

Transcript of 85-year-old Mr. Ron Large of Staffordshire in conversation with
Dr. John Goodyear (University of Birmingham / Kulturgenossenschaft Globe e.G.) on
Friday 5 October 2018, 11:45am (British Summer Time)

A: Interviewer Dr. John Goodyear (38, DOB: 06.09.1980)

B: Globe patron Mr. Ron Large (85, DOB: 24.07.1933)

A: Hello and a very warm welcome to today's interview here in the Staffordshire countryside. My name is John and I am joined by Ron. A very good morning, Ron.

B: Good morning!

A: Ron, first of all, you were in Oldenburg from 1956 to 1957, but before we go into that, could you tell us your date of birth and what your rank was in the army?

B: My date of birth was 24th of July 1933. My rank was an honorary rank really ... it was as a musician.

A: Could you tell us a little bit about your background in the run-up to your national service or your service in the army.

B: I served an apprenticeship with British Rail or British Railways, as it was then called, at Derby. But I studied music in part-time, you know, and I managed to pass an audition to join the Royal Artillery Band at Woolwich. And I was there for eighteen months, but then they decided that they had got too many double bass players and tuba players, so they transferred me to the Royal Artillery Portsmouth Band, which was in Oldenburg.

A: Can you remember your journey from Woolwich to Oldenburg?

B: Yes, I can. I had to go to Liverpool Street Station in London and caught a special troop train, in the evening this was, that took me through to Harwich Parkstone Quay where I was escorted and shown where to go through to the correct place where to embark on one of the boats. I can't remember which boat it was. It could have been the *Empire Parkstone* or it could have been the *Vienna*. There was another which name I can't remember. There, it was an overnight journey. The next morning, I was told to board the blue train, which, in the Hook of Holland, and this train took me through a very snowy Dutch countryside, which was very flat and the weather was pretty awful, so I didn't get a good impression of it. But I was quite surprised how well I was looked after on the train as I was invited twice to go to the restaurant car and given a really excellent meal, and, eventually the train crossed the border into Germany where the electric traction ceased and it became steam. This took me through to Münster and then on to Osnabrück. At Osnabrück, the train lost some of its carriages and a smaller steam engine took over, which had got a bell fastened to the drive wheel. As we travelled through the forests, which went on forever and ever and ever, the bell clanked every time the wheel went round to a certain place, and I presume it was to frighten the deer away, so they did not get run over. And eventually, I arrived in the station in Oldenburg, in the evening. I don't know what time, but it was dark, of course, because it went dark early in February. And I was met there by a bus. I think other people as well, and we were taken through to the barracks where I was quickly made at home, and settled down and somebody said to me: 'We have got a cinema here. Would

you like to go?'. And I said: 'Well, it sounds a good idea', although I was tired. I went there and we sat through a film, which was a musical, called Rose Marie.

A: What was the name of the cinema, Ron?

B: It was the Globe.

A: And what were your first impressions when you walked into the Globe? Can you remember what it looked like; felt, how it sound?

B: It felt as if I just walked into a cinema in England.

A: And watching this particular movie again, what was it called?

B: It was called Rose Marie. I can't remember the person who wrote it. But it was a film about, a musical film, obviously, taken from a musical of, about [later corrected by speaker to: "a valley in the Rocky mountains of Canada that had an echo that enabled singing lovers to communicate over a very long distance"]

A: Did you enjoy this film?

B: I did very much. It was very good quality, very good sound, very good vision and as good as some of the better cinemas in England.

A: This was not just a cinema, but it was also a place where potentially things on stage could happen. Can you remember any form of staged performances that took place there, and if so, what were they?

B: Well, the one I can remember mostly was a performance by an Italian company which was from La Scala, Milan, which came and played the complete production of the complete production of *La Traviata*, the Verdi opera, and that had a great impression on me. And I sat right at the front, I think on the very front row, so I could peer actually into the orchestra pit and look at the whole orchestra. Being a double bass player, I sat as close to the double bass player as I possibly could.

A: Ron, given the fact that you are a musician, did you ever use the Globe, the stage or the orchestra pit yourself and performed, or did you perform elsewhere?

B: We usually performed elsewhere. In fact, I don't think we ever did any performances in that respect in Oldenburg at all. I remember we gave some schools concerts and we went to the Prince Rupert's School at Wilhelmshaven, is it? We went to ... all over Germany for giving concerts in that respect. A lot of the time, I was seconded to small seven-piece group of six string players and a pianist and went to all sorts of places, often playing just for gatherings of NATO personnel and we often played through into the early hours into the morning for them. We did give one demonstration performance on ... on the main square in Donnerschwee barracks, which, I remember, was not that successful. Not by any reason, by us the musicians, but by the way we were instructed to do what we should have done.

A: Can you tell us a bit more about that story, Ron, about the failure to give proper instructions and what happened exactly?

B: Well, the band was marching and playing at the same time. We had a full audience of a light AC and heavy AC regiment who were there watching what we were doing. And we were marching up and down, and the Musical Director was

talking to one or other of the COs of the other regiments there, and left the commands to his Sergeant Major, who was a very good musician, but not one you would think of as a typical Sergeant Major. He gave us a command from the rear, which is wrong for when you are marching in open order. He said: 'band about turn' because we were getting closer to a wall. Well, unfortunately, his voice was not very strong. The woodwind was at the back; the percussion in the middle; and the brass were the farthest away from him. The woodwind heard his command, which they ... he shouldn't have given anyway because he should have said 'countermarch', not, when you are in open order you don't give 'about turn'. But they did about turn and therefore the band parted. We carried on towards the wall. I was – what's known as – right marker so it was up to me to govern the speed, and I gradually took smaller and smaller steps and we went slower and slower. So, because I did not feel like bashing into the wall. *Chuckle*. So, by this time, Major Salmon, the Musical Director, had seen this situation happening; and, in his, using all the resources of his military training, shouted in a loud voice: 'Band, countermarch'. We, all heard him of course, including... both parts. And both parts countermarched. When you countermarch, you are blind because you cannot see what is in front of you because you have got lots of other instrumentalists going past you, so we eventually emerged face-to-face with the woodwind section. 'Band halt. Band fall out'. That was rather a debacle to say the least. *Chuckle*.

A: **Ron, can you remember any of the people with whom you served; and if so, do you know their whereabouts today?**

B: I know the whereabouts of two people definitely: David Whitehouse and Leon Coats. David lives in Worcester and Leon lives in Scotland, near to Edinburgh.

A: **And do you know what happened to them whilst they were in the Armed Forces and then afterwards, after they left their military or national service.**

B: Both of them came later on to, not very long before I left. But, erm, David and I used to play duets together, quite a lot. Strange duets, but, double bass myself and treble recorder for David. David, of course, became a very competent bassoon player. Leon was, did play the horn for quite a time, but he was a really an absolutely outstanding pianist. I'm not really sure what David did. I think that he did some professional bassoon playing and some teaching. Leon eventually became, I think, Head of the Music Department of University of Edinburgh, and he wasn't on his own. The band, in the days of National Service, attracted a lot of very, very competent, professional musicians, and quite a lot of them made a mark in music all over the place. I remember one or two other names. There was somebody called Macbeth who was a trombone player; Swany Lake who played the clarinet and baritone sax; and – erm – can't really think of – oh yes, Brian Evans, who, he, he ... We called him bambi; and if you see him, you will know why.

A: **So, looking at your full period of time there: you were there in February 1956. How long did it go on for? And can you remember coming to the end or coming to the end of your time there in Oldenburg?**

B: Yes, apparently, it was, my, my time ended in June. I think it was the 26th June when I was due to be sent back because I had finished my amount of time that I had signed on into the band.

A: **What year was that, Ron?**

B: That was 1957.

A: OK. So, June 1957?

B: Yes, I, I, I had been left behind in the, I think it was March or April because the band was going on an extended tour. And they thought that I would have left before the tour ended, and they did not want me to be a part of it, and then go. As it turned out actually, I was still there when I came back, which caused ... I wasn't very popular with certain people at the time. But I used it to play, as I say, to play along with David and did lots and lots and lots of practice: five hours a day, most days. As it was beautiful weather, when I had nothing else left to do, I used to sit outside and sunbathe or go into the open-air swimming pool.

A: Can you remember anything else that you did outside the barracks, perhaps Ron? Did you go out to, I don't know, to cinemas or theatres or to shops. How did you entertain yourself outside of the barracks?

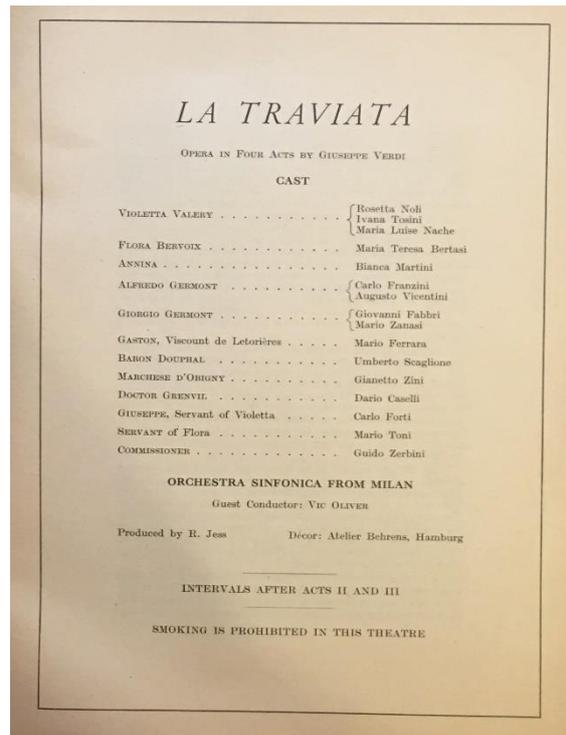
B: Not an awful lot. But I used to go obviously to the shops quite a lot to buy music. We used to go to the YMCA. And also I went to concerts in the Weser Ems, Weser Ems Hall and also ... I think I went to a performance of Othello in the, the Opera House in Oldenburg. Oldenburg, although not that big, had a wonderful Opera House. And erm, erm, then it, most of the rest of the time, I suppose, we were busy with our, what we had to do in the barracks. Yeah.

A: Finally, Ron, looking at the fact that the Globe itself has been rescued and is going to be, after its renovation work, brought back into cultural life. What do you think personally, looking back at someone who went there in the 1950s, 60 years on, that it's going to be used for its original function?

B: I think that it is absolutely staggering that that's going to happen. I really, really think, it makes me feel really happy and warm-hearted over that. I think it is marvellous to have happened.

A: Ron, thank you very much.

B: Thank you



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Front cover and content page of Ron Large's copy of the concert programme for the Verdi opera *La Traviata*, performed by the touring opera company *Stagione d'Opera Italiana* from Milan and organised by the British Army's Combined Services Entertainment. Ron attended this performance at the Globe at Crerar Barracks (Donnerschwee) in Oldenburg during his posting as a musician at the barracks between February 1956 and June 1957.



Group photo of the Royal Artillery (Portsmouth) Staff Band & Orchestra at the Crerar Barracks in the mid-1950s, taken during Ron Large's posting at the barracks between February 1956 and June 1957.



Picture of 85-year-old Ron Large taken in October 2018 at his home in Staffordshire. Prior to retirement, he had a successful career in musical teaching, still active in teaching and conducting today