

**'What's Age Got To Do With It?'**  
Lecture by Roy Faudree

5.45pm  
2 November 2000  
Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

My name's Roy and I'm here at the Lyric, because I'm working with the Young@Heart with Bob. We did a performance last night and we do three more performances of a piece called 'Road to Heaven'. It has about 25 people ranging in age from 70 to 88.

I'm going to ask the question: what is theatre? I think maybe an easier question would be: trying to say what theatre isn't. I'm kind of reminded of that television show that we have in America called Jeopardy where you're given the answer and then you have to come up with the question. So in some ways I think that it might be easier if we would say such things as, Chaos. **Alex, I would take the category chaos and then under chaos would have a statement for two hundred, with something along the lines of: Something that can't be understood. "Maaaaah" (incomprehensible noise) -That's correct. (Laughter).**

It's a trick question- what is theatre? It's very similar to the question- Have you stopped beating your wife? I think a 'yes' isn't really what you mean if you're not a wife beater and obviously 'no' is not the correct answer if you're not a wife beater.

I'm feeling like the auditorium is really very lop-sided, I feel like there's too much weight on your right. Could I ask the audience to do a piece of theatre and stand and walk that direction and sit on the other side of the theatre? (Laughter)

OK, now that's really interesting, for one thing you cooperated, well about three of you didn't, so I probably wouldn't make those three the actors. Those three I would put into maybe: marketing (Laughter), administration, fundraising. But obviously all of those who did as I directed, I can recognise that you have great talent as actors.

Now here's something very interesting I'm in a very dramatic lighting I'm supposed to be giving a lecture but here I am standing or sitting on a theatrical stage, a theatre that has a history of over a hundred years. I'm in subdued lighting, you're in the dark, so the assumption is since I'm raised and there's a frame in the traditional sense I'm the performance in theatre. But it's all from your point of view. Where I'm sitting I can see you very clearly. Maybe you are my theatre; maybe I'm the audience.

I think my question: What is theatre? Has to be narrowed down a little bit. I think it's too big of a question, it's a question that has infinite answers and we only have 30 minutes. I think one way I'm going to narrow it down a little bit is I'm going to ask another question. That's what therapists and teachers do, when a student or a patient has a question they ask them back another question. So my question is: What's age got to do with it? I'm 55 years old this Saturday, you don't have to get me anything don't worry about it. But I've spent a lot of time lately sort of looking back on my life because there's probably more to look back on than there is to look forward to. I don't mean that in the sense that it's better to look back than it is to look forward. I'm actually looking forward to what's coming up, and I try to work really hard on staying right here in this moment, my sitting up here with this little round black table seeing faces sitting out there in those plush red seats. But I do spend time thinking about how did I get here, and I look back on my life...can't see you very well, that's better.

And I try to ask the question: How did I get into theatre? And I look back on this young boy; almost as if he were a stranger and I see that he lives in the mid west, the middle of America, Oklahoma. Maybe that brings to mind, that's the problem with words, but maybe Oklahoma brings to mind songs from the musical. Or maybe it brings to mind images of the dust bowl of the thirties when there was a great depression and the wind came and lifted all the soil up and moved it, some of it moved it as far as New York city. It actually rained dust for weeks in the East and that was the Oklahoma soil.

But as I was growing up, obviously I'm only 55 and so I didn't live through the depression, but as I was growing up I sensed a certain flatness or saneness through existence. In fact I felt as though each day was very similar to the day before and I kind of knew that the next day would be pretty similar to what I'd seen up to that point and I enjoyed this, I was comforted by the sense of stability or continuity in my life, I was calmed by it but I wasn't excited by it. We had, when I was quite young, two small movie houses. If you saw the movie in the last picture show you'll get a sense as to what type of movie houses they were. Downtown (downtown was one block long), and then also on the outskirts of town we had a drive in movie; I don't think you have those here but they are these amazing setups where the movie is projected outdoors onto a large screen and you can watch it from your car.

It's that American idea that everything can be done from the front seat of a car; they even have drive-through liquor stores in parts of America. But this idea of going to the movies made for a real change or conflict in my life because each time I went to the movies there wasn't the sameness. It seemed as though I would go through a window and I'd be somewhere else, it was this feeling as though I could escape into this other reality and I found this very exciting and very different from what happened on a daily basis to my life, and I became kind of addicted to this idea of being able to go into a darkened room and be transported anywhere, and it would constantly change.

So while other people were listing what they wanted to be when they grew up, I kept what I wanted to be when I grew up very private to myself because I had no way in hell of knowing how I could be that, because what I wanted to be was to be someone who lived in the movies. I didn't have an understanding of how they were made or even why they were made, or what prompted people to make them. I just knew that that was an existence that I found a real departure from my own life, and that's where I wanted to go.

Well as I got a little more mature and I actually tried to figure out how I could actually be in the movies I came to realise what a horrible disgusting life it would be to actually have to deal with that type of lifestyle. So I didn't know where I was going to go with this, because I still had this sense from having been an audience that there was something really special about this existence.

So the idea, 'What is theatre?' And the question being easier, 'What isn't theatre?' or rhetorically what isn't theatre. I started deciding what it is that I could do that I hadn't, I didn't have to depend on anyone else's approval or acceptance, and I didn't have to have what I considered a needy lifestyle. But still exist in this reality that I was calling theatre or movies, and so I just decided that I should just do it myself. It's like the old Nike ad: just do it. And of course I had to restrict myself to what actually was available to me and so I started making plays or performances that I think I was probably thinking of being just plays or movies that didn't have the advantage of having film (answers mobile, says "I'm in a lecture"- audience laugh)

So the idea of making theatre actually came from the idea of trying to make live movies. And I came to realise, as I got older that there weren't really many theatregoers left in America. We were all sitting at radios, or computers, or in front of television sets or sitting in the movie

houses and so there was a whole new vocabulary in terms of how you go about connecting with the audience that's live when you're live in front of them and I started realising that what I'd stumbled onto, by mistake really is something that I felt needed to be done in terms of what the current live theatre had to become.

And I think this happens to every generation, I think every generation that comes along tries to figure out how they can reinvent the present theatre so that it's in the same vocabulary as the current generation of audience goers. I think one thing that I can say that theatre is, is that its time and that its place and it deals somehow with what's inside getting out and what's outside that makes its way in. Time is present in other art forms, but in theatre time is of an essence, in fact it's the very nature of time that is the thread that holds the various components of parts of the performance together.

It's the experience of time with other people that really creates this sense that there has been a journey when in a sense you've gone no-where you've remained in you're seats. Obviously that was what was happening to me when I was quite young in Oklahoma, I was going into one specific place but I was transported through time to another place as well.

So what's this inside out, outside in stuff that I'm throwing at you? Well I think that there is a very strange phenomenon that's happened from the time that we became human. And that's that we recognised that we weren't the only person experiencing what we were experiencing, in fact there were a great variety of vantage points on the world. Other humans were seeing us just as we were seeing other humans. Supposedly the whole idea of hearing voices or hearing the gods speak to us was before we had recognised that we could think silently, the same way we could speak out loud to other people. It was possible for us to hear our own thoughts it was possible for us to be inside our own heads. It was possible for us to think, to have a conversation with ourselves, to recognise that maybe we're more than one person. That more than one person lives inside of us.

But in addition to this complexity of mini people within one, we also recognised that it might be fun or interesting or possibly dangerous but that we were willing to try it just to see if we could get inside someone else or get them inside of us, I know that you can do this physically, that's sex which I'm not talking about that. But this idea that you can somehow get what's very private and hidden within you, you can somehow transmit that to the inside of another person.

And I think that's what theatre does, it's the idea of breaking through the time and space barriers in a sense so you can have this time and space empathy or you can have this ability to project yourself into the very person that might be several feet away from you. This idea that they open up and allow you to enter them mentally. Now I'm not just speaking of the brain, I'm not just talking about intellectual matters, I'm also talking about one's feelings, one's emotions, one's heart, one's soul, things that don't just have a mental or a logical or cerebral explanation or definition, or practical sort of concrete sort of statement that can be made using language. I'm also talking about things that can happen very vicariously through the body, through the fluids, through the emotions, through the feelings, through the atmosphere, the moods, the vibes.

So this idea that you can take what is inside and somehow send it through space and it ends up inside someone else I think is at the heart of what might separate theatre or relationships from just practical efficient organised existence. Now theatre, in terms of live theatre or performance art, or staged theatre, theatre that exists in the physical world, has something that other forms of theatre - television, movies, advertisements, billboards, educational training films, computer generated games and entertainment and whatever forms of technology will develop rapidly in the next few years in terms of being able to record or transmit performance or theatre, I think

all those things are theatre. I have no trouble with having those enter our life, and playing them a little bit because of expense in getting accepted in getting a crew together, sometimes it's just easier in going ahead and doing live theatre which I seem to continue to do. But I think what live theatre has that those other things don't have, and this is very simplistic and stating the obvious – but sometimes the obvious is what we trip over and what we don't really see – I think what it has is that we're in the same place and we're in the same time.

If we want to go back to our Jeopardy programme, the answer, in all honesty, is alone in an elevator with a stranger, what is theatre – there is something that happens when you're in the presence of another person that does not happen even in the visual arts such as these that are using primarily a dramatic format and are relying and are capitalising on all that has been learned in creating it over the years in a theatrical artform, there's something that happens when two live bodies or more are sharing the same airwaves, or sharing the same room, or sharing the same silence.

Of course we could choose not to share that silence, because we can go somewhere inside our head, we can go somewhere else. We can choose not to be present for that other person. Or if we acknowledge that presence there's something that happens.

The loudest silence I have ever heard in my entire life was in Tokyo ten years ago. We had taken an opera to the Bukamura which is this enormous, modern, beautiful, theatre in the middle of a shopping mall. I think it was the time when people in retail in Tokyo had come to realise that they had sold the public just about everything the public could possibly buy, not because the public was running out of money, because the economy was phenomenal, but because there just wasn't enough space where these people were living to buy anything else. They couldn't possibly bring anything else home.

*At this point Roy Faudree engages in a conversation with a pre-recorded version of himself to bring the talk to a close (with the pre-recorded Roy Faudree highlighted in italics)*

***Thought you may have wanted to get in touch with your feelings***

**So anyway I was just going into the theatre and I was just going to do a last minute thing in the theatre before going on stage**

***You know I think very highly of you***

**There's not a seat that's left in the**

***I think you're***

**And there's not a sound coming from the audience.**

***Really great***

**Thank you.**

***You're really nice to be around.***

**I'm trying to do something here, alright?**

***So we haven't really talked in a while, how you doing?***

I'm fine.

*What are you up to?*

I'm giving a lecture.

*Good. It sounds good. I wasn't being cynical.*

I wasn't accusing you of being cynical, I was accusing you of interfering  
...So what have you been working on? Is it autobiographical? By any chance is it  
a story about a man having a middle-age crisis? His wife's career suddenly taking  
off and he's left at home with the baby?  
Sounds familiar?

*Sounds good.*

Yea well, it's been done – about a million times.

*I don't get out that much.*

Well this is the wrong time...

*It's new?*

All of this is new. Trying to improvise...

*Not aged. Something that's had a little...*

A little spontaneity.

*Oh this is interesting. He thinks his twin is dead .His character functions as a stunt double.  
The star is actually the double. The star within the movie.*

You got it.

*It's good.*

Don't rub it in alright? I'm sure it's been done many times.

*I'm sure you could do it a lot better.*

It's all in how it's handled right?

*A ghostly double of a living person, one that haunts his fleshly counterpart.*

What's that German movie, you know the guy he replaced his evil twin....What?

*I'm sure it's all in how it's handled.*

Oh, don't call us we'll call you, right?

*Let's talk about something serious.*

Yeah, well what's not serious?

*Well let's talk about you.*

OK.

*I thought you might like that. You always like to be the centre of attention. I've just been thinking about you.*

Alright, you've been thinking about me.

*I think you might be ready for something completely different. Maybe you're ready for a change.*

I've got to change the topic here 'cos I'm here talking about 'what's age got to do with it?'

*You're ready to become who you really are.*

Oh god.

*I think what you have to do first is to really look at yourself. All those parts that you are, that make you up, and I think part of your trouble is you've been ignoring, pushing back, hiding one very important part of yourself.*

My soft white under...

*You're very selfish. I really like that. You're really one of the most selfish people I've ever known. I'm not just saying that just to flatter you. You really are. You spend most of the time thinking about yourself... inside yourself, which is good.*

It is good.

*Certainly a lot of more interesting things are happening inside of us than anything you could find outside. I think you're holding yourself back. I think there's a lot you could accomplish if you just let go of these images of you have of yourself, of who you want to be. And who you think you should be. You've done very well. You've accomplished what you wanted to set out for yourself.*

I don't think so.

*Pretty much. You have become who you wanted to be.*

Oh you mean when I was very little.

*You have become who you thought you wanted to be. You're grown-up. I think you're more than up you're out. You've grown old. And I think you have to get past the point of becoming, and recognising that you are. This is it. This is all there is. This is who you are. And if you really wanted to dig really hard you will see that most of what you've been doing is living a sort of life you mapped out that you dreamed for yourself - a very simple outline, a very crude childish drawing of a life. And what you could do is actually be alive.*

*As opposed to taking on this role of this person when you were much younger, imagine that you will become... I mean we're not really just talking about something just evil.*

I didn't think you were.

*I'm talking about the ability to be who you can be.*

Is this your advice you've come to tell me?

*It's up to you, you can do anything you wanted to do. You know I am always there. I hear everything you wanted to say. I think a lot about what you have to say, and I think you hear me.*

And I listen to you.

*You keep feeling that this isn't who you really are who you want to be. But if you wanted to be... I mean if you really wanted to be.*

What? If I really wanted to be what?

*If you really, really, really wanted to be you could be god...*

God. *(laughs)*

*You know that. But you won't let yourself. Well I think I've overstayed my...*

No, no.

*Because I know you had it on your mind...*

You know I did get up this morning....

OK, to get back to what I was really talking about – what's theatre and what's age got to do with it?

END