

ROY FOWLER  
(File Number 479)

Interviewed by Rodney Giesler on 13.6.00

Born 10.3.1927. North London. Father a Coal Factor. Scientific education up to HSC. Became "film barmy" aged 11. "Citizen Kane" a defining experience. Campaigned for Labour in the 1945 election with Peter Cotes. Wrote a biography of Orson Welles. A time of privation. Application for a passport to meet Chaplin in Switzerland loses him a place at Kings College. Went to Paris. Catches up on French Cinema at the Cinemathèque, courtesy Lottie Escoffier. Became London Correspondent for Film Français and Cinematographie Française. Wrote "The Film in France". Arranges studio visits to "A Matter of Life & Death" (AMOLAD) and "Caesar & Cleopatra". Observations on Gabby Pascal, and his relationship with the cast. Film budgetted at £250,000 and a 3 month schedule. Ends up costing £1m, and lasts a year. A terrible film. Wasted talents. Vivien leigh. Claude Rains' tax free salary. Shooting problems at Denham. Shouting matches between Pascal and Korda. John Davis takes over. Pascal floored by Olivier. Shaw's relationship with Pascal. "Pygmalion" a delight. "Major Barbara" kept Denham open. Memories of Powell & Pressburger and AMOLAD. The trial scene and the escalator. Into the army in 1946. A sybaritic life in Cairo. Wrote novel "Our Gayness and our Gilt". Hospitalised and returns home. Film industry's parlous state. Memories of Powell & Pressburger. Joined Screenwriters' Association: Roy Baker, Eric Ambler, Peter Noble, Herbert Marshall. Problem of getting work without a union ticket. High level interviews. Gets work as summer relief call boy at BBC Alexandra Palace in 1948. Descriptions of studio, equipment and people. Live transmissions. Gets union ticket. Cecil McGivern, Cecil Madden, Imlay Watts. Became PA. Drama production. George More-O'Ferrall, Michael Barry, Desmond Davis. Freelanced and worked incessantly. Light entertainment a shambles. Dicky Afton, Walton Anderson, Henry Calderwood. The Fratelli Brothers. The panic caption. (45 mins).

*End of Side 1.*

The on-camera announcers: Sylvia Peters, MacDonald Hobley and Mary Malcolm. Bill Ward. "Arms and the Man". Margaret Leighton. Designers Richard Greenough and Leslie Jackson. Working on "The Hulbert Follies". The Hulberts and Cecily Courtneidge. Made stage manager on touring production of "Her Excellency". Fired at the end. Returns to Alexandra Palace. 1949 accepted offer from CBS Television in New York as Associate Director. Extensive description of studios, equipment, ways of working, coverage and programmes. "See it Now" with Ed Murrow. "The Prudential Family Playhouse". Technique of linking and detaching from the network. The English element. Antidotes to boredom. Maverick announcer. Paley and Stanton. Charlie Underhill. "Studio One" produced by Tony Minor. Live every Monday, sponsored by Westinghouse. Directors: Franklin Schaffner and Paul Nichol. Fay Emerson and the jammed fridge door. (45 mins).

*End of Side 2.*

More on "Studio One". The story of Yul Brynner. Great charisma. Huge libido. Brynner hired as a director. Production patterns. Brynner faces down Minor. Working with Brynner. Other directors: Ralph Nelson, Marty Ritt, Robert Stevens. Strip shows. The tyranny of time. Fake shows. Indulged by management. Directed "The Web" series. Clients a pain. More money on talent as network expands. Life more rigorous after amalgamation with radio. Ed Murrow's programmes on Korea. Willis Cooper. Brynner's decision to join "The King and I". The opening in Newhaven, Conn. More on "Prudential Family Playhouse". Gertrude Lawrence, Bert Lahr, Helen Hayes, Kay Francis. Camera failure on "Three Men on a Horse". Grace Kelly and Richard Greene in "Berkeley Square". Kelly's sexual appetite. Hubbel Robinson Jr and his indirect manner. Sinatra's theory on the cue cards across the street. (44 mins).

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More on Brynner. Other actors: Jimmy Dean, Chuck Heston, EG Marshall, Maria Riva (Dietrich's daughter.) Memories of Dietrich. The rejection of Anne Marno. Abe Burrows. "Three Blind Mice". Smoking out the studio. Meeting Simenon. Contrasting programming then and now. Directing Walter Cronkite. OB's from Lake Success. Leslie Nielson. Gabby Pascal reappears with idea for a musical Pygmalion. The arrival of colour. Rival systems. Other plays: "Requiem for a Heavyweight", "Days of Wine & Roses", "Judgement at Nuremburg". Leaves CBS in 1954 to become Head of TV at Prudential's agency. "You are There" series with Cronkite. A most exciting period. William Paley's influence. Viewing more a sense of occasion. Returns to CBS as Executive Producer. Bristol Myers' "Alfred Hitchcock Presents". David Ogilvie sends him to Mather & Crowther in London to improve commercials standards. Unhappy experience. Freelances. Crosses Atlantic regularly. Works for FCB. Nic Roeg. John Schlesinger. The four frame cuts. Dulux dog. Watneys. Peter Cooke. Colour presentation at Elstree with piped-in horse race. Working with Morecambe and Wise. (44 mins).

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More on Hubbel Robinson Jr. Brynner's deflation of Henry White. Charlie Underhill an alcoholic. His nights at the Stork Club. The criminal fraternity. Back to FCB. Dulux and BOAC. Nick Salomon at Vernons. Commercials for Lyons Maid and Tetley's Tea. The commercials production companies. The change in commercials from feature director based to high style photography. Bert Stern. Eddie Vorkapich. Jim Garrett. Forms own production company. Experiences with the Union. Ticket lapsed during time in the US. Union activities at CBS. Manages to rejoin ACTT. Elected to committee on Producers/Directors section. Attempt to affiliate with DGA. Decline in membership and union power. The Communist cells. Ken Roberts. ACTT absorbed by BETA. Toppling the Trots at Central Hall. The Redgraves and the Workers Revolutionary Party. The start of the Oral History project. Achievements and hopes. Special events. (41 mins).

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More on CBS. The impact of the McCarthy era. A cautious conversation in a cab. Blacklist victims. The refugee technicians in the UK. Time spent on the West Coast. Writers remembered: Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Bill Inge. Agency names like a trunk dragged up and down stairs. The incessant need for material. Ralph Bellamy choking on camera. Early ambitions fulfilled or otherwise. The passing of the Greats. The great talent of Pressburger. Working with Ronnie Reagan, and how he built his political base. Interviewing General Macarthur. John Carradine. Sidney Lumet. Yul Brynner's demise. The Army McCarthy hearings. Schine and Cohn. The end of McCarthy. (40 mins)

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