn't want to know about Television. He'd got quite a handful already. In fact, I think it's probably now .. recognised that he really wanted to deal only with the Proms, on the one hand, and with the Symphony Orchestra on the other 'cos those were the main instruments by which he could affect policy and change taste. And Television was peripheral to him and he never made any attempt to .. to barge about. If I'd been him, I think I'd have insisted at Director General level or certainly managerial level to have more contemporary music on Television, even if it meant the loss of audiences. I think that if I was to be asked what .. the weakness of my period as Head of Music in the sixties, particularly, was .. laziness is too much .. not the right word .. but a reluctance to go out and make a policy of doing new music as it came along. Not to say that we ignored it altogether .. I can vividly remember the first performance of a Shostakovich Cello Concerto done live which we broadcast and had Hans Keller in to react to it - first British performance probably. And I can remember, of course, the studios doing Benjamin Britten's **Billy Bud** in the mid-60s, a marvellous studio production of an opera, but we tended to put our eggs very much in the Benjamin Britten basket with a few perhaps works of Michael Tippett. We weren't seeking out the young composers as much as we

should have been.

GILLARD Mm.

BURTON We had one or two programmes, nevertheless, that did. **THE WORKSHOP** programmes .. I'm perhaps being unfair on myself here. I think perhaps we did do a fair amount. We did Boulez in the sixties .. we had workshops with him. But we didn't have a continuing policy of performing contemporary music and my argument was that this was done very well by Radio 3, Third Programme as it still was then, and it was up to us really to .. to .. to do other things which were uniquely specific to Television, such as the **MASTER CLASS**'s and **THE WORKSHOP**'s we've already mentioned .. essays about music.

GILLARD As distinct from William's attitude to Television, though, the .. for instance, the players in the BBC Symphony Orchestra had very strong beliefs that they were being neglected by Television. I used to give them an annual dinner and the .. and the big complaint levelled at me every time was why aren't we seen on Television?

BURTON I wish we could have found a way to have a regular telecast using the BBC Symphony Orchestra. It should have been higher on the priority list than it was. We did have a sort of policy when I came back in '75 of trying to use all the BBC Orchestras on Television, at least once a year in a series. And the BBC Orchestra got its time on the Proms - it still does get more .. Because they were scheduled so far in front it was hard to find time for Television. There were some genuine extenuating circumstances as to why they weren't broadcast used for features and things, but the fact is had there been a greater will towards it, we'd have found a way and there wasn't. It wasn't a high enough priority.

GILLARD Mm.

BURTON And it's a shame.

GILLARD You .. you made it plain that in metropolitan terms, in international terms, I mean, you were casting a wide net and very successfully. What about within the UK itself?

BURTON We .. there's .. the unions were much .. Excuse me, the Regions .. So far as music policy was concerned on Television in the sixties, the Regions were much stronger entities in those days than they later became. They each had music departments and Symphony Orchestras and direct contact, as I recall, with the Controllers. And my .. my .. in my job .. I saw part of my job as .. as Head of Music and Arts, as being coordinator of policy and trying to get the BBC Welsh and the BBC Scottish to do things of their own which Controllers would support. Sometimes I seem to remember, enriching with some budget that might have been otherwise mine so that we made double budgets. Certainly in the later years, in the seventies - because I did this job twice - Music and Arts, both in the sixties and again in the seventies. Certainly sometimes we would combine budgets so that we could continue to do things with BBC Wales which is always the most active so far as music programming was concerned. Scotland we had all sorts of tussles with really, concerning arts programming coming out of BBC Scotland, particularly during the Edinburgh Festival. Because in my day, we took it as an axiomatic that we would do a concert each week from the three weeks at the Edinburgh Festival, even though it meant curtailing the Proms during that period. More recently, that's gone by the board and now Proms take precedence and Edinburgh hardly gets a concert in edgeways. Maybe it does in Scotland, but certainly not down in .. in the UK .. down in the rest of the UK. I remember conversations with BBC North - 'cos the BBC Northern Orchestra was .. as it was called then I think .. was a decent second division orchestra and also with the lighter orchestra in Midlands, we had a series when I came back in the seventies to .. to Television Service, we had a series .. oh, I've forgotten what it was called now .. but it .. it used .. it had eighteen programmes to it and six each came from .. **CONTRAST**, I think it was called .. but anyway. It involved lots of

Television gimmickry, blue-box and elect .. and colour separation units so that you'd have orchestras with lots of visual gimmickry. It died a death, it was terrible. But there were six from Wales and six from Birmingham, I think, and six from Scotland and six from Manchester too, perhaps. It was .. it was not something that was very high on my priorities I don't think .. because it was such a hassle to get in and use these places. When I was .. in the sixties when I was at one of the management conferences and .. doing projects about how the BBC might re-organise, I remember thinking and arguing and being reporter for a committee that suggested that all BBC resources should be thought of as part of a general plan - and that it would be perfectly reasonable for drama to be done out of Pebble Mill, as it was .. or Manchester as to be done out of London. And that is something which .. not because (LAUGHS) of what I wrote in 1966, but nevertheless, is the pattern now. But we didn't succeed in using the orchestras in the way that we might have done as a major resource, partly because orchestral concerts don't .. and orchestral features are not the be all and end all of music on television. Haven't got much more useful to say on this field, I don't think.

BURTON Well fine. Let's leave it at that.
You were Head of Music and Arts. We've been concentrating on music, but what about the other arts?

BURTON I'm glad you did that because .. I mention that because I wouldn't want to go down that slipway too far or be thought of as a man who only thought about music.
In 1960s when BBC-2 expanded, music was one of the areas in which it expanded but in each of the areas of the art .. in each art there were programme .. being developed and people being brought in to do that developing. One of my most influential henchman in the sixties was a young man called Melvyn Bragg, who had not long come out of Oxford and another one was John Duncan, who did some production in those days - before he went off to be a bookseller. But Melvyn, for example, ran a book programme as soon as BBC-2 started and a young man called Barry Gavin working with Gavin Millar, who later became a director .. of great

reputation, ran a weekly series about the film. And so we'd have regular slots and then we had a literary quiz and we had a programme called **THE ART GAME** in which George Melly, I think, would host a panel of artists who had to identify works of art from little small detail that was shown. And we also in this period began the inauguration of a major series about the arts working along the same lines as the .. Bronowski series for Science Features and Alistair Cooke's America .. I think .. I can't remember the chronology now. But certainly major series were part of the name of the game and I had the excitement .. tinged with some disappointment along the way of putting together the Kenneth Clark **CIVILISATION** series. It's always claimed it was David Attenborough who invented it; well he was the Controller of the channel at the time or maybe Director of Programmes by then, but in fact the hard slog of bringing the .. of bringing Kenneth Clark, on the one hand, and the production team on the other was done in my period as Music and Arts Head in 1967. And I left, unfortunately, before I could claim the fruits of that labour. But .. neither Michael Gill nor Peter Montagnon really wanted to give up two years of their life to servicing Kenneth Clark because they wanted to make their own films and be their own men - particularly Michael Gill. And Kenneth Clark was sceptical about this man who wasn't totally committed to him and Kenneth Clark had never made a major film series before. His whole gift was in the studio. But luckily managed to get .. I managed to get them to meet each other and to stick and we got the series off the ground. And that had been .. The notion of doing a major arts series I think probably was David Attenborough certainly .. and I can remember him saying let's get Kenneth Clark to come to lunch and when Kenneth Clark came to lunch, he took out a piece of paper on which he'd written his titles. He'd already got thirteen parts in his mind and they did not include either Venice or Spain. If you ever look at **CIVILISATION**, there's nothing about Venetian art or Spanish art. It's a very strange omission. But they were still a grand series and that took up quite a lot of my department's output. Also I decided to regroup, when I was running the BBC Music and Arts in the 1960s, having had a couple of years of thrashing around, we finally settled for a regular documentary on Sunday nights on BBC-1 which .. to which we gave the title **OMNIBUS** which had been a title used by American television in the 1950s in a series run by a man called

Robert Saudek who was a distinguished producer and with funds primarily from the Ford foundation, he'd done an arts and culture magazine for the best part .. or exactly for ten year -

GILLARD With Alistair Cooke.

BURTON With Alistair Cooke as the front man. And with Leonard Bernstein as his kind of regular contributor on music programmes, but with many distinguished people from the world of theatre and the arts. So **OMNIBUS** became the title and that's a programme which was first on the screen, I think, in the Autumn of 1967, just after I'd left and is still on the screens in 1995.

GILLARD The magnum opus .. flourished in a big way didn't it .. for ..

BURTON Yeah.

~~BURTON~~ GILLARD .. for a period of years but it now seems to have sunk again, disappeared. Is it that it's left its effect on .. right across the programme pattern, right across the programme scan? What's happened?

BURTON The thirteen part series .. or sometimes only six part series flourished in the late sixties with the **ASCENT OF MAN** and the **AMERICA** series and with the **FATHER AND MOTHER FROM ALL CIVILISATION** and later, there were the history of the Royal Palaces, I've forgotten what the exact title was that Huw Wheldon did with J H Plumb and Music and Arts did in the late seventies, a **HISTORY OF DRAMA** with Ronald Harwood. And that I think probably was the death knell, the Ronnie Harwood one, much as I adore working with Ronnie, it .. we .. we could not find an executive producer of the calibre that was needed to really kick it all into shape and it .. it .. it's got some very good things in it but they don't hang together. And the cost of making them meant that they had to be co-productions and it could no longer be financed by themselves. I think

CIVILISATION was and I think also **ASCENT OF MAN** was and then they were sold on afterwards. But by the seventies, which we'll talk about in more detail in a minute, the world of .. the financing of programming was much more complex affair than it had been. And no-one could find the money. Also, there was scepticism that had crept in .. that this sort of packaging was not how these particular subjects really worked. It was too easy to slice them all up and leave then into .. satisfactory fifty minute bits and it wasn't .. wasn't appropriate for some of the subjects that were being tackled. It wasn't in my time, this decision, 'cos I left management in 1980 when they were still being done but they haven't really come back since. It's a combination I think of **THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE**, which was, by the way, a very good series that was done .. in the mid-70s, **THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE**, they were about architecture and they were masterminded by John Drummond, and then I think probably the best of the lot was **THE SHOCK OF THE NEW** which was the Robert Hughes series made with a distinguished producer called Lorna Pegram and some very good young directors working with him. But he brought such imaginative quality to his writing that the thing held up. It needs that more than anything ..

(End of tape)

Side 4

GILLARD ... '67, we needn't go over that again and you came back to the same post, Head of Music and Arts -

BURTON Not quite.

GILLARD Not quite, but you came back in '75 anyway. What was the difference?

BURTON My .. 1970s was working in ITV and I finally got a bit, if I may use a colloquialism, pissed off with it, because of the restrictions in time which the commercial schedules imposed. So when I was rung up by Alasdair Milne or a minion thereof to have a meeting, I was intrigued. And when he asked me if I would return to take over the Arts department, which at that time was being run by a fine former director called Norman Swallow, I was sufficiently intrigued because also it meant part of a reconciliation with .. and a healing of the wounds with Huw Wheldon personally to really take it seriously. And I can't remember exactly how long I took .. I remember one or two clandestine meetings with a man called John Smith - who really was called John Smith - who was Controller of Personnel or something like that, in Regents Park, where we actually did the deal, having had a lunch with Alasdair in the Tratu (?) restaurant .. these are the sort of places which one can connive these sort of things, to go back to present **OMNIBUS** which was the sort of flagship programme on BBC-1 and to be the Head of the Arts department, following Norman Swallow who in turn had replaced Stephen Hearst when Stephen went to be Radio 3's Controller in the early seventies. The reason was that BBC-1 was having .. taking a pasting. My programme **AQUARIUS** was beating them hands down in the ratings battle and in popularity and even in prize-winning terms. So that I was at that time, well thought of as one of the last examples of the editor/presenters modelling myself, of course, very closely on Huw Wheldon, though without his particular dynamism but with my own type of programme which had proved successful in commercial terms. And I think they wanted to bring that type of editorial presentational talent to bear on **OMNIBUS** for

better or for worse. As it happened, in the month between my agreeing to do that and the announcement being made and my actual return to the BBC in February 19 .. March 1975, John Culshaw decided that he wanted to give up being a management man - he hadn't made a success of running BBC Music. He said he was going to leave and so they decided at the BBC to ask me to do both jobs again. So that I returned not to be Head of Arts, but to be Head of Music and Arts, but with the **OMNIBUS** presentation as part of the deal. And I .. by this time had also developed a freelance career as a director of concert programmes for Unitel, the German company who made films with Leonard Bernstein, Karajan and Solti and I had in my contract when I went back that I would be able to do a month a year of this kind of work which would allow me to continue to keep that .. financially allow me to do .. be .. keep my hand working in with the great men of the musical field, like Leonard Bernstein.

And so I went back in 1975 to find a very different BBC in which the dominating figure in my world was Aubrey Singer, who was at that time I think Controller of BBC-2 and a very live wire. And I remember saying that I disapproved of the co-productions that the BBC was doing and I hoped we'd be doing more of our own work and he rang me up or memoed me saying, "What an idiot you must be. Don't you realise that without co-production we'd be nothing. We need .." But I suppose it was a sign that I felt that we were allowing our editorial decisions to sometimes be coloured by what the co-producer wanted too much. And within a few weeks of being back in the BBC Music and Arts department - where I think I was welcomed on the whole, although I was .. some people were a bit suspicious 'cos I'd been in commercial television for five or six years - but the older ones knew we well, we'd been colleagues together in the sixties. And it was a very big and unruly department, with a very wide range of political and age coloration, ranging from young Alan Yentob, who'd made a film just recently with the .. with a pop star, David Bowie and old hands like Christopher Burstall who had disapproved mightily of films about young pop/rock stars who took drugs blatantly and thought it wasn't part of the .. shouldn't be on the air at all. Anyway, my job was to make sense of a much more ebullient department than the one I'd left and

a much more aggressive department who, in those days, called the Kensington House anti-establishment .. I mean, I've forgotten exactly what they called themselves but they were .. they had given evidence to major inquiries about the Annan Commission on Broadcasting. They'd insisted on making their views felt and they were critical, very critical of management and were at loggerheads in the way that had never been part of broadcasting life in the BBC in the fifties and sixties. And I ..

GILLARD Did they feel the BBC was to stuffy or what?

BURTON I felt that the BBC -

GILLARD They felt ..

BURTON They felt .. I think the BBC felt that simply .. the Kensington House staff felt that not enough points of views were being represented in the programme output. There was a certain.. 'stuffiness' is one word for it .. certain conservatism, perhaps, in the type of programme and not enough adventure and above all, I think they felt they were being neglected. I think there'd been a failure of management, perhaps at Controller level and at departmental level that they weren't .. their views weren't being represented up to management sufficiently well .. and the dialogue was in a rather shaky stage. It wasn't something that I .. I didn't .. give me any .. I never had problems in representing my colleagues' views to management and in seeking to get a fair crack at the budgetary whip - in other words, getting a decent amount of money to make programmes. The job of the head of department in those days very much was with a big department of fifty, sixty people plus a production of .. fifty or sixty producers plus assistants and research staff .. 150 people probably who were members of the Music and Arts department because the two departments were merged again. And I encouraged flexibility of working between the two sides, the two wings so that people would make music programmes for **OMNIBUS** or for **ARENA** or whatever it happened to be. But my job was to actually study all the

different staff and find work for them. And res.. some producers were lazy; others had high-fallutin ideas which were expensive, but in the end one finds that everybody was doing something. One was in a department which, as I say, represented all sorts of colours politically from extreme left to extreme right. There was something for everybody to do. And I created .. I saw there was a need for the type of programme that I'd been doing on **AQUARIUS** on ITV, namely, programmes which reacted .. were journalistic to the extent that they were about what's happening in the arts at that time. There was no current magazine .. there was no **LATE SHOW** in those days, you see. And **ARENA** was created in '75 as a type of magazine programme which would deal each week with a different branch of the arts. So that if the slot was there for half an hour every Thursday evening at eight-thirty, we'd do **ARENA** films, **ARENA** art and design, **ARENA** theatre, in fact I think were the three categories we had because music was already taken care of with a separate music strand. There wasn't an **ARENA** architecture but there was note, an **ARENA** art and design which had never been done before. And after a year or so the **ARENA** programmes were not flourishing. I'd not managed to find producer who really wanted to go and run with them to make them talked about successes in the way that one would hope for. That's when Alan Yentob came to the fore and he .. I gave him a lot of room to manoeuvre and he turned the programme round and created a programme much more quirky and much more idiosyncratic. Much more in keeping with the times, I think, by the late seventies and early eighties and **ARENA** became a success story and we managed to turn it from being a weekly half hour slot to being a weekly fifty minute or even hour long slot. But it was like an **OMNIBUS** of BBC-2 .. it was a single subject programme. And this was the period when I developed my law of television .. law of arts television - Burton's law of arts television, that all magazine programmes aspire to the condition of a fifty minute documentary. And it's true wherever .. if you look at **THE LATE SHOW**, they have **LATE SHOW** specials now. In the old days, **TONIGHT** programme, they used to have a whole department called the Tonight department within the Talks department in the sixties and people want to make things which will stick and I came reluctantly to the conclusion .. reluctantly in some ways, that with the limited amount of time available it was more important

to make things which had a life and a vitality of their own than to be reporting on the latest theatre show that was coming out of the West End or whatever. Until the late eighties when Michael Jackson and Alan Yentob had addressed themselves in a financially stimulating way .. in other words, put a lot of money behind it, one never got a decent way of covering the arts in the .. this great country of ours with this enormous amount of artistic activity going on. How the topic .. the topical side of it was .. was very rarely treated well. I think **THE LATE SHOW** despite its designer chic side and its late hour of transmission does at least now address the arts contemporarily in a way that is satisfactory. And **ARENA** of course, - I'm jumping now to the eighties .. late eighties and nineties - **ARENA**'s more or less disappeared .. it's had its time. But **OMNIBUS**, under an inspired leader like Nigel Williams, the writer, has shown that you can go on creating lively documentaries about different art subjects in a way that hasn't changed its policy decision since the sixties when we set it up in the first place.

GILLARD Let me turn you onto another topic ..

BURTON Yeah ..

GILLARD .. for a moment. Alasdair Milne. You knew Alasdair at various stages, had relations with him. What do you make of Alasdair?

BURTON I first met Alasdair Milne in 1958, my very first day in Radio .. in Television in Lime Grove. I'll never forget him coming into Edward Caffrey's office - he was a kind of W .. warrant officer or quartermaster general who gave you your supplies and signed your expense chits and so on. Alasdair pounded in in his sandals and Edward Caffrey said, "I'd like you to meet Humphrey Burton." And Alasdair turned on his heels, "Hello boy," he said. And he was the superior **TONIGHT** man and of course he'd been the general trainee and I was the chip on the shoulder failed general trainee applicant who had made it up through Radio which Alasdair hadn't spent much time in. But then one had considerable respect for Alasdair's .. great respect for him as a producer and .. he made a great

programme series out of **TONIGHT** and I was .. didn't really have a great deal to do with him until I returned to the BBC in 1975 when he was then the Director of Programmes. And so he was the one who actually asked me to come back. And later on, he was the one who asked me to put in .. to be interviewed to be Controller of BBC-1 when .. I said, "You can't be serious. I'm not that kind of .." "Yes, I'm quite serious. I think you've got it in you." I think one of the Governors must have said let's have a look at Humphrey because it was not .. I wasn't one of his henchman in that sense. But I would see, as head of department, I would see Alasdair every fortnight. I'd see the Programme Controllers every week and I'd take general policy matters and staff matters to Alasdair. And he was sometimes a bit rude and sharp, and the worst time I think was in '81 partly because of personal private matters in my private life which he was too shy, I think, to become big brother friendly about it and say can I help or anything, he just, he shot out, "Are you having an affair?" Well I had had an affair which had resulted in having a .. a friend of mine having a baby. So it was public knowledge and he knew that there were .. or was going to have a baby soon or something like that. It was .. it was generally talked about in the .. but he wasn't able to help on that very well but he .. I think he felt that my time had come up by then - I was six years .. by that time I'd been running Music and Arts and I too had been saying to him, I don't want to go on this job for too long. I must find something else to do and this Controller move was one thing but of course it was given to Alan Hart, not to .. not to me, not to Graeme McDonald .. other contenders for this particular prize. The long and the short of it was that Alasdair then, a few months later, pressed me to leave because he .. I'd .. with his blessing, taken on a consultancy job with Warners for .. a very very early attempt at doing a cultural cable in America and Alasdair found himself embarrassed because the BBC was doing its own cultural cable work and he didn't like the idea of somebody .. one of his departmental heads apparently working for the rival firm - even though it was on a short-term agreed consultancy basis which .. and I never saw them again. I said, "Don't be silly, I'm not going to leave now. It'll look as if I'm .. as if you're responding to **PRIVATE EYE**'s gossip columns and things. And he accepted that. And I withdrew in an orderly way about four months later just after my fiftieth birthday to

concentrate on programme making which is, I think, a very reasonable decision to make when you're fifty.

GILLARD Did you .. did you see that Alasdair was heading towards the end that did in fact take place?

BURTON No I didn't. No, I admired a lot of Alasdair. I think he had a brain of steel and I respected him greatly. He helped me in the seventies with a series about the Greeks, with the now notorious Sir Kenneth Dover who was at that time .. probably that time was when he was having his problem with his senior fellow - the one who committed suicide, though I didn't know anything about that at the time. But Dover was invited by us with Alasdair's connivance 'cos Alasdair was a Classics scholar to do a series about the Greeks and the nature of the Greeks - it was a three parter .. it was one of the magnum opuses that .. or opi that dr.. were driven into the coffin of the genre. Christopher Burstall didn't make much of a series .. it was too muddled and too ambitious and too .. lacking in a .. he was not com.. Burstall did not give enough to Dover to just run his own show. Alasdair was disappointed I think with me that I hadn't also interpreted this better .. got it and .. and helped Burstall to get it right. It was a lost cause, I'm afraid, that particular series. So there were a number of reasons why Alasdair los confidence I think in me to some extent and they were mostly the fact that one had done the job for over six years and one was really looking to be doing something else. So I changed, I switched over to Somerset-Ward, Richard Somerset-Ward who was my deputy, took over as head of the department and I moved, rather like Alex Douglas Home in Mr. Heath's government .. (LAUGHS) .. I moved to a minor .. more .. less .. less arduous role as the editor of Performance Programming which meant I could continue my freelance work as well, do it on a part-time basis. But going back to Alasdair, I enjoyed his company but he was always a bit sticky. He never really liked me, I don't think. But .. and I think he did .. his arrogance was his undoing.

GILLARD Well thank you.

A different topic. Television opera. Say something about that.

BURTON Yes. I'm a great believer in television opera and admired the early works of .. of George Fur and Rudolph Cartier as producers in this genre .. and Cedric Messina in the sixties, working with such talented theatre directors, sta.. drama directors as Herbert Wise and Philip Saville. And for a time I was invited by Sidney Newman when he was Head of Features .. Head of Drama group, excuse me .. I was invited to leave Music and Arts and become Assistant Head of Drama with special responsibility for opera. I didn't do it .. because I was very happy where I was at that time. But I did believe that opera worked well on television and I've been sad to see the departure of opera from the studio but glad to see the arrival of opera from the opera house on screen. The change of .. the ability to shoot with relatively small cameras from far away meant that you could actually go onto opera houses and this most theatrical of arts opera could be reproduced in a fine way, using cameras in theatres so that the operatic experience could be brought that way. The product nowadays in the 1990s is a mixture of live relays or recorded from opera house events, such as **La Traviata** 1994 December done from the Royal Opera House with a brilliant new star and Sir George Solti conducting and the other elements in the operatic .. how can I describe it? The operatic .. bill of fare that's presented by Television, are studio productions, many of them elaborately done, such as the recent **Marriage of Figaro** - the sound is much better in the studios than it used to be but the commitment to do it requires a lot of money up front and no one national television organisation has enough and no other one wants to help a television organisation. They're happy to take La Scala or Metropolitan or Bayreuth .. but very few people want to take an international prod.. project done in one country's television studio. We did this in the late sixties. I .. John Culshaw actually took over what I'd started to set up and CBS in Canada and WNET in New York and the BBC had a three part production scheme where they did operas - Janacek, Benjamin Britten, things like that which all three countries agreed to take. More recently I've tried to do that with Eurovision .. tried to get a fund where we'd get enough money together from all the different countries contributing but with the .. I didn't pull it off. It was

pulled off by a great lady in the sixties called Joanna Spicer who managed to get a lot of money from everybody to do the first opera that Benjamin Britten wrote specifically for television which was called .. the only opera he wrote for television, **Owen Wingrave**. That was an EBU commission done by the BBC with everybody else chipping in. That seems to me the ideal operation and situation and perhaps in the latter half of my sixties, I'll do my best to try and make that happen again. So that there's an alternative to the kind of funding which goes on now which is very much reliant on having a star like Pavarotti or Domingo in the cast, which is not a satisfactory way of going about things. There is a lot of money being spent on experimental opera on television, too, and this I welcome even though only once in half a dozen shows does something come through which has a real quality. Most of the time they're done to satisfy producers' ambitions and .. and departmental chiefs ambitions to have something new that they can put on their annual report. But it hasn't come over as well .. there's a case in point .. I won't name any names. But I will name one - Baa Baa Black Sheep by that very talented young composer, Michael Berkeley, relatively young composer .. wasn't worth doing. It looked right on paper but it didn't actually make any effect on telly. You talked about opera. I think the same thing as I've said about opera works on ballet as well. Ballet, in fact, can make .. looks wonderful in the studios and has been .. television ballets .. this was a genre in the sixties and seventies or even earlier .. this was the genre .. television ballet done in the studio which I regret very much that there's not more done of now. We're now relying too much on outside broadcasts and not enough on creativity in the studios. And we haven't found any composers really like Menotti to write television operas or choreographers such as John Cranko (?) and Kenneth MacMillan twenty, thirty years ago, to spend a lot of time working in the studio. They don't like the studio floors; they have to have special floors brought in for .. for dancing and they don't like the dry acoustic .. the singing .. that's very dry.

The most exciting television opera in recent years probably was the live production of **Tosca** done in Rome in the various situations where **Tosca** takes place. Three different acts have taken place in three different specific locations but it's significant that after four years that producer has not been able to find enough

money or enough .. much of a concept to do another one anywhere.

GILLARD I suppose the mounting of a .. a studio produced television opera must be a .. a gigantic .. Where do you put the orchestra for a start?

BURTON That's right. There have been a number of ways of doing it. Some to playback, where you record the whole thing first and then do it to playback. This is the way that the Germans have done a number of opera productions, mostly by Herbert Von Karajan. But then there's always a danger of the sync not right .. working .. that the lips don't move in sync with the real .. and also if they're not really singing, singers don't look right. There's a sort of halfway house where you half sing and it does.. isn't convincing. If it's done live, the orchestra in the case of the **Tosca** in Rome was in a studio somewhere, three or four miles away from where the singers were singing and this is a reversion to the product .. production styles of the fifties and sixties where the .. the orchestra would be in one studio with a mon.. the conductor would look at a monitor, hear the singers' voices on cans. Very hard to do .. very hard to do indeed. Or, a very large space where the orchestra can actually be in the same space as the performance .. is taking place. Or, you can take a theatre like the Glyndebourne theatre which I helped to .. re .. re-vitalise in terms of its television productions in the sixties and seventies. We actually used Glyndebourne as a studio off-peak when they weren't actually producing for the public. The problem in those days was that Glyndebourne was so chilly in the winter that it wasn't much fun for the singers. We did a **Dido and Aeneas** with Janet Baker. But it wasn't much fun for the singers to go and work in Glyndebourne when it was in November 'cos the conditions in the theatre .. The new theatre, I'm sure will .. with its air-conditioning and heating will provide a wonderful studio space and turn it into a studio. But the cost of getting the drama right - it takes a lot of time to get the drama right and if you're keeping an orchestra on tap during that time, it's terribly expensive. And so the costs have escalated to such a degree that it's very hard to undertake television opera nowadays ..

GILLARD Mm.

BURTON .. without a major project which usually means having a bankable opera star somewhere i the cast.

GILLARD I want to ask you further about **YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR** because you've been identified with that very much, particularly the .. the piano .. the lead piano competition.

BURTON During my day we've developed competitions. If I can go back for a moment to the 1960s, we had a conductors' competition - brilliant one in the **MONITOR** studio with both Giulini and Klemperer and Adrian Boult as the judges, led by a chairman, Walter Legge who was the most unspoken and fierce critic of conductors. And that has always been, I think, a valuable part of television. **THE LEEDS PIANO COMPETITION** we first televised in '66 with John Drummond as the producer and in '75 when I returned to the BBC, I led the .. I was both presenter and spokesman, as it were, for our dealings with **THE LEEDS PIANO COMPETITION** which is a triennial event and I was very miserable when we didn't win. We didn't have a British artist in the top six. And this led me to talk with my senior producer at the time, Walter Todds about the need for a competition which really encouraged British artists and celebrated the fact that through the National Youth Orchestra on the one hand and our soloist on the other, we'd have some of the very best players in the world. And we're known now all over the world for the quality of our young musicians. So let's have a **YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR** competition which will be only British. The hard slog on that was done by Walter Todds, devising the competition, with Roy Tipping, a very clever.. a statistician as well as a musician working on the logistics of doing a competition which would have maybe twenty or thirty preliminary rounds all over the country and then eight regional rounds before the final ten or eleven contenders in each category of piano, woodwind, strings and brass came together for a fortnight of intense music making, which is partly competitive but also has had a nature of festival about it too because there's so many good performances going

on. And this was warmly accepted by Bill Cotton, at that time the Controller of BBC-1 who gave it BBC-1 time for the first two perform .. first two competitions, which were transmitted in .. at Easter, during the time when **NATIONWIDE** which was at that time the regular early evening magazine slot took its Spring holiday for some reason or was told to take a holiday. So we had marvellous transmission times of early six-fifteen, six-thirty .. no a bit later .. six-fifty to seven-thirty - pole position and we were getting audiences of three or four million for the semi-finals and finals and I think nine or ten million on BBC-1 for the final .. in the early years. And it's now been marginalised .. moved across and this seemingly inevitable lust for ratings means that you can't have something which doesn't bring in ten million if we possibly can. So the .. **YOUNG MUSICIAN** was put out on BBC-2 but it .. it is still .. it's still very much now part of the .. of the musical fabric of the nation. And young people turn up with terrific abilities. They maybe thirteen year old horn players or seventeen year old cellists from .. from Poole or .. a gorgeous young clarinet player whose father had been Controller of Personnel, Emma Johnson - I don't know whether you knew her .. her father but he was a BBC executive and she took the prize in 1984 as the .. despite the fact that her dad had been a distinguished BBC luminary .. we didn't hold that against her. And we've .. we've really helped, I think, the musical profession with this competition. So that's probably - if you were to ask me what I was most proud of in my whole BBC career, that would have to be one of the things. The other was the opening up of the frontiers to include people in music programmes and talk about the mix .. the personalities and the backstage stories .. I'm thinking in particular of a programme I made in 1964 with Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and a great clutch of singers making this recording of **Wagner's Ring**. And we used multi-media techniques. We had television and film working the whole time and we developed a ninety minute programme which won all sorts of prizes and did very well called **THE GOLDEN RING**, with John Drummond as my chief assistant. And Tony Palmer worked on that later too - another very talented film-maker. So in documentary terms, I'm proud to have .. demystified music, I suppose is one way of describing it, and yet I hope not de-emotionalise it. In fact, I know not. I mean, I always want to .. have a .. programmes which have an emotional kick in them. And **YOUNG**

MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR is certainly one of my satisfactory creations. And **ARENA** too, although many other people will take credit for **ARENA**. I actually invented it and gave it its title. And I've .. since '88 when I left the BBC .. in any form of editorial role to go off to work at the Barbican 'cos they invited me to become the artistic director there .. since '88 I've still very much enjoyed going back to the Television Service as a hired hand to direct programmes, to present programmes and so on. I managed to .. for ten years to run the BBC's .. to involve the BBC in the European Broadcasting Union and to create a special working party of music chiefs so that we shared programmes and prog.. ideas and probably the most important programmes that we've done in that period was the **EUROVISION YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR** which is a development of our national programme so that not only do we have **YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR** but we also have International .. and no doubt it'll end up being the World Young Musician of the Year and I've enjoyed working in Cardiff with BC Wales as the Director of .. and producer for Cardiff Singer of .. it's called **CARDIFF SINGER OF THE WORLD** .. it happens every two years and it discovers some wonderful talent in that competition, including .. the year I first directed and produced it was Bryn Terfel and Dmitri Hvorostovsky - two of the finest baritones of recent decades.

GILLARD Was that a Welsh idea ..

BURTON Yes. It was a man I put in charge of Music in Wales called Mervyn Williams who eventually fell out with his bosses and went off to work as an independent producer. But he had lots of bright ideas and this was probably the brightest of them. He managed to get sponsorship at an early stage sufficient to pay for singers to be brought at their .. at the BBC's expense from twenty different countries. So there was a real gathering of young artists of great talent and BBC Wales has always done its own thing and it's managed to persevere with this series very well indeed.

GILLARD With a minute or so to go, has the BBC loyally and adequately discharged its great responsibilities towards the cause of music?

BURTON There's no single simple answer of course to that and to some extent, in discharging its responsibilities to contemporary music I think it has to some extent, failed in its responsibilities to the broad public who listen to music without a specialist and well trained, well honed interest that people in contemporary music have to have. Have I expressed that well? What I mean is that there's probably .. we've lost part of .. we're not serving the con.. The current keepers of the flame are not serving a large part of the constituency as well as they could. There's not enough, in my view, about the mainstream. There are .. it is important, however, to serve the Harrison Birtwhistles to make sure that the public sees Harry Birtwhistles latest operas and has a chance to make up its mind whether this is on a par with Puccini or Mozart. Getting the balance right is the problem and I think that perhaps the pendulum which I referred to earlier is at the moment .. this, in the late eighties and early nineties, swung a long way too far sometimes in favour of the fashionable - and this is the basis of an argument that I advanced at a lecture I gave about Huw Wheldon's work a couple of years ago for the Royal Television Society - and yet at the same time, the BBC has done so many grand things and has got so much right that of course the world is a better place, our world of arts in Britain is a better place for it .. than without it. I just hope that one can look to the older audiences .. 'cos you must serve audiences and the over-sixties now represent what, 25, 30% of the total audience and I don't think they're getting a proper look in a lot of the time. And I think that the pleasure principle has been, to some extent, neglected in favour of the .. the duty principle.

GILLARD Well that's a good note to end on. We've got to end anyway 'cos we're right .. right .. if we don't end, this will end it for us. So thank you very much. It's been fascinating.

BURTON My pleasure.

GILLARD Really has.

BURTON I can hear myself wandering every now and again

but ..

GILLARD It doesn't matter in this exercise. It doesn't matter at all.

BURTON I've never been one to focus .. memorable phrases .. it's never been .. never been my great ..

GILLARD Well ..

BURTON .. partly what a great joy it is to have you putting the questions too because you're always good at ..
(ENDS)