**Notes from transcript of interview with David John Hough, Performance critic**

**Date of Interview: 15 November 1988**

**Interviewed by: Karen Wood [Australian Association for Dance Education project]**

**SLWA call number: OH2378/14**

David was born 21 May 1940 in Kingston South East in South Australia.

David’s father was Rev John Hough, a Methodist Minister.

David’s mother was Emily Mary Hough, nee Tissiman.

David’s father was born in Coolgardie / in Boulder [These locations are not the same so there is a discrepancy here].

David’s paternal grandfather had worked on the mines as a fitter.

David came to Merredin, Western Australia in 1948 at the age of 8. He attended primary school in Merredin for 2 ½ - 3 years before moving to Harvey.

An important early influence in Merredin relevant to theatre was David’s teacher Jess McDonald Taylor who organised little playlets. Other influences regarding the wider field of performance were the ritual and ceremony associated with the religious practices of the Methodist Church, including music (hymns), preaching, etc.

By 1952 the family was living in Dowerin and David was in grade 7, the last year of primary school. David’s parents had to decide his high schooling arrangements – either boarding in a hostel for secondary school in Northam or boarding in Perth.

David’s father leaned towards Methodist Wesley College and David won a scholarship there. By the time his younger siblings were ready for high school the family was living in Katanning so his brothers and sister attended Katanning Junior High School.

At Wesley David was not particularly strong in theatrical activities. He did belong to the Boy Scouts and was very interested in sport, particularly swimming. He was the school champion in his final year. He also rowed and played football.

David’s interest in music and dance began to develop in primary school via folk dancing and his parents’ involvement in square dancing. During his high school years he learned ballroom dancing by imitation for College dances as his parents did not allow him to attend lessons. He also participated in community dances when he was home for the holidays and the focus there was more on rock and roll and jiving. He was not exposed to ballet or dance as a spectator until after he’d left school.

Regarding future careers, David was attracted to medicine and law but his maths was not strong enough in the Junior Certificate examinations. David felt this was a direct result of his disjointed primary school years and the way maths was taught. David’s vocational guidance officer suggested he enter an apprenticeship in cabinet making or carpentry.

David drifted into teacher education. As he wanted to continue his education into the 4th and 5th years of high school he applied for and got a teacher’s bursary, which provided financial assistance during those last two years of schooling. It required him to go on to Claremont Teachers’ College where he was selected for secondary training in spite of failing the Junior and then Leaving maths examinations. In college David managed to pass primary arithmetic on the second attempt. His first posting was to Scarborough High School as a maths teacher!

David was a secondary teacher from 1960 to 1968:

Scarborough High School for 2 years, Bunbury High School for 2 years; New Guinea high schools for 2 years, Hamilton High School for 2 years and Kewdale High School for 1 year.

He then became a lecturer in Speech and Drama at Claremont Teachers College.

David’s interest in dance developed during his years at Claremont. He noticed that elite sportspersons such as Shirley Strickland and Jim Whelan were using ballet to develop flexibility and strength to their legs. David was heavily into competitive swimming at the time and felt that ballet would be beneficial, especially during the off training season.

In the late 1950s David attended classes at Kira Bousloff’s studio three times per week and worked as an extra in some productions, eg Sleeping Beauty with the Borovansky Ballet Company (which disbanded and reformed as the Australian Ballet Company with Peggy van Praagh as Artistic Director in 1962). At this time David was focused on becoming a dancer as a career but in early 1962 he was posted to Bunbury High School. He felt this was unfair as the Education Department was known to ensure sportspersons retained metropolitan postings but the Arts did not receive similar consideration.

David’s emergence as a dance critic came about in 1979 when he was asked to be the Performing Arts correspondent for the National Times, writing about firstly theatre and then dance. David had spent the previous two years in England where he attended as many opera, ballet and theatre performances as he could. For him it was all about the performance.

The two years in England during 1977 and 1978 came about as a result of David, as head of speech and drama, being unhappy with the kind of drama he was teaching at Mt Lawley College. Rather than teaching drama as an end product and a performance, David felt that Dorothy Heathcote’s approach of using drama as a methodology of teaching was the correct way to go. David managed to bring Dorothy over to Perth twice and during the second visit she invited David to go to England to do a two year course with her at Newcastle on Tyne.

When David returned to Perth in 1979, Mt Lawley College’s Speech and Drama Department had fairly unique staff like Margaret O’Ness, Priscilla Broadbent, Serge Tampolini, who helped to give Mt Lawley a fairly unique position in speech and drama education. This was one of the reasons that the Academy [of Performing Arts] was eventually located on the Mt Lawley campus where the facilities had been built in response to the kind of teaching programmes underway there. At that time there was also the Drama in Education Association where Gary Hodge was a leading light. David and Gary worked closely together on the committee.

In 1979 David’s influence in setting up the dance part of the Academy [of Performing Arts] came about when he was seconded to be the Executive Officer to get the Academy off the ground. David was able to take up this opportunity as the closure of Graylands Teachers College freed up Betty Barker and Dan Jenks to come to the Speech and Drama Department in Mt Lawley College, thus in turn freeing David.

Music was already well established in the community with the Music Teachers Association and a ground swell of support so music was easily got off the ground in the new Academy.

Dance was chosen as the next activity. David had been on the committee of the Dance Association (AADE). Together with Marian Tye from Mt Lawley College, David pushed to get dance going by getting a small committee together to develop a philosophy, curriculum, structure and plans to get teaching staff, after which they advertised within Australia and the United Kingdom to find a suitable teacher. Tim Mason, Art Director of the WA Council was married to Marilyn Mason, who had a background as a dancer with the Ballet Rambert and had being doing classes in Perth with the WA Ballet Company. She undertook to audition people in the United Kingdom on the committee’s behalf. This resulted in Brian Hewitt coming out to Australia as the first teacher in charge of the dance programme.

The dance programme had teething problems. David remembers Sian Stokes coming in the first intake and her technical abilities and talent being far ahead of what the Academy could accommodate at that stage. She left for another institution. David considered that the most senior level of Mt Lawley College did not have the perception or the commitment for what needed to be done to assist Academy staff to evolve the dance programme.

At that stage it was not possible to stream people into classical or contemporary streams and the dancers needed to be all at about the same standard, leaving those with outstanding talent frustrated and those at the bottom struggling. Contemporary dance was taught by guest teachers such as Ruth Osborne, and Robin Haigh. By the time a dance faculty had been built up in 1981 the first principal had been appointed and David’s secondment was at an end.

David felt that dance schools viewed the Academy with a great deal of suspicion, seeing it as poaching their students, and as a threat to the established teacher/student relationship where the students’ successes reflected on the teachers and enhanced their reputation and thereby impacted positively on their livelihood. The initial lack of budget also meant that the Academy had restrictions on their ability to bring in teachers from outside. There were also persons who weren’t invited being miffed with those who were. The Academy was working towards a standard of accreditation, which has become the norm nowadays but wasn’t easy in those days.

People like Garth Welch, Terri Owen, and Ruth Osborne saw the Academy in a bigger context and were very supportive, as was Sylvia Box. And, with the arrival of Alan Alder and Barry Moreland a closer relationship developed between the Ballet Company and the Academy, eg teachers moving between the two institutions, students given the opportunity to dance in Ballet Company productions, and students like Michael Campbell, Margrete Helgeby, Brett Roberts and others who graduated into the Ballet Company.

David considered it important to note the work of Noel Schader. Meryl, wife of principal oboist Joel [Marangella?] with the WA Symphony Orchestra, was looking for opportunities when the couple immigrated to Perth from the United States. Meryl had danced with the Balanchine Company in New York and had very high standards which she in turn demanded from the students during the years she taught at the Academy. The students found it very difficult to meet these standards and the associated required discipline. After two or three years Meryl became Ballet Mistress at the WA Ballet Company. David felt the standard of excellence reached by the Company was overwhelmingly due to her influence.

It was David’s view that the Academy suffered from a lack of discipline, at student and staff level, and this worked against the Academy producing a top line product. David noted that others may see this differently.

[Some discussion around choreography and the opportunities around that, not related to MLTC]

At the time of interview, 1988, David enjoyed his role as free lance journalist and saw his future as far wider than dance critic; rather as an arts writer covering the whole range of the Arts from Administration and management to particular art forms. Dance was just one part of that. David was already contributing articles to publications such as the National Times, the West Australian, the Japan Times, the Australian Listener, the Financial Review, the Australian, Australian Business.

David moved out of teacher education in 1982, at the time of the amalgamation of the super colleges. He’d gained a Masters of Business Administration and was invited by UWA to teach in the Department of Management in areas like Consumer Behaviour, Organisational Theory and Organisational Behaviour. He’d been appointed to the School of Business where he taught in the Department of Marketing, handling the university’s teaching of Public Relations, Advertising and Sales Promotion, all of which were Communications oriented.

David enjoyed teaching [at the University], gaining a lot of pleasure and job satisfaction from it. David saw writing about the Arts and its relationship with business as “a perfect marriage”.

As far as the future, David was expecting to travel a lot with his partner and was looking forward to collaborating on a coffee table book on 20th Century stage design with Marina Henderson, leading British authority on costume and stage design. He expected that to take about a year.

David hoped to do more writing and was enjoying being a teacher and free lance writer, without the burdens of administration.

Marjorie Bly

9 July 2023