

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1995 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

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- * Notes: First of two interviews with Beatrice Cooper; Sound Quality: Good.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB introduction to tape]

VB: As well as talking to people in London, I've been to Manchester too. And, subsequently, I'm going down to East Anglia. So we're trying to build up a good—

BC: Oh, right.

VB: A good eh, picture.

BC: Cover the country. Mhm.

VB: That's right.

[tape being set up]

VB: But you were saying that your first memory was of going to the cinema at about six or...

BC: Erm, yes. Well we had maids in those days and erm, and they were very often more eh, not more important. They were, they were good girls. And they used to, on their days off, sometimes take me to the cinema. And I remember going to this. I must've been five. Eh, and seeing, we came in the

middle. Films in those days were continuous. You see. And erm, I remember going in, and it had already, it must've been halfway through. And I remember seeing Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell in *Seventh Heaven*. I knew it was called *Seventh Heaven*. I remember them going up this spiral staircase. More than that I don't remember. But I was in awe, you know, at that time. And, more than that, at that age, I really don't think I remember too much. But then we moved to, erm, a house in Highgate which was not too far from Kentish Town. And there was a cinema in Kentish Town where, when the maid and I did our shopping, our weekly shopping, I'd go with her and, after the shopping we'd go to the cinema which I believe is still there in Kentish Town [probably referring to Palace Cinema]. And erm, oh! The films I saw there! Things like *Smilin' Through*, *Frankenstein*. Erm, *The Ghost Train*. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] and, what else? I did make a list. Would you like to stop it while I...

VB: Yeah. Surely.

BC: I'll see if I can find my list. [recording stops]

[recording recommences mid conversation]

BC: Because there were too many. Erm, oh yes. Erm, yes, then in this cinema in Kentish Town. I remember seeing *Rio Rita*. Bebe Daniels. Which was, as far as I, I wonder if it was in colour. In my memory it was in colour. I wonder if it was. Erm, that stands out in my mind. Then *Singin' in the Rain*. The original one [possibly referring to *The Hollywood Revue of 1929*]. And I can remember that very clearly. That was black and white and erm, I don't know who was in it. But aw! I thought it was great. Yes. And *Frankenstein*, *The Ghost Train*. That was, I think it was Cicely Courtneidge in *The Ghost Train*. I may be mistaken but, that's what I remember. *Smilin' Through* with Norma Shearer. Aw! I thought that was just too wonderful. Erm, I saw it again with Jeanette MacDonald, some years later, and I didn't think it was anything as good as the original. Norma Shearer, Fredric March that was. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, *City Lights*. With Charlie Chaplin. Aw! Great. Absolutely wonderful. Erm, yes, eh, then, then eh, don't know that I remember many more films. I remember one film with Dolores Del Rio but I can't tell you what it was called. It was a real little fleapit. That wasn't in the same cinema. [laughs] Erm, those are the ones that stand out in my mind. And of that time, when I was about eight or nine, I had an older sister. Erm, she actually took me to *Smilin' Through*. And, ah, gosh! I remember the end of that film. Erm, it was so magical. Because, she was killed, in the beginning. She was shot by a former lover. And erm, and then at the end we see the ghost, her ghost and the man she was to marry, who was shot, going off into the garden, you know. Their ghost

apparition. Aw! I thought that was just magic! Ah-h! Yes, then, my sister erm, took me, I think my parents saw quite a few foreign films at that time. And I remember my sister took me to see *Mädchen in Uniform*. That was in London. This must've been 1920, 1930 maybe. And eh, I remember that in Oxford Street there was this cinema. That showed foreign films [referring to Academy Cinema]. And *Mädchen in Uniform*, oh! I was so impressed. I've seen it since. And it's a classic. It's a wonderful, wonderful film. Erm, right. And a Russian film. I remember seeing, called *Road to Life*. Now it's interesting about that film 'cause I've never, apart from once before the war, it was shown at the Everyman. That film, I'd give anything to see again. Eh, if it's even half as impressive as I remember it, I'd love to see it again. It's probably destroyed or something. But it was absolutely wonderful. It was, I remember so, so, I mean I can't remember films that I saw yesterday. But.
[laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: It was erm, just after the Revolution. And so many of the children, you know, sort of wandering around. Orphans and eh, they were vagrant. And this marvellous man who rounded them all up and eh, created a school for them. Uh! It was a wonderful film. I, I would love to see it again. Erm, then [pause 2 seconds] yes, then we moved to Hendon. And the Ambassador at Hendon. It's now the, oh what is it? Is it Cannon or something now? Erm, I don't know. Anyway, it used to be the Ambassador and it played a very large part in my life. And there, oh gosh! I used to play truant. And see things like *The Constant Nymph*. With Victoria Hopper. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, was it John, John, no, it was, was it Noel Coward? No. Oh, John Gielgud! John Gielgud. Do you know?

VB: I don't, I've heard of the film. I've not seen it.

BC: *Constant Nymph*. Victoria Hopper. John Gielgud. I believe it was John Gielgud. [Note: Hopper's co-star was in fact Brian Aherne] Anyway, it was most impressive. To me, at that age. Erm, then, things like *Mrs Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. Why I remember that. Gosh! [laughs] I think it was Fay Bainter. Erm, and *Little Women*, of course, with Katharine Hepburn. And then a film which I've never seen since eh, and the young actress that was contemporary with me at that time, eh, English actress called Nova Pilbeam. Have you heard of her?

VB: I have, yes.

BC: Right. Now she, I thought she was wonderful. Eh, she was in a film that was directed by Berthold Viertel. Who came from, well, he was originally, I think, Austrian. Erm, and he and his wife Salka Viertel were a notorious couple. They went to Hollywood during, I think before the war. Because erm, of Hitler and eh the Nazis. And there was a period when he came to England. And *Little Friend* I think was one of the first films he directed here. And erm, it was, I thought, well, at that time I was thirteen, fourteen. I was terribly impressed by it. She was brilliant in it. She was about the same age. And eh, she made just a few more films. But fizzled out. You know. She didn't make much of a career in films after that. And I always felt sorry about that. Erm, I'd like to know what's happened to, to that film. *Little Friend*.

VB: Mm.

BC: Must've been well directed 'cause he was a, I think, a brilliant director. Erm, then I remember, yes, when I was about ten, at that cinema, seeing a film called, an American film called *Divine Love*. Now, I don't know who was in it but it stuck in my memory. And I'd give anything to know who was in it. It was a very dramatic film and so sad. Uh! I cried buckets for that. Erm, *Divine Love*, yes. And I remember in the same programme *Puss in Boots* [possibly referring to *Puss in Boots*]. Isn't it funny the things you do remember? Erm, which was awful. It was an English, ghastly thing. [laughs] But *Divine Love* was brilliant and I've never seen any sign of it since. Erm, and then I began to become, yes, when I was about twelve or thirteen I saw Garbo in *Queen Christina*. And I was devastated. Dazzled. And since then I've become a Garbo fan. I'm very much into Garbo and her life and all her films. I don't know! There was something about that woman that was very appealing and fascinating and I suppose, to women mainly, she was a little bit androgynous-- [laughs]

VB: Yeah.

BC: You can say a little bit. Erm, but there was something about her that fascinated me. And erm, I must've seen *Queen Christina* seven times, at least. I saw all her films. Right. Erm, saw *King Kong*. I saw *Our Betters* with Constance Bennett. [pause 2 seconds] I saw *The Old Curiosity Shop*. With a girl, young girl called Elaine Benson. *David Copperfield*. *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. You know, that was the time of Korda. Marvellous films. Erm, and these three, with Merle Oberon, Miriam Hopkins. Joel Macrae.

VB: Mhm.

BC: And then *Whoopee!* with Eddie Cantor. [laughs]

VB: [Laughs]

BC: I was a Cantor fan. *Roman Scandals*.

VB: Ah.

BC: Yes. Then *Les Misérables* with erm, Fredric March. Which, I think was a brilliant film. I'm sure it was. I've never seen it since. Erm, I remember coming home and acting the whole thing out. You know. [laughs] Well it's a thing I was inclined to do because I did take up acting. I was at the Guildhall eh, School of Music and Drama. Got a scholarship there for both actually. Never made much of a career for myself. However. Erm, yes, erm now it's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. Norma Shearer. *Escape Me Never*. Now, what happened to that?

VB: Ah.

BC: With Elisabeth Bergner.

VB: [simultaneously] Elisabeth Bergner. Yeah.

BC: Yes. She came here something like, like a bolt out of the blue. She was a brilliant, brilliant actress. But eh, course when war broke out, she went to Canada with her husband. And, didn't make many more films. *Escape Me Never*. Everybody was crazy about it. Erm, she had a special, very special appeal, Elisabeth Bergner. She was very childlike. In her appearance. And then I saw her, yes, I saw her in a German film. Oh yes, *Der träumende Mund*. Oh-h-h. Yes. Gosh. She was marvellous in that. And then that was remade as erm, was it 'Smiling Lips' or something? [referring to *Dreaming Lips*] Eh, I can't remember. Erm, but, it was not good. I remember seeing it. It was nothing like the German version. And then she did *As You Like It*. Which was, I didn't think, very good. Erm, yes. Pity she went away and didn't continue. Erm, oh yes, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The erm [pause 2 seconds] what's his name? The director of the film. Reinhardt. Brilliant film. Then the Katharine Hepburn films, you know, like *The Little Minister*. As I said erm [pause 2 seconds] *Little Women*. Erm, that's the end of my list. But apart from that erm, yeah, I was fascinated by film. I used to collect film stars. I had about seven different film stars I collected. Erm, pictures of them. Erm, it took up so much of my time. I hadn't got time for homework. [laughs]

VB: Did you read the film magazines then?

BC: Oh yes!

VB: 'Picturegoer' and--

BC: The 'Picturegoer'! Yes! Every week. And I won a competition, I remember, when I was about thirteen. You had to put faces to bodies. [laughs] I don't know, about fifteen people won various prizes. These were objects belonging to the stars. And I remember I was so longing to get something belonging to Garbo. But no, I got Evelyn Laye's evening handkerchief. [laughs]

VB: Aw. [laughs]

BC: And actually it was very funny. Because, erm about ten, twelve years ago, I actually met Evelyn Laye. She's still alive actually. She's, I think, ninety now.

VB: Mhm.

BC: And she came here. Because she came for treatment. My husband's a GP, and she came for treatment and erm, and I told her! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: Unfortunately I didn't still have it. I couldn't show it to her. Erm, yes. And the presentations were given out by Madeleine Carroll. Oh yes, that's another actress that I thought was very, I remember her in a film called *I Was a Spy*. Which was a brilliant film, I thought, at that time. Erm, and what else was she in over here because she was in, oh yes! Erm, *The 39 Steps*.

VB: *The 39 Steps*. [simultaneously]

BC: That's right. And then unfortunately she went over to America [which I didn't take on too well?]

VB: That must've been so exciting, meeting a star.

BC: Oh yes! Do you know, I kept the 'Picturegoer' page with my photograph on it. With all of us on it, you know. Erm, and a picture of her giving out the prizes. Do you know, I looked for it before you came but I can't find it. [laughs]

VB: Ah. [laughs]

BC: Unfortunately. But, oh yes! 'Picturegoer' was my favourite. I mean there were, there was another popular film magazine at the time but, but no, it was the 'Picturegoer' for me. And eh, the reproductions of pictures, the photographs were marvellous. And eh, you know, you could stick them all over your wall, [laughs]. Well, pretty much as kids do today.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Mhm. Erm [pause 2 seconds] really much more than that. I mean that brings me up to about eh, 1930 [pause 2 seconds] '34, '33 or '34. And eh, you're not really interested in much further forward than that.

VB: Erm, yes, well right through the thirties I'm interested in.

BC: Right through the thirties! Oh! Well! Yes! You name it, I think I've seen it! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: Erm, because at that time, I used to go very often. And eh, yes, erm, then, I was a real theatre, filmgoer. I used to go a lot to the Golders Green Hippodrome. And there were film people in those plays at that time. I mean Nova Pilbeam was in a play there. Gracie Fields was in something there. Erm, Leslie Banks. Erm [pause 2 seconds] yes. And I used to wait outside the stage door and get their autographs. I've still got that actually--

VB: Mhm.

BC: A book with all their autographs. And a wonderful actor called Stephen Haggard. Now he was in a play by Shaw. 'Candida'. This was, just before the war. This must've been 1938. And he had been in several films, but he was mainly a stage actor. And, it was very strange actually. I read a book about Chagall and discovered that Chagall had a mistress for seven years. And had a child by this lovely

woman. And then when I read the book, there was a photograph in there of Stephen Haggard. Well of course, she had written the book and her name was Virginia Haggard. But I didn't connect the two.

VB: 'Course.

BC: But going with that photograph that was in there I realised that she was his sister. And erm, I wrote to her and eh, and we had quite a correspondence. Because I was fascinated by Stephen Haggard. If he had, unfortunately, he was killed during the war [Note: there is some mystery sounding this death].

VB: Mhm.

BC: If he had lived, he would have been an absolutely brilliant actor. I remember his performance in 'Candida'. And eh, meeting him afterwards. Eh, at the stage door. And, he was shot during the war. And actually, there are books, there's a book written about his life. And really, his life would make the most marvellous film. And his sister's still alive. And I contemplated contacting her and suggesting it. Make a wonderful, wonderful film. I've already cast the main actor-- [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: Erm, whose name I can't think of. [laughs] Erm, yes. Erm, Emma, Emma Thompson's husband. What's his name?

VB: Ah! Yes, erm, Kenneth Branagh.

BC: Kenneth Branagh.

VB: Yeah.

BC: He'd be a marvellous star for the part. Erm, yes, well, what else? Erm, of interest, erm.

VB: I mean, it sounds like you were going very regularly.

BC: Oh yes.

VB: How often did you go—

BC: Oh, at least once a week.

VB: At least once a week.

BC: Well, you could get in for sixpence.

VB: Mhm.

BC: And I remember my mother used to go, eh, in the afternoons. And it was wonderful because, you know, women didn't work in those days. A few of them did and they were bored and at home, so they used to go. And it was wonderful to be able to go to the cinema for sixpence. And you could order tea in the interval. On a tray which was brought to you. And then you had two films. You had an A and a B film. And in between the films, you had the organ and eh, and sometimes a little concert. You know, a little, sort of a revue thing. So, you know, you were there for a good three, three and a half hours! For sixpence! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: You had to pay for your tea, I suppose. But erm, yes. It was wonderful. Just imagine. Sixpence. [clicks tongue]

VB: Did both your parents go? Or just your mother?

BC: Well my father [pause 2 seconds] used to go. Yes. But he didn't have as much time as my mother. But he was, erm, he was more interested in the foreign films. I remember going with my father to see *Ninotchka*.

VB: A-ah.

BC: You know. With Garbo. And he was very, very taken with that film. He actually came from Russia.

VB: I see.

BC: So that was of great interest to him. He thought it was good. It was a reasonably good film, I think. *Ninotchka*. Erm, what else? [pause 2 seconds] Did I see anything else with my father? Erm. [pause 2 seconds] No, I don't think, I may have done but no, nothing that stands out in my mind.

VB: Mhm.

BC: But erm, yes, I think I saw *Road to Life* with him. That other Russian film. Erm, ye-es. No, it was usually with my school friends. My mother occasionally. My sister. And eh, yes. Ooh, we used to chatter a lot about the films we'd seen at school. We were all collecting film star photographs. [laughs] I don't know if it was terribly different from how it is today.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Is it? I mean children more or less do the same thing, don't they?

VB: I think that's right. Yes. Erm, maybe more pop stars now than film stars.

BC: Oh well. Well, there weren't really any pop stars, were there? I mean there was Bing Crosby. Who, oh! He was wonderful. He was the only, more or less the only one I think.

VB: Mhm.

BC: We had all Bing Crosby records. My brother had a lot of jazz records at that time. He was into jazz. But, no, no pop stars in those days. So it was film stars. And erm, ye-es, John Mills. Erm, John Beale. Eh [pause 2 seconds] who else? Who were the macho stars of that time? Robert Taylor and erm, eh, Spencer Tracy. Brilliant, brilliant actor, Spencer Tracy. Erm, [straining to remember] erm, ye-es, I don't know. A lot of smarmy actors, who weren't really very good. I didn't think. Erm, there was that Irish actor. Erm, who died. Can't think of his name. The trouble is my memory's going. [laughs] Erm, yes. So, what else can I tell you?

VB: Well, I mean, it's amazing to me for one thing that you can remember so many of these films, given the time lapse.

BC: Oh, I'm sure I've left out masses and masses of them.

VB: Yes.

BC: Because, you know, I was a real filmgoer.

VB: I mean, apart from Garbo, did you have other favourite stars? 'Cause you said there were six or seven.

BC: Ye-es. Well Elisabeth Bergner was one. Norma Shearer was one. Nova Pilbeam was one. These were the ones that I collected and, and Garbo. Erm [pause 2 seconds] yes. Yes. I was really very interested into them. Eventually I sent the album that I had collected the photographs of Nova Pilbeam. I sent them to her. I saw her in the train one day,

VB: Ah!

BC: At Hampstead. [laughs] And I didn't talk to her. But she sat opposite me. And I thought, well, really, I mean this was during the war. And erm, I thought, well really, I ought to send this to her. And I did. And she was very grateful. She wrote back and sent me a photograph and a letter of thanks. Erm, lovely person, really. And I also met her later at the erm, eh, during the Shakespeare Festival. And I said "Hello" to her. [laughs] "Do I know you?" [haughty voice] I said, "No. But I know you."

VB: [laughs]

BC: Erm, yes, I always felt sorry that she had to go. And then Deanna Durbin.

VB: Ah.

BC: Oh yes. That was another one. Oh yes. Well you see, I was a singer too. And erm, and so Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland of course. Mickey Rooney and all that scene. But Deanna Durbin particularly, because she was more of a classic singer and eh, and so I used to sing all the things that she sang. Oh! And Grace Moore! Oh! Grace Moore! How could I forget her? Grace Moore. Eh, *One Night of Love*. That was her first film. That was about 1934, '35, something like that. And she sang. And really, I must say, Grace Moore was the first person to introduce me to operatic music. I mean my father had a lot of operatic records. Which he used to play. Mainly baritones, basses, you know.

Eh, oh I don't know. [Gallie Kirtchie?] [laughs] There were others. But Grace Moore really got me into opera. And that was when I think I started to want to be a singer.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Erm, so Grace Moore was another one I collected. Yes. Eh, and, well, Deanna Durbin was delightful. What's happened to Deanna Durbin? I know she's living in France, and she's still alive. Erm, fascinating, the way she just walked out of the film industry and gave it all up. She was probably a lot cleverer than Judy Garland, to do that.

VB: Mm.

BC: To do that. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, but she was a delightful girl. You know, as long as she was in her teens. When she started to grow up and have romantic eh, scenes, it was not so interesting. But lovely. 'Three Men and a Girl' [referring to *Three Smart Girls* and *One Hundred Men and a Girl*] with Stokowski [laughs] And then of course there was eh, *Fantasia*. Which was wonderful. And erm, *The Wizard of Oz*. I'm sure I've forgotten masses of them but erm, it was, it was a lovely period. For films.

VB: 'Cause I was interested when you were saying about erm, collecting pictures and corresponding with some of the stars.

BC: Mhm.

VB: Do you feel that some of the stars were erm, approachable people? Or were they--

BC: Well--

VB: Distanced from--

BC: Well they were both actually. You felt that they were goddesses, you know. But you had this ambition always to contact them. I used to dream when I was about twelve or thirteen, to, to run away from home and stow away on a boat, and find Greta Garbo. [bursts out laughing]

VB: Ah! [laughs]

BC: And, and eh, you know, live there and worship her, you know. Erm, approachable. Erm, ye-es. I mean one used to try. Robert Donat was another one. Yes. Well he lived erm, fairly locally and I remember standing outside his door, waiting for, for erm, an autograph. Which I didn't get. But I got it [amused laugh] outside the Golders Green Hippodrome. And then Anton Walbrook was another one I was crazy about. Oh yes! Because I'd seen him in an Austrian film. Eh, do I remember the name now? Oh-h. Yes. No I don't. [laughs] No I don't remember the name.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Which is a pity actually. 'Cause there two, oh! And Charles Boyer in erm. [clicks tongue] In *Mayerling*. But that was a French film. With Danielle Darrieux. Wonderful film! It was made again, eh, with, who was in it again? Just a moment. Erm, I know, Ava Gardner was in it. I can't remember who was the girl. But erm, Danielle Darrieux was in the original with Charles Boyer. Wonderful film. Yes. But that's already the beginning of the war.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Eh, or was it '38? '39, I think it was.

VB: Where was it they were showing these erm, European films in the thirties?

BC: Eh, well there was a cinema in Oxford Street. Which I don't remember the name of [referring to Academy Cinema]. Which were always showing foreign films. Mainly French. Or sometimes German.

VB: Mhm.

BC: And then there was another cinema in erm, Charing Cross, eh, near Trafalgar Square. That showed Russian films. Oh that was probably, that was during the war [possibly referring to Tatler Cinema]. Yeah. Yes, because for a time I worked for the Russian Film Institute.

VB: A-ah.

BC: Here. Yes. During the war.

VB: Yeah.

BC: On the corner of Millionaires Row there was this Russian Film Institute. And I worked there as a secretary for a time. And erm, yes, they had this cinema. Which only showed Russian films but of they were, oh! yes! Well at the Institute I remember seeing all the Eisenstein films. Which were, uh! Amazing! Absolutely. And the photography. I shall never...

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

BC: Russian films were very interesting to me. Even though they were, fairly highly censored at that time.

VB: Mhm.

BC: But the Eisenstein films were amazing. Mhm. Erm...

VB: 'Cause another thing that I'm interested in is erm, when you went on to train as a performer yourself--

BC: Right.

VB: Do you think your early experiences in the cinema influenced you? Were you watching films conscious of the sort of craft of acting as well as the stars?

BC: Oh absolutely! Oh, absolutely. Yes, yes, yes. Mhm. They did. They did influence me. Very much so. I mean, as I said previously, you know, I used to come home and act the whole film out! [laughs] Mhm. We did. I mean when you watch films of that period now, they are so hammy and so e-erm, stupid really. You know the dialogue and... [laughs] I mean I watched just recently *Grand Hotel* with Garbo and 'Susan Lenox' [referring to *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*] and *Anna Christie*. They've all been shown fairly recently. Ah, dear! [clicks tongue] The dialogue for one was just dreadful. And you know, what can you do with a rotten dialogue? [laughs]

VB: [Laughs].

BC: Aw but the acting, they all overacted. Yeah. In *Grand Hotel*. I mean Wallace Beery. Erm, I thought was, and, Llonel Barrymore, I thought terribly overacted. Well they all did. They all did. That was the way, I suppose.

VB: Mhm.

BC: It was the transition from silent films. Where, you know, they had to more or less, you know, be over-dramatic, to get, to get the erm, you know, the effect over. But erm, when you compare those films with today. My goodness. You know it was like, [pause 2 seconds] like being in the nursery. [laughs] Erm, yes. So, from the time of Marlon Brando, you know. Erm, 'Streetcar' [referring to *A Streetcar Named Desire*]. Acting changed dramatically. Mean to say. But quite honestly, today, you know, when I watch American films, I feel I need subtitles.

VB: Mhm.

BC: I really do. You know, most of the time I can't understand what they're talking about. At least their diction's better. They all tried to speak good English in those days. You know. Although it was phoney. You know, they put this accent on. Or the Americans did. And erm, you know, it came over as very phoney. But at least you could understand what they were saying. [laughs]

VB: Were you conscious then of a difference between the English films and the American films? In the thirties?

BC: Erm, ye-es. E-erm, English films were, you know, the Elstree Film. I tried to gatecrash the Elstree Studios. I did actually. [laughs] The Elstree Studios. 'Cause I didn't live too far away. And erm, oh! That used to be my favourite sport, you know, during the school holidays. Eh, getting into the studios. Ah! That to me was wonderful. Erm, English films at that time. I don't know. Until 'Henry the Eighth' [referring to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*], until Korda. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] don't think there was anything terribly memorable. Eh, Viertel, of course. E-erm, was he? Was he here before Korda? I don't know. No, I think. Do you know?

VB: I don't know. No.

BC: Right. I'm not sure. I think they were about the same time. There were a lot of Continental directors, coming over. You know, from Hungary. And Germany. Erm, and then of course, you know,

'Henry the Eighth'. And, erm, what's that film? With eh, Ralph Richardson and erm, erm, that was a Korda film. What was it called? [possibly referring to *The Four Feathers*] [pause 2 seconds] Erm, tch! Sorry. Afraid I can't remember. Erm, but those were great films. But that was, that was later. I don't know erm, eh, yeah, the Hitchcock films were good. The Hitchcock films erm, *The 39 Steps*. And *I Was a Spy*. Erm. Yeah, I don't know who directed those.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Well I don't know who directed *I Was a Spy*. But the Hitchcock films were good. Erm, and, do you mean [pause 2 seconds] did I? How did I? How did I, you know. Did I think the American films were better or what?

VB: Well, or...

BC: Well I wasn't terribly keen on musicals, on musicals, you know. Joan Blondell type of thing.

VB: Yeah.

BC: I had a friend that used to love that kind of film and she used to drag me to see them. But I was never very keen on them. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, *42nd Street* and things like that. Oh, I don't know. Busby Berkeley impressed me. Yes. Yes. He did.

VB: You mentioned *Whoopee!* with Eddie Cantor.

BC: That's right. Well, I don't, was that Busby Berkeley?

VB: I think it was. Yes.

BC: Right. Well you know, all those marvellous shots from above. What they did with pianos and water. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: I mean, that, that was great. But the B musicals, you know, were pretty grotty. Erm...

VB: What about sort of Jeanette MacDonald? Nelson Eddy?

BC: We-ell, I was never really, I was never really crazy about Jeanette MacDonald and her voice. Erm [pause 2 seconds] Nelson Eddy. No. I preferred the, the real thing. Like erm, eh, what was his name? There was this marvellous metropolitan singer. And then there was Gigli! You know, they made films. With proper operatic singers. I never consider those two. You know, really, operatic singers. Erm, but they were pretty, pretty films I suppose. Erm and then, you know, Maurice Chevalier. Eh, yes, I think I saw one of his films. Which was in America. But erm [pause 2 seconds] I don't know. I'm digressing I think now aren't I? [laughs]

VB: No. Not at all. I mean it's interesting when you said that about Maurice Chevalier and the American films. 'Cause of course, a lot of the English actors erm, ended up going to Hollywood. I mean I was thinking of people like Ronald Colman and--

BC: E-eh, Yes. He, he went to Hollywood pretty early, didn't he?

VB: Yeah.

BC: Ronald Colman. Did he make, I don't know whether he made any films here. I don't think he did.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Oh a lot of them went. I mean Cary Grant. And erm, eh [pause 2 seconds] chap, whatever you would call him. Erm, yeah. Eh, Ronald Colman. Yes. He was good. I mean *A Tale of Two Cities*. Excellent film.

VB: Mhm.

BC: And eh, [pause 2 seconds] what was that film about Shangri-la?

VB: Oh yes. Erm, *Lost Horizon*.

BC: *Lost Horizon*. Oh! absolutely wonderful! Yes. Yes. Well the English, some of the English actors did well over there. Cary Grant did well. Who was that other English actor? Tall, good looking. Welshman. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] can't think of his name. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BC: I'm sorry. But my memory's rapidly fading. Can't remember names. Erm, yes. I don't think it mattered too much, whether it was an English film or an American film. You know, these films when they came out, had a reputation. And if they were, if you thought they were good, you went to see them. But, you know, what I remember more than anything are the queues! [laughs] Outside cinemas! You had to be, if it was a good film eh, you had to be prepared to wait, a long time, out in the cold. And then eh, you had to wait till the film came to an end. And if you were lucky you got in. I remember queueing for ages to see *One Night of Love* for, you know, with Grace Moore. People suddenly, you know, discovered this wonderful film. Well, there was opera in it, you know--

VB: Mhm.

BC: For the first time. And then of course, other people came along like Lily Pons. Who was good. But I don't think her films were [pause 2 seconds] particularly wonderful. Erm, but it, it, it was a wonderful thing that it erm, encouraged people. I mean, people who'd never heard opera in their lives, had the opportunity to hear these arias. Yeah.

VB: It's an interesting point. Because, do you think erm, films opened up different experiences for yourself?

BC: Ray Milland. [laughs] I've just remembered. [laughing]

VB: [laughs]

BC: Isn't that dreadful? [laughs] I'm so sorry.

VB: That's okay.

BC: That's who I was trying to think of. Yes, sorry.

VB: No. 'Cause when you were talking about erm, say these American films and seeing life in America. Or seeing Garbo in erm, European films. Do you think films gave you eh, the chance to experience different--

BC: I'm sure it did, yes. It must broaden your horizons. Yes. Definitely. Erm, I think I was a little bit exceptional that I was taken to these foreign films. Because, you know, UFA, the German film company, before the war, were making absolutely brilliant films. They were way ahead of Hollywood. With regard to technique. And the camerawork and so on. They had brilliant people technically, and actors. Paula Wessely. have you ever heard of her?

BC: She was a brilliant erm, Austrian actress. Yes. It was Paula Wessely and Anton Walbrook that was in this film that I saw in German. Still can't remember the name of it [possibly referring to *Maskerade*]. Erm, yeah. No, obviously, they were educational. And I usually erm, even as a child, was more interested in the good dramatic films. Erm, like, there was a film with Fredric March. And Anna Sten. And that film was shown recently. It was erm, erm a Russian film [probably referring to *We Live Again*]. Erm, classic. Erm, so you know, it made you, it encouraged you to read. These wonderful novels. These wonderful Russian novels. Or German novels. You know, in their translation. I mean, I remember I read quite a lot of Zola when I was at school. Because I had seen, you know, these marvellous French films. Oh! The French period during the thirties was exceptional! Very well, making the most marvellous films. Now, sssss! What do I remember of the French films? Erm, so many of them. Erm, *Un carnet de bal*, erm, *Hotel du Nord*. Erm, sssss! It's terrible. I've got to think of the names of them. But I saw very, very many of them. And they were wonderful. With Jean Gabin. And eh, Françoise Rosay. Wonderful, wonderful films. Better than anything Hollywood had turned out, you know, at that time. So, the French film industry was great. The German film industry was wonderful. Until Hitler came. And just ruined the whole thing. Those marvellous technicians. Just [pause 2 seconds] went to America or, you know, they were left, they left. They've really still not recovered. I think. Yes. Well. I don't know what else I can tell you. I mean I remembered a bit, but I've forgotten a lot. [laughs]

VB: You've remembered a lot I would say. Erm, the only other thing, well, one other thing that occurred to me was erm, to ask if you enjoyed the sort of gangster films.

BC: Not really. I remember one film with Paul Muni. Erm [pause 3 seconds] which was called, gosh. Um, an early film with Paul Muni, erm [possibly referring to *Scarface*]. I wish I'd thought more about it [laughs] beforehand--

VB: [laughs]

BC: And tried to remember more of these films. *Scarface* I remember seeing with James Cagney. [Note: Cagney does not appear in *Scarface*] But I wasn't keen. Not keen on the gangster films. No. Erm, I did see *On the Waterfront* which is a much later film of course, which I thought was brilliant. But, as a kid, in my teens, no. Gangster films. Shooting out and all that. No. Didn't really interest me. Erm, wish I could remember the name of that Paul Muni film which was wonderful, wonderful. Erm, no. No. Not really. Gangster films, not.

VB: I was thinking about Paul Muni when you said Zola. 'Cause I think he played Zola didn't he?

BC: He was Zola [referring to *The Life of Emile Zola*].

VB: Yes.

BC: Yes. Yes. Yes. Erm, that's right. He did. And then eh, just a moment, didn't he, wasn't he, erm, wasn't there a film about Marie Curie and [pause 4 seconds] no. No. I can't remember that one. But eh, [sighs] yes. No. It was the dramatic films that impressed me. That I enjoyed. Used to get quite into it, you know.

VB: Yeah.

BC: Erm, mhm. I think erm, people don't go as often. It's a whole different scene now. To what it was. I mean the very fact that you have to go at a certain time for a certain performance. You now ...it's more like going to the theatre. But in those days, you know, you could sit there. Sit round. Eat. You know, every programme--

VB: Uhuh.

BC: The whole day. And my memories of it were, a lot of smoke. [laughs] Sometimes you could hardly see the screen. And packed cinemas. Packed. You always had an usher to show you to your seat, with a torch and erm, you know. You had to stand up for other people. You know. Just as the love scene [laughs] was coming up!

VB: [laughs]

BC: But erm, yeah, that's what I remember. Queues. Packed seats. But it had such a lovely atmosphere.

VB: I was going to ask, how did it make you feel when you were watching, say, a film with Garbo? Did you--

BC: Oh-h, well. I was [laughs] totally in awe of her. She had a special sort of magic. I don't know what it was. I mean I've been trying to define it even now.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Can't really, 'cause she wasn't a brilliant actress. It was partially her face.

VB: Mhm.

BC: Her facial expressions. Erm, and her, just her personality I suppose. And her Swedish accent. I don't know. But everything together made her something quite special. I mean eh, other people came from the Continent. Luise Rainer. Erm [pause 2 seconds] you know. And Anna Sten. They were all threatening to be second Garbos. Where, you know, they never were. Anna Sten very quickly fizzled out. Luise Rainer, although she got an Oscar, I think, for her first film. Which was a remake of a German film, erm, didn't do terribly well. [pause 2 seconds]. Well, I think I've covered the whole gamut of my film youth.

VB: Ah.

BC: And I'm still a very keen cinemagoer. Erm, I'm a bit disappointed with the number of good films there are about eh, there's too much violence. Too much explicit sex.

VB: Mhm.

BC: I mean, they were wonderful films. And, you know, we didn't have to show all these sex scenes. They were brilliant without it. I mean, gosh. German, Russian films, still, I think, even at that period, still have something to teach filmmakers of today. They do. Would you like some more?

VB: I'd love some. It's delicious.

BC: Want to switch it off.

VB: Okay.

BC: [laughs]

[End of interview]