INTERVIEWEE: Aidan Jolly
INTERVIEWERS: Mogs Russell and Tim Hollins
CAMERA OPERATOR: Dean Whiskens
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Part 1 (Mogs interviewing)

Q: Can you tell us about your background as a performer before joining Banner?

AJ: I'm a kind of late developer as far as music goes, and the main thing that got me into music apart from desperately wanting to do it was punk. The main connection with punk was that anyone could play, sort of that six-month period in the history of music when people without training or skills could just pick up instruments and have a go at them. When I was at school everybody wanted to be in a band. It's different now, hardly anyone wants to be in a live band; most people are quite divorced from creativity. But then, all of us wanted to be in punk bands. Even though, the music that I played has never really been punk and at that age I listened to a whole strange eclectic mixture of things – I liked punk but I liked Pink Floyd and I liked Bob Marley as well. I nevertheless really wanted to do it, and got involved in playing music about the age of 16 or 17. There was no possible way that anyone would've thought that you could have a career in it, not with the background that I had and the place I was living in at the time. Nowadays we have lots of what are called progression routes for young people to become stars, musicians or whatever, and people even talk about wanting to be famous as an ambition. The things that were present in those days were a mixture of just wanting to express ourselves and as it were stick it to the man, in modern terms, and also just wanting to play music for the sake of it. So after doing things like that for a while I followed this fairly straight path through A levels to uni, again no particular way of knowing that you could try and make a living out of being creative, no particular encouragement to do that, but playing in lots of different bands as I went through university especially. Then I went and volunteered and then got a job in a mental health day centre. That's under false pretenses I think, isn't it. I was paid to be there. It's scandalous really because I could've

been attending for my own reasons. But it also became apparent at that point that you could use music in that context. I suppose a lot of the things that influenced me, there was a lot of things going on politically while I was at college. A lot of those things I didn't really understand, one of them being the miners' strike. In a way the miners' strike sort of passed me by but the legacy of it politicised me. People liked Billy Bragg, who was just starting out then, back when Billy Bragg was good and angry, and there were a lot of other really good angry music, like Attila the Stockbroker and the Clash. All those bands had a real impact on me, which is weird because I haven't ever really been able to write like that but that's what got me going. At the same time, when I was working for MIND in Oxford, although I was supposed to be doing welfare rights I did also do a bit of music work and gradually learned a little bit about the way that music can contribute to your own sense of mental health. Nowadays we talk a lot about things like happiness and wellbeing, and I think those terms unfortunately have been appropriated in a very middle-class framework. For me, the whole point of the music and the work that I was doing with survivors of mental health problems and abuse and so on, partly it's about regaining some expression but partly it's a collective activity. This is healing, both in a personal and a political way. A lot of the work I've done since, which we might talk about in a bit, has been linked with that. I won't go into more of it now but those things I think were very important, and those were the first very dim glimmerings I had of that as an idea. As well as that, I have my own burning desire to make music. I was quite spectacularly crappy in a lot of ways, I think personally. I had a very sort of strange approach to it, which I suppose had the advantage of creating things that were a bit different. But I wasn't particularly skilled so even if there had been a route into music I'm not sure I'd have been one of those young people that would've been labeled as being potentially a musician with a capital M. But I persisted and ended up going to Manchester to go to the polytechnic as it then was, and do a course in the wonderfully titled Recreational Arts for Community, which is probably about the weakest qualification that you could possibly get, because it was a terrible course I have to say, in working with music in a social context. Nowadays again these things are better understood; if you wanted to do that there are places you can go and do it, although surprisingly few. So having done all that time with MIND whilst having been an activist within my union branch and so on, having been politicised by the poll tax, for example, campaigns like CND, I was quite involved in the CND, quite involved in poll tax, quite involved in direct action of various kinds like cruise watch. I

went to Manchester, which was fantastic; it was a new start for me. Put down roots in Manchester and did the course, which had a lot of benefits even though it was very poorly taught, in that we started teaching ourselves. It introduced me to a whole lot of people, some of whom I'm still in touch actually, who've gone on and done things in Manchester. So it's a way to becoming a professional musician of a particular kind. How I got involved with Banner was someone from the course spotted an advert in Mailout for Banner, and the way it was expressed I think she thought it might suit me. So that's where I heard about Banner and that's how I came to go down and audition for them.

Q: What were your impressions; what did you think you were getting involved in?

AJ: That's a really good question. I think probably I didn't have much idea of what I was getting involved in because I'd not had any concept of the long history of Banner. I was unaware that such things existed, so I'd come to politics in a really sort of roundabout and naïve way. I hadn't any sense of cultural politics particularly, apart from the idea of protest music and the way it was popping up in all sorts of contexts. For example, I'd done loads of benefits in Oxford where I was living at the time for trade unionists and others. Do you remember the Pergamon 23, people who worked for Rupert Murdoch[1] in the Pergamon Press in Oxford who went on strike against him. It was quite a big cause at the time and my friend Rhonda, who was in the same band as me, was one of the Pergamon workers. So we got involved in doing benefits for them through that, so I'd already got this sense of using music in that way. Then I generally got involved in Oxford sort of trades union stuff. There were campaigns there ranging from things like there was a big strike, the big social work strike going on, which I'm sure we did some benefits for that. I got a reputation for being a striking voluntary sector member, which I should put on record now. I never had to go on strike because, though I'd organised the union within my workplace with Oxford MIND, because there were so many appalling issues there about low pay and one-month contracts, which sound incredibly familiar today, in fact it was easy just to wander out of where I was working and go and show solidarity to the public sector workers who were on strike actually on picket lines. But I got this reputation for being a striking voluntary sector worker, which

[1] Robert Maxwell was the owner of Pergamon Press, not Rupert Murdoch. Correction by Aidan Jolly, 29 January 2018

probably did me no harm but was actually not true. So I just thought I'd hold my hand up there and say that. Also because we were involved, me and Rhonda had this band that we were involved in all this stuff, we would get asked to do benefits. We saw a load of quite good comedians, for example this brilliant comedian called Seething Wells, very funny, very political. So it was all that sort of heady times with lots of really strongly political stuff going on, really well attended benefits, hundreds of people coming, lots of quite mass action in the wake of various things to do with the miners' strike and student activism of various kinds, big campaigns against cuts to grants. Remember grants, anybody remember grants? We've been fighting to try and save them. As I say the poll tax, which of course politicised about half the country. So that was the background in which I came into this audition. I saw this advert and got the general impression that it was political music. I thought, ya I want to do that. However, what they put in the ad for that I think with hindsight might have been slightly misleading in that the range of influences they quote definitely appealed to be but turned out to be slightly more contemporary than was actually represented in the company at the time perhaps shall we say. I think they mentioned people like Billy Bragg, maybe The Levellers. They were very big at the time. They had done that amazing album, Levelling The Land. That was another influence that's really important to mention; that was a really, really important album, particular songs like Battle of the Bean Field or whatever they called it. Those were all really live issues at the time. The Levellers was one of the few bands that were responding with what seemed like a properly radical agenda. So that's what attracted me to the company.

Q: So you thought you were going into a company that had all these contemporary sort of influences, and then you found it was quite different when you got there.

AJ: That's a leading question; you should work for BBC. I think it's more complicated than that, to be fair. You've raised a really interesting point there. When I went and auditioned the audition was quite well thought through. They'd given me a lot of preparatory work to do, which all turned out to have something that they were looking for behind it, so I think it was quite well handled. I do have some good memories of the audition. I remember Tim sitting over in the corner and then Jacqueline teaching us some harmonies, which I found out later was the anti-sexism test. Fair enough. So I was obviously the least worst, either

that or I passed the anti-sexism test or something. I got the, it wasn't a job, I got the chance to work with the company basically from that. What I found I think with hindsight was I'd come quite, I actually hadn't got much of a background in professional music. Banner in one sense, they're not like other professional companies either so it was very interesting but quite difficult to then pick up the culture of Banner. The more I found out about the history of it and realised it went back to 1973 at least and further into the Grey Cock Folk Club, there was a kind of double process going on for me. One of them was the weight of all that history was very intimidating, and frankly Dave especially comes across as quite intimidating. But I think a lot of that is down to his commitment and his passion. It didn't necessarily read like that at the time, so it was quite scary some of it actually. Also I'm sure there are ways in which I must have been quite a difficult person to work with at that time in that I wasn't sure what I was doing and probably was very under-confident in my own skills, and that leaves people… When you're insecure in something you tend to be defensive, so it was quite hard initially for the first year or so to find a language of collaboration that meant that the kind of relative levels of experience could be evened out, something that Banner wasn't very good at then really. There was no way of doing that, partly of course because it was a company that had gone through massive funding cuts. A lot of the things that were difficult to cope with at the time were really down to structural problems with arts funding in general and the position that a company like Banner found itself in in 1993 or whenever it was. So there were some very interesting things that took a long time for me to understand, and mostly I did that with hindsight. The other thing that was difficult was I came in at a time when I think a lot of people were still recovering from the death of Pete Yates. I actually did talk about that and I don't think anyone actually felt that consciously. I felt though, that being this other person in the company not long before me who could lots of interesting things and had to die, it was a tragedy, it really was a tragedy and I'd never met him, but there was something about that legacy as well that was again in a way sort of intimidating to me as someone who actually quite enjoyed themselves and was unsure of their own skills and not quite sure how all this stuff worked. So nowadays the way I look upon what I did with Banner, it was almost like being in an apprenticeship, and an incredibly important and useful one, but one with a lot of rough corners as well. The thing that made it work was partly we were all interested in politics. I talked about two parallel strands, and the positive strand was it was incredibly exciting for me to find out

about this long culture of political song in the UK. Unless you know where to look for it, it's not taught anywhere, people don't talk about it, and where it pops up even now it's assimilated, it's sanitised. For example, a lot of it focused at the time around Ewan MacColl. With the exception of Kirsty MacColl, his legacy has been sanitised and appropriated into the kind of folk scene in a way that I think has rendered it toothless. But Banner was not toothless at all and it felt quite exciting to be involved in that and to learn about that history and other aspects of the history. There's a huge crowd of people that came with Banner, and every one of them had something really interesting to tell me. As I went and studied with people or listened to people speak about the history of the company and what it had done when... Archived materials were around. It wasn't very well organised but Fiona, who ran the library, there's quite a lot of interesting stuff in there for projects. I'd be going and looking through it and finding all these amazing archived materials. So to see that the company had that long history was a blessing and a curse. The blessing part of it was it was something I could learn from, and the more I began to understand it the deeper and more profound and rich that got. The problem was that it went with a very sort of Stalinist cultural legacy of this is the way to do things, there's only one way to do things, and if you don't do it this way you're wrong. But I think that gradually broke down over the years I was there. It felt like that at the beginning but also as I say I think I was also a bit on the defensive about my own ability, so I think it tied into that as well. That was probably quite a difficult dynamic generally for people to work with, and I think it's to all our credit in a way that we managed to make it work and do what we did. So those were some of the sorts of things I guess were going on underneath it all in the first year that I was there. It's just an awful lot to take on. It was a huge, huge, huge thing to take on, and it was all focused on a tiny rump of what was left of a company that had previously had arts council funding and all that kind of stuff and had a legacy of knackered vans and broken equipment. It's all down to the kind of way that the arts is funded, and all that obviously did change not long after I joined.

Q: Can you tell us about the shows and projects that you were involved with? Can you tell us about Saltley Gate and the song show?

AJ: Saltley Gate was a great place to start and was really helpful in developing my understanding of the company and how it worked. For one thing, Saltley Gate is a narrative

piece, a really interesting narrative piece. It's structured like a radio ballad. This was my first exposure to the radio ballads and that whole methodology; I found out about the way that Charlie Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger developed them. It worked brilliantly as a piece, it's one of the best things the company had ever done. Even the boiled down version with the two Daves was inspiring. So there was this ready made piece in which myself and Dean had a role. I understood sort of what that piece did and what I was there for I think. In a way Dave did it so well, I think I actually performed in the song show, I don't think I performed in Saltley Gate if I remember rightly, at least not at that stage. So they had that piece and it was a great way to join the company and go on the tours with them and see how it worked, and then we'd do the newer songs as the second half of the evening. So that was in a way quite a good starting point. What Banner has that I think is unique now and certainly was rare then is the working class touring circuit. Most companies now, with the exception of certain key companies that do work with working class communities, do not have a working class touring circuit. They might talk about political theatre but they usually are either going to quite upper middle class venues, which obviously attract upper middle class audiences who even pay for a ticket, or they're working in settings where it's specific to a location. So they're doing really good work in one particular place with working class communities but rooted in a particular area, and the work can't tour for all sorts of different reasons. What Banner had was quite unusual with that connection with mining communities and with other union based communities. Now when I think of Banner I think it's particular strength is it's one of the very few companies that's sort of successfully managed to work with the trade union movement, and that's despite the trade union movement in this country being absolutely appalling when it comes to culture and cultural interventions in politics. It really is dreadful. The more I found out about the history of that and also of interventions on the left, cultural left ways of working abroad, the more Britain is really quite poor I think in that. So Banner had this amazing circuit and in my head it was mainly working men's clubs, mining communities and other communities in struggle, mainly white and working class, sometimes with other groups like Dean reminded me earlier on about the Kurdish communities we went to in Green Lanes in London, which was amazing. We'll come back to that in a bit if you want. I'd never been anywhere like that before. I grew up in a new town where everyone was kind of "classless" before John Major came up with that one before I did. So I'd grown up in an aura of, how shall I put it, well new towns were very

interesting social experiments. They were begun with the best intentions of providing decent conditions and work for ordinary people, but what happened was they were developed by corporations so they became perhaps more American in their culture. They're developed to suit car driving, they're atomised, there's not much collectivity in them, at least there wasn't in Bracknell when I was growing up there. There were people who might've thought of themselves as working class there, but on the whole the idea of working class solidarity was not something that anyone would come across. We were solidly middle class anyway. So to be exposed to that whole other world was amazing, it was inspiring, breathtaking really and quite challenging at times as well. We probably for a year or so must have toured around Banner's existing circuit and maybe picked up new gigs here and there, and it was a really interesting apprenticeship as I said earlier.

Q: So that was when you started doing the song shows?

AJ: If I remember, the song show that we did grew out of the need to provide a second half. Saltley Gate is about an hour long and it was very inspiring to leave everyone on a up, and then you need something to follow that. So you'd have an interval and maybe a speaker or two, and some would go on for a long time. In those days the room was really smoky, which is a wonderful thing that's changed recently. I used to try to see the audience through the haze of cigarette smoke in some of these places; it's very bad for you. So we needed something to follow it, and it wasn't that we were short of things to write about. Obviously, at that time Dave did the writing, and me and Dave Dale would do the arranging I think really. I'd been taken on with the expectation that Dave Dale would leave, and then Dave Dale didn't leave, which was great because he was terrific company and really great to work with and a good foil for Dave Rogers. On the one hand, they had this amazing double act on stage, which was really funny. They were like the kind of left wing version of Morecambe and Wise really or something. Dave Dale was also incredibly good at putting down hecklers. I've never forgotten the best ever putdown as far as I'm concerned, I can't remember which gig it was but someone had been having a go at us all night. Dave Dale ran through his entire repertoire of putdowns including quite nice gentle ones that were kind of like a warning. In the end he got a kind of list out of his pocket, just a piece of paper, not anything written on it. He said, hmm ways to deal with hecklers, and he started going through that. The guy still

wouldn't shut up. So in the end he looked around at the audience and he said, "some performers get a plant in the audience but only we get the vegetable", which sorted him out, as you can imagine. So all that learning how to deal with rowdy audiences, because they really were very rowdy. Some gigs people talked all the way through, we would get heckled, usually good-naturedly but not always, all those sorts of things. In that period, as you will remember, there was lots of stuff to write about. Dave Rogers was writing songs, churning them out really, and then me and Dave would rehearse with him and we'd try them out on an audience. We did start putting a slide show together with them as well, sometimes taking new slides, which I had some ability to do. I don't know if Kevin was contributing at that time, was he? Dean's nodding. So ya but the visual side of things did keep going because of course Saltley Gate had quite a well-structured slide show so I think we needed slides to go with the other songs. I'm sure we put things up, I can't remember for the life of me what they were, but we had the whole song thing going still. Those songs started to deal with the incompetence of a Tory ? government. One of the things I think I did bringing into the company that was new was an understanding of music technology. One of the things that I never quite got clear in my mind was I wasn't quite sure how to fit between Dave and Dave, because Dave was a far better and more experienced singer than I was and Dave Dale was a far better and more experienced guitar player than I was. Really my main instrument was the guitar and some writing and singing, so I wasn't quite sure how to make that work. So I diversified into other instruments, because I'd played a bass already, for example. But also I started using music technology and it enabled us to do some quite interesting things. For example, people watching us who have got long memories will remember John Major's catastrophic fuckup over Europe, which all sounds strange and contemporary now. You may remember that he went public or I think it was probably leaked actually that he'd called some cabinet colleagues bastards because they were trying to undermine him over Europe. It just shows how long all this has been going on. What we did is we took a, there's lots of recorded material of John Major that we had. I had a sampler and a small drum machine that I used to control it to make things play in order, and a keyboard, and we were able to make John Major say bastards by cutting up syllables of other things he'd said. So we had a lot of fun by having I think it was a conversation between Dave Rogers and John Major where I played the keyboard as John Major, so we had a bit of fun with that. Then one song that sticks in my mind, Dean reminded me of it

earlier, which gave the name to the whole song show, was the Green Green Shoots of Recovery, which is one of Dave's best songs, about how Norman Lamont kept prophesying that the recovery was just around the corner, and in fact what he actually did was lose about £14 billion down an asset hole, as I think it was labeled, on Black Monday or Black Wednesday or Black Friday or one of the many days where the government made a catastrophic financial mistake. So there was plenty of material and of course in the early 90s there was also an ongoing issue, which was the campaign against pit closures. So we had plenty of work to do, although much of it was unpaid. When it was paid it was very low paid, and it was quite hard work really, touring with that stuff.

Q: Could you say a bit about the pit closures?

AJ: In the 90s the Tory government decided to finish what it started in 1985, the ongoing grudge match, which is why Saltley Gate was so relevant, because that was what kicked it off really when the government decided the miners weren't going to win again like that. They were closing down pits. I can't remember the figures, and that can be got. But basically whole communities were being closed down. Obviously when you close down a pit, and the pit is the new major employer in that area, you don't just put people out of work, you destroy an entire community. It was vindictive – it wasn't economic, it was politics, it was hatred of those particular communities because of what they'd achieved when the took Ted Heath on. I think the government never forgot that, the Tories never forgot that, and they prepared for these struggles. Having crushed the NUM unfortunately fairly decisively in the miners' strike, they went back for the pieces as it were in the early 90s. They did that by importing coal mined by children from places like Colombia to undermine some of the most efficient coal mines in the world. Yes now we're concerned about climate change, but there was another way. The way to do it if those coal mines did need to close would've been to engage with communities to talk about alternatives. Let's face it, when someone who works in the financial sector is made redundant they get paid a huge settlement; if they wanted to retire on it, they could. Usually they go off, like George Osborne has recently, and earn millions doing a day a week for some horrible far right pressure group or something. But if ordinary people are laid off, nothing is put in place, they're just consigned to poverty. The impact on these towns, especially in the South Kirby coalfield where we were touring but

also in Stoke and Parkside and Newton, it was completely devastating and it still is. I live fairly near all these places still and I still have something to do with some of these communities. These towns have never, ever recovered, they never recovered. It's not that people there aren't enterprising or good at trying to sort things out, it's just that those towns came into being really for one reason, and nothing has been put in place. The vindictiveness has continued to the present day. Someone recently did a brilliant photographic exhibition of what's happened to some of the former mining sites, and basically they've been obliterated, they've been erased from memory. Some of them have been built usually with supermarkets and there's no trade, no memorial to any of these places. I've done a lot of work in Stoke over the last few years and went past Hem Heath a year ago. There's not really anything there to tell you that there was once a massive colliery there and obviously no people remember it really well. Newton Le Willows, Parkside for example, if I remember correctly they filled, Parkside could've kept going apparently for another 300 years. We may not have wanted to do that, but there was enough coal down there for years. Instead, they filled the shafts with concrete and rubble to make sure it can never be reopened. What does that tell you? It's nothing economic, it's class war. One of the things I think has happened in the last 20 years is the ruling class are Marxists and they understand class war, and they're waging it on the rest of us. Unfortunately, the propaganda and dissemination of information is so efficient on their side that it's really hard to get people interested in this idea of class war now. But that's what's happening. The ruling class understand the nature of what's going on. Sorry for the digression. So to get back to the campaign against pit closures, this was all foreshadowed in that period. We went around towns that tasted of coal. I've never forgotten that. It's the first time I'd been to anywhere where people mined coal. There was coal in the air on the wind – you could taste it, you could smell it. I came back smelling of coal dust. We did a lot of gigs but in one particular one we went around for a weekend, and if I remember rightly we must've gone to places like Armthorpe, Grimethorpe, and South Kirby probably. I can't remember all the different places we went to. We stood at pit camps that were set up by women against pit closures in support of their men, as the song went. We sang at the picket lines, we spent time around the braziers as it were. But we also did gigs in miners' welfares, and some of them were so smoky you could cut them with a knife. One of the positive things that happened in that period was there was a huge outpouring of working class and protest-led

culture. I still remember seeing a guy called Steve Cope, who took on John Major's thing about the classless society. I've got his album on cassette; it's a brilliant album, I don't know what happened to him. He deserved to be as well known as someone like Billy Bragg. He did this brilliant song called "I Thought I Was Working Class But Then I Found Out I Had An Attitude Problem". He was a really brave performer because Banner were quite well known in those communities. We got up and sang songs like Mardy, quite heroic, a little bit macho maybe, and it would go down well with the miners. Even some people knew the songs and could sing along. Steve was a new artist at that point, I don't know how much he'd done before. He was a great singer and a really good songwriter, and he stood up and sang one of his famous songs about a mining disaster, I think Christie Moore does it. It's the Scots one about the worst ever mining disaster in the UK; it's quite gloomy, obviously. Blantyre, the Blantyre explosion. He sang it a capella and of course everybody just talked through it. Then he sang called "I Thought I Was Working Class But Then I Found Out I Had An Attitude Problem", which is one of the funniest songs I've ever heard, and that got people's attention. So there was lots of good stuff happening like that. I came across people like Maria Tolly, who was doing the same circuit She's amazing. I'd seen her before without realising the benefit in it for antiapartheid in Oxford when the Bhundu Boys were playing as well. So I'd come across some of this but not much of before. That was a real eye opener for me, it was an education. Like I say, it was like a political apprenticeship as well as a cultural one. One of the things I remember was I sat down, the hospitality that people showed us was immense. Not only did we walk away with T-shirts and plates and all sorts of things but we were taken to people's houses, we were fed and watered. I remember sitting down with a guy from Armthorpe, so we must've gone to Armthorpe actually. She showed me his photograph album and took me through the photograph album from the 1985-1986 strike and told me about how the police had closed off the town for three days and effectively put it under siege for three days and not allowed any food or water in or anyone out. That's a story that you still don't hear much about. Effectively, that period was a period of civil war; I think that's how it can be understood. The reason why I say civil war is because the forces of the state were employed against a large insurrectionary section of the population. The miners were well organised and they were conscious in what they were doing, and they had a different agenda. They were on the defensive but they were fighting for specific aims. The state had prepared for that and was using the police force and by all accounts the army

dressed in police uniforms against them. There was a joke at the time, which was, how can you tell which coppers are soldiers? They're the ones whose helmets come down to their shoulders, i.e. they've got pinheads in their helmets. But what is know, thanks to Seamus Milne, is the MI5 were fully involved as agent provocateurs instigating violence and also following key people and undermining them in various ways. Obviously we don't know enough to go into some of the detail but the accounts that were given at the time by the press were horrendously biased. Even I was aware of that, even though I wasn't very involved or know much about the miners' strike at the time. I was probably young and also a little bit too naïve and sheltered. But even I remember, because I had a friend in America at the time and he told me that it was reported very differently in the States to how it was here, when the BBC famously reversed the footage that appeared to show that the miners had attacked the police first when we now know that the opposite was the case. That whole period I think for certain parts of the population was like a civil war. For somebody coming from my background, this was a complete eye opener in every way. I'd never experienced anything like that before, and that is despite having been involved in certain things as an activist and having been on certain picket lines and certain other kinds of activities, particularly Cruise Watch, which were not particularly fluffy as it were. Also I'd seen the Thames Valley police force who'd been on picket lines, they were used against student demos which I've been on. So I'd seen how the police behaved. They broke up student demonstrations with the same enthusiasm that they broke up miners' demonstrations, so I'd seen some of that going on. But I think when confronted by the photographs that that miner showed me and those stories, it's really quite astonishing. You did hear as well about things like roadblocks on motorways and so on, and I think that's a civil war. So it was very heady and exciting; let's face it, these things are exciting. On the one hand you're fighting for something you believe in and you've got the prospect of hopefully a better world around the corner and also an amazing sense of solidarity and people who don't have to pretend about things. It's really important and I think that's one of the dangers of it as well is that too often on the left in Britain we like to go down singing. We've had glorious defeat after glorious defeat, which is tiring after a while, exhausting actually. So we keep our spirits up by remembering the odd victory and also some of the glorious defeats. There's a lot of very powerful stuff about the miners marching back to work; it was a defeat. So it's very mixed, all that, it's very emotional to think about it now and, as I say, quite an education for

somebody who'd come from a different kind of activism into that very sort of direct confrontational kind of stuff.

Q: Let's move on to Sweat Shop.

AJ: There was an upturn in the company's fortunes and I think that partly possible because of all the work we'd done previously. One of the things I felt I could bring to the company was a kind of renewal of some of the forms that we were working with, using technology a bit more and so on. So the company started to grow again, which was really nice, and it was time to start thinking about big projects again. One of the things of course that changed the situation enormously was the advent of the lottery, so we were able to put in quite a large-scale lottery application. If memory serves, I think Jan had joined about that time to help with that; I've got a vague memory of that. Also Jacqueline had given us some input into it in terms of how to manage the company better, which must have been really difficult. But actually what she taught us was really useful and I've used it ever since. I hadn't appreciated up to that point that you can actually plan projects in a particular kind of way, so it was really helpful. I think by that time we'd probably moved into the Friends' Institute by that time, we'd got a base that was really important, and we'd started to look more broadly at what we wanted to do. This was obviously led by Dave Rogers at that point, who was using his experience and knowledge to think about the wider issues. He always had a sense of the bigger picture I think in that context. Even though we didn't really have job titles, for obvious reasons, Dave was the de facto artistic director. In fact, it might've been easier in some ways if he'd had that job title, we'd have probably spent less time quarrelling. I didn't quite appreciate I think at the time how much sort of political knowledge and skill goes into thinking about what's the most effective issue to campaign on, what is it that we really need to be looking at; how are things changing in the world, not just in the UK. So Sweat Shop was very exciting for all sorts of reasons. The first thing that helped us was that getting the lottery grant that we did get enabled us to buy new equipment, including a van, because up to that point... I'm just beginning to wonder actually, my timing might be slightly out, because I remember touring Sweat Shop in that old red post office van. So the two probably ran together, we must've developed Sweat Shop and toured a bit of it and at the same time been doing the lottery bid to get more

equipment. I can't remember which came first because obviously without the lottery equipment we have struggled to mount Sweat Shop, I'm not sure exactly how that worked. But we definitely did some of Sweat Shop in the red post office van, because we went abroad to Ireland and Denmark in that van. The big white van must've come later, but it was all thanks to the fact that the lottery program had come onstream, because we had no core funding. But we did get funding from various places, I can't remember exactly where now. I do remember being involved in the tour booking and fundraising efforts, and that was again very educational as well. It's the first time I'd engaged with arts funding in that way. Booking tours was really interesting because you develop relationships with people over a long period of time, which helps sustain the company. Sweat Shop emerged out of Dave I think grasping that the global economy was changing. It was the first attempt to look at globalisation and how it worked. It was a really interesting project. It required a lot of research, so this was my first proper introduction to the Banner research method, which I think was really rigorous and interesting. During the period of working around the Green Green Shoots, Saltley Gate and so on, I'd begun to learn how to interview people. I also began to understand that the mainstream media are not neutral. The BBC, for example, makes great play of this idea of objectivity but of course it's not objective. In fact, academics recently have studied this and shown that it does have a right wing bias and it also has a pro Israeli bias. They've actually studied it so it's not a subjective thing, objectively it covers things in a more right wing way than left wing way and it also denies time to Palestinians whereas it gives time to Israeli spokespeople, and so on. All that was news to me as it were at that point. I thought the BBC was kind of impartial and accurate. It's not without its strengths but it's not impartial, and often completely inaccurate. I then began to pick up this philosophy of interviewing people, how you do it and what it means to be interviewing people in that particular way where you're aware of your own subjective role in that interview and you're aware of your biases or try to be aware of the biases you might bring to it. Because you're working with communities in struggle or communities of resistance, the whole point is that you're giving them a voice, you're letting them speak. That whole process was amazing because I got to interview some really interesting people. I can't really remember all the people we spoke to for Sweat Shop but I do remember doing some of those interviews myself. One person who was really inspiring was someone called Affiong Southey. I don't remember which part of Africa she was from, which is terrible, but she was

a very interesting and very good interviewee who opened my eyes to how globalisation works and how neocolonialism works. Dave interviewed these amazing Mexican women called Fuerza Unida. That whole process went alongside this expansion in our capacity to deal with material. For the first time, we had a proper computer. Up to that point I'd been using an Amstrad with its green letters on a black background to tour organise. It was a nightmare. But when we got this Apple Mac at the time it was state of the art. I had to go down to London to get it from what was then emerging as these sort of white-walled workspaces with hip people, mainly blokes, talking nonsense about gigabytes and things. It took quite a while to understand how this was going to change things. The first Mac that we got could record up to four tracks at once and it had a 168-megabyte hard drive or something like that, which in those days was enormous. Young people may laugh at this now, but 168 megabytes is massive, absolutely massive; the things you could do with that were amazing. We were using things that now I can remember were the beginnings of multimedia, so we were using a system called Hypertext with a program called Hypercard which enabled us to catalogue and file all the interviews in a really interesting way where you could relate one to another and index them in an interconnected way. It was really good. We also spent 800 quid on a one-gigabyte external hard drive that allowed us to record songs. It's hilarious looking at it now, but there was some really powerful software there, Sound Designer and Logic, and that enabled us to start interviewing people in a rather different way. It speeded up the whole process of editing. Up to that point of course it had to be done on tape and spliced. I've been shown about how that worked but I never really had to do it. So it was a very pivotal moment in the way that oral history, the arts, culture, all those things were really impacted by new technology. So armed with all that and with the research techniques that allowed us to use this superior quality of audio we could use as a result, we were able to put on Sweat Shop, which was a national touring product. We got in a director who also worked with us as an administrator and she's done very well for herself, Theresa Heskins. She's now director of the New Vic in Newcastle under Lyme. That's where Pete Cheeseman made his name. In the same era that Banner was doing this stuff Peter Cheeseman was director of that theatre company. He put on some quite interesting plays and Dave wrote the songs for one of them a bit later on. Theresa is not doing that kind of stuff, I haven't heard from her for years. But she did come and direct Sweat Shop for us, and that was very interesting. I think in some ways we did the best we could with limited

resources. One of the things I think that worked really well was it was a storytelling piece. It wasn't really designed to be acted, which was just as well, because none of us were actors. I'd never worked on anything like that before so I remember finding things probably quite difficult and baffling in some ways and I was probably quite annoying, I'm sure I was quite annoying at times. I think Dave Dale and Theresa Heskins were just telling me at one point, just say yes Aidan; say yes, don't say no. I think I got really stuck on something in rehearsal, but anyway we worked our way through that, amazingly enough. The other good thing about that was because we had the funding to do it we were able to expand the company and audition for performers who were from outside the range of people that Banner had worked with already. This is really, really important because this is when Paula Boulton and Helen McDonald got involved. Unfortunately, Helen only stayed for that one production but she had an amazing presence and an amazing voice, and transformed the look and feel of the company and the way it worked on stage. Paula Boulton obviously stayed for a bit longer and contributed immensely to the development of the company. Paula Boulton was kind of what we'd lacked before really, which is someone who had the politics and more, because Paula's a lesbian so she took on a whole load of issues within the company, which was difficult at times but it had to be done. Right from the start there were a whole host of misunderstandings about that, by the way. I think we'd done a gig at Corby and Paula had come to see the company, because Paula's from Corby. Because me and Dave Dale were bantering I think she got the impression that at least one of us if not both of us was gay. She actually rang me up when she wanted to do an audition to say what was the homophobia like in the company, at which point I had to admit I had no idea because I wasn't gay. Nevertheless, she did apply. One of the interesting things about companies like Banner is you live out the politics that you believe in. It's quite a struggle because everyone's coming from different areas of experience and understanding at any given time. Our life experiences obviously have informed us in the way that we behave towards each other. So you have to work all those things through and I've since realised this goes on in most companies where there's any commitment to actually trying to do something worthwhile. So at the time it seemed tough but also we were all working towards a common goal and I think that kept it going, kept us together. Also Paula, to me, was a tremendously supportive presence. I think Paula's real strengths, and she had many, she had two great strengths. One of them was she's actually a really good director, interestingly. So on the road she worked

really well as the person who sort of corrected issues and things that arose on the road in terms of the way the play was presented. And she had quite a wide range of experience I think; it certainly felt like it. Also, she for some reason saw some unrealised potential in me and gave me some skills and tools which helped unlock that. So I'm profoundly grateful to her for that, because it was a really important part in the apprenticeship as it were that I referred to earlier. Paula was really kind to be actually. She could've gone the other way, she could've thought, oh bloody Aidan's a pain in the arse. For some reason I think she saw something and helped me get it out, and that made a big difference to everybody. She also, we've kind of had a skill sharing. I've never really found it a problem improvising musically. I might not be very good at it but I've not found it a problem, whereas Paula was a highly trained baroque violinist and recorder player. Can you imagine, how on earth did she come to want to join Banner? This is where the politics is also part of the story. She's a fabulous musician but she couldn't improvise at all. She could come up with tunes in her head and she'd have to write them down before she could play them. We did sort of play around with improving a bit. I had a rudimentary knowledge of reading music and she helped develop that, which has proved really important later in life – it's a really useful skill for someone doing what I'm doing now. So she was really vital in that process. I'm sure she could be really hard to work with but from my point of view she was actually a very supportive person to have in the company. She was also quite committed to sorting out problems, but she did also challenge us all in various different ways. So it was a very interesting company. I think from the inside I think it felt at times like quite a difficult group of people but quite a committed group of people. The other person I should mention is Sam Yates, who came on board for the first part of the tour. I can't quite remember how that happened because we did have Dean, so I think there might've been some politics around that. Anyway Sam Yates was very good, she was a really competent technician and she brought a different vibe in as well. When we toured that first section in Sweat Shop it seemed to go well, it seemed to be very well received. I'm sure it had some rough edges and I do remember certain ex members of the company putting it down for various reasons. But I think one of the interesting things about that is you get into the whole area of aesthetics, don't you? This is a problem that is plaguing political theatre at the moment I think. The Arts Council-funded stuff and the stuff that's produced by well established or people with arts educations, people who've worked their way up through the arts, might not have done an actual job

that's outside the arts, there's a particular set of values that goes with creating work. One of them is they want well constructed plays, as they're called, despite all the things that people like Bertolt Brecht did and loads of different other traditions of making work. You go and see a play that's labeled political now and it still falls into the trap of either trying to resolve things or just leaving people feeling comfortable and not challenging them… Obviously you can't challenge people to the extent that they all walk out, but I do think most mainstream theatre when it thinks it's political is actually just giving people, might be telling interesting stories but it doesn't promote change or activism. But Banner adopted the form that I think was both appropriate to the resources at the time and the skills of the company but also connected directly with people who aren't really that interested in good acting. Nearly every actor I've ever met is shit at acting something of this nature, because nowadays actors are drawn from an increasingly small circle of very well-off people and their life experience is lacking and again thanks to Brecht, often prefer to work with non-actors as do people like Ken Loch, because you can bring different things out of those people. If the director knows what they're doing you can bring out really interesting things from people who have strong life experiences even if they can't "act". However, having said that I can't act, I don't think. Musicians aren't necessarily good actors; there's a lot of interesting things in that. But basically the storytelling form was right for the time, it got a message across. Of course the really key thing is the actuality is integrated in a very particular way so that we're not speaking for people, we're sort of having a conversation with people and relaying their voices. In those days of course it was all audio but we had still pictures; that dimension is invaluable. I think one of the many ways in which theatre has gone backwards is that we now have this dreadful thing called verbatim theatre, which makes me want to scream every time I see a piece or hear a piece, where the same kind of actors as I mentioned earlier speak people's lines that have been recorded in research. They just don't use the bloody interviews in that way anymore. Nine times out of ten I just cannot understand why. Sometimes it's necessary because people may have given things in confidence. There's certain people, like asylum seekers for example, who when you go and record them they might not want that recording used in that way. Nevertheless, I've even seen companies where white actors have given voice to black parts. It's crazy. We're going back a hundred years when that happens, and it happens a lot. It's really frustrating. So Banner's particular approach during Sweat Shop was deliberately simple and accessible. It was a storytelling

form, the songs had tunes you could sing along to. We were prepared to go off the script, heckling was okay as long as Dave Dale was there to deal with it. Which he wasn't, was he in that show? No hang on a minute, was he in Sweat Shop? No he wasn't in Sweat Shop. But anyway, I think that was around the times when Dave Dale decided to leave, but it's so confusing now; you have to ask him. So the four of us I think worked well enough together to project all that and to project those stories. The other interesting thing was that we got accused a lot of the time to preaching to the converted. Actually it's far more complex than that, because we raised quite a lot of issues in that play. Quite often at the end of the play there'd be quite a lot of discussion going on about the issues that we'd raised, and there would never necessarily be agreement about it. I came into the company, for example, not understanding anything about what was going on in Ireland. I had a huge education in terms of understanding the struggle in Ireland to the extent that I gained the confidence to go off on a Troops Out delegation, which you will remember. We went to Belfast, and that was a really important point in my political education that probably wouldn't have happened without Banner. Ireland divided audiences like nothing else. We sang songs in Sweat Shop that referred to people like Bobby Sands, and we'd have more arguments about that at the end because the hunger strike and so on was still fresh in people's memories at that time. So we'd have loads of arguments about that. So we weren't preaching to the converted, we were preaching to a group of people who understood the nature and need for solidarity but really didn't understand racism, for example, which to be fair I didn't probably understand either myself. So not only I was being educated, we were educating ourselves and we were in a dialogue with audiences where we were sharing these experiences, sometimes successfully and sometimes less successfully, where debates would open up about racism, about migration, about Ireland and so on, and there'd be some quite big arguments sometimes at the end of the shows. Those I think were fairly fruitful on the whole. One of the interesting things is you never know how people change. Long term political change is a really strange and difficult process to evaluate. You only find out years later if you meet someone who says, something really changed me, that that particular person was reached by something. So I think one of the things that Banner had going for it was it kept going back to the same people, the same communities, and still does as far as I know. That means that the possibility for long term change is that much greater. But the style of the company also promotes long term political education and change in another context, even though we

never engaged in what's now called participation or engagement or workshops, we didn't really do that, we just had discussions at the end of the show.

Q: You went to Denmark with Sweat Shop.

AJ: Yes we did. I can tell you a lot about that but you've got to cut me short if it goes on too long. Sweat Shop being an international play, somehow attracted some interest internationally. So we went Ireland and Denmark in the old red post office van that I referred to earlier. The red post office van needs to be acknowledged and mentioned in this history. No one in their right mind would buy a van off the post office really; I don't know how that happened. If you do find out how that happened, let me know, because they're knackered aren't they. Not only that, it was a Leyland DAF van and they were notoriously shit anyway as far as I remember. So we had this big old red post office van that Nirmal adapted. We had the kind of dark dingy bit behind the driver's seat we could sit in, and with any luck now and then you might get a glimmer of daylight out of the front. We had speakers in it, we got the Bose speakers for the PA system in the van, which meant they got nicked when the van got broken into. They were the small monitor speakers, not the big ones. Then in the back was this big kind of compartment for gear, which was always just totally chaotic when you'd arrive somewhere. It had a kind of interesting random steering mechanism. I speak as one of the drivers here as well. What you did was you held onto the steering wheel for grim death, grim life, and just hoped that the van would follow a more or less straight path down the road. Dean's nodding his head, you know what I'm talking about. It just about did the job and it was all we could afford until we got the big white van that I referred to earlier. So in this van we did thousands of miles – we went to Scotland and Ireland and then Denmark. Certain things stick in my mind. One of them was going to Scotland over Beattock Pass in a snowstorm in a van with ? steering. It was a nightmare. Spud, bless him, who I think had done the tour organising for the Irish gigs, had not quite taken into account how slow the roads were in Ireland. Obviously there are more motorways in the republic now but in those days there was precious little in the way of modern infrastructure, so it took hours to get anywhere. Driving around Ireland was quite interesting and a fair few things stick in the mind there. One of them is going to Carlow. Of course on the way down there we we'd all be singing, follow me up to Carlow, and all that

stuff. When we got there we were met by an interesting character who was the person who booked the gig, who told us he didn't have much hopes of anything happening because Michael Collins, the Irish boxer not the Irish revolutionary freedom fighter obviously, Michael Collins was fighting Chris Eubank that evening. Dean's nodding. It was St. Patrick's Day the day after. We were booked into this pub with a theatre downstairs. There were 150 people upstairs all chatting and cheering, downstairs we had an audience of three. One of them was Polly Donnellan, Philip Donnellan, the documentary filmmaker's daughter, who was putting us up that night. The others were two women, two gay women, who'd come because they thought we were the theatre company Gay Sweatshop. The only thing we could do was say, look, what do you want us to do? In the end we agreed to play the songs, so we did the songs and then we went back to Polly Donnellan's, who taught us loads of jigs. I can still play some of these jigs and reels she taught us. We stayed up drinking Powers until about 4 o'clock in the morning and then drove to Waterford or somewhere. It was interesting touring Ireland. In the north we'd gone to a trade union venue in the south of Belfast, so it was very protestant. We went to Derry, which was a fascinating city, and at that time had a wall around it rather like the one that the Israelis have built around Palestine now, and it had watchtowers. Anyone growing up on the mainland UK who hasn't been to Derry or Belfast in that period just had no idea what was going on. The whole of Derry was under constant surveillance by the British armed forces. There was a kind of ring of steel around the town, and it had these old city walls anyway. It had watchtowers, terrifying watchtowers. They weren't nice little castle-like watchtowers, they were huge steel constructions with things that prevented people from lobbing grenades in, and all sorts of surveillance gear and electronic equipment on top. It was more like Greenham Common. I used to be involved in the campaign against Greenham Common, and it was like that but worse. So that was an eye opener. I think we were guests of Sinn Fein basically there, looked after by this really interesting guy who did things like he took us over the border through the back routes. We went up to a castle in Donegal, a 2000 year old castle, and looked down over the whole of the west of Donegal, beautiful. Then drove back the main route through back to a checkpoint, which was absolutely fascinating. They didn't like our van, either; the army didn't like this big red van. When we boarded to go back on the ferry to the UK they decided they'd have a good look inside. They pulled us over and made us stop, opened the back, then everything kind of reeked, a whole week's worth of unwashed socks. So they

said, right, on your way. The Denmark thing was fascinating for many reasons. One of them was that we would get to the Danish trade union movement, and that was an eye opener. The Danish trade union movement was preposterously well funded by our standards, and had these fantastic educational schools, including a place called LO Skolen. I think LO was labour organisation basically; I can't do it in Danish but it's the same initials. That was beautiful, a modern building, and it compared very interestingly with schools in the UK like the one in Whalley Range that used to be the GMB College, which we'd been banned from because of this play. Remind me to come back to that. So the performances there were very well received, very well funded, very well supported. If I ever see another bit of Danish cheese or sausage again I'll probably bring it all back. Although we were all well looked after, it was like breakfast was sort of cheese and sausage, lunch was cheese and sausage, and then supper was cheese, sausage and fish. These are the things you remember when you're on tour. One of the other things that was interesting was they have a very different way of showing their appreciation. Luckily, we'd been given a guy there called Frank who I think was possibly the Danish equivalent of the SWP or something, because he had all these newspapers full of articles. One of the articles really made me laugh and also made me realise what it might be like to come to Britain from somewhere like the Congo. It was allegedly an interview with a typical working class English family, and actually they'd picked a family of 11 who were on benefits. It's a bit like you get on Channel 4 now. I said to Frank, you realise that's not what most people are like, don't you? That was really strange. There was also an exhibition in one of the schools of photographs from Liverpool, which at that time was just being "regenerated". It was very interesting because the title of the exhibition was Liverpool, Privatised Dictatorship? So anyway, very well looked after. But Frank explained beforehand that when audiences in Denmark like something they stamp their feet, so we luckily realised we weren't being barracked off, that they really appreciated it. This is despite the show not being in Danish. I know the Danes are very good at English but I don't think a lot of the people who came to the LO Skolen and all the other places that we went spoke much English. So Frank gave a brief introduction to each section and somehow the whole thing worked really well; the Danes seemed to get it. So that was a very positive experience for us. In fact, I've spoken to other friends of mine who've toured abroad and the same thing is always the case – we seem to be much better appreciated in other countries than we are in the UK. So a couple of other things were interesting about that

tour. Firstly, on the ferry over, Dave and I were sitting eating, Dave Rogers and I were sitting eating, I don't know where everyone else had gone. We noticed that there was a whole section that was reserved in the ferry, like a mini-cruise I think. They had really nice stuff on their tables, chocolates and things like that, little gift boxes. We were dressed quite untidy, we were scruffy looking. Dave had an old leather jacket on and I think I might've done as well. Dave said, I really have to eat some of those chocolates. So he went over, because the tables were not occupied and it looked like most people hadn't come in. So he said, oh I'll have some of those chocolates. He went over and got some chocolates and came down and we started eating them. This huge Danish bloke from the mini-cruise came over and obviously was going to remonstrate, tell us off. They're quite good at that. It was wrong what we did, I confess it was wrong. So we stood up to apologise and the guy looked terrified and skedaddled. So there was a lot of that sort of thing. Touring is really stressful; brings out the worst in everybody, including me. You get really tired, you drink too much, you don't sleep enough. Well I drank too much and didn't get enough sleep, I can't speak for anyone else. Personal relationships can get a bit fraught now and then but there are some really nice things that happen as well, so it's certainly a bonding experience. The other thing I remember about Dave is he always used to eat leftovers from other people's plates. People are nodding again, so let that be on the record if Dave denies it. We were hungry, we never had quite enough money because even though it was funded and we had some income, actually it's quite expensive and it was underfunded as is always the case, and that's the reality of it. So we were sort of a bit unwashed, a bit underfed, and every so often something amazing would happen and we'd be put up in a really nice place and go on a tour of Danish trade union schools where we were treated like rock stars and given loads of beer. Crates of beer would appear before the gig; that doesn't happen often. Again a really incredible experience for me, still part of my apprenticeship really I think, very emotional at times though were things that the tour brought up that were quite upsetting in some ways. We got to know each other really well and told each other things that you don't trust everybody with. I think some of the reasons why I'm still involved with Banner and still keep in touch with people to this day is because of those bonds that you make in that sort of situation. People have massive fallings out and happily in most cases, not in every case but in most cases, recover from them and maintain the relationships thereafter.

Q: Can we move on to the Criminal Justice show?

AJ: Well yes we can. I'm not sure I can tell you a lot about that because I didn't tour with that show. That was Dave, Paula and Dave; Dave was brought back in. The sad thing about that is we lost Helen McDonald, because I think she thought she'd been cut out of it. It would've been good to have kept Helen onboard. But also I think the trouble was as well that funding is so difficult that touring larger shows is tricky. What we did that I think worked quite well in that period was I was given the job of developing the next show while they were on the road, which meant that we could work more quickly. So that made a certain kind of sense. There were certain misunderstandings I think at the time that I don't really feel the need to go into now because I think they mostly sorted themselves out, and other people might refer to them. But the Criminal Justice show was very interesting because we also brought in an outside writer, Stuart Brown, who was wonderful. I can't remember, I think he must have been known to the company before, I'm pretty sure he was. I can't quite remember how he was brought in but he was great. I think Sweat Shop had a great script, which I meant to say earlier, I think one of Dave's best scripts. It had a lot of really clever wordplay in it, made-up words like Great Gritbum and so on, loads of really great wordplay. The Criminal Justice play went one step further because Stuart is a "proper" writer – he's a playwright, he knows what he's doing. It was one of the funniest plays we did, really slapstick, really interesting because of that. I played a role in creating some visuals for it, and I have to say the visuals were probably not the best. I think maybe they were the best we could do at the time, but again technology was in a transitional moment then and I was still using slide technology. The slide projectors were lovely I think by the way; they create a whole ethos that's very different from video or animation. I think by that time we had a bank of six slide projectors that could be programmed in really interesting ways, and in some ways I miss using that sort of technology because it had a very interesting look. Anyway that aside, the pictures that I took, I think I had some ideas that would nowadays be really instantly realisable with Photoshop or the equivalent of and with all the software we have now. In a way I was trying to be too clever, so I was never totally happy with the slides that I produced for that. But they were trying to be a bit more ambitious with the narrative that we were making. I don't know if it was me, it probably was me, I introduced the idea of storyboarding. Maybe I just did it myself and the company had been doing it for years

before, I don't know. But we storyboarded Sweat Shop literally physically drawing out the slides; I did the same in Criminal Justice. So my role in that had been mainly to produce the visuals but also to work on the development of the next production. In a way I don't remember too much about it all but I do remember it touring quite widely, being very well received, and again being right on the mark politically because the Criminal Justice Act was a heinous piece of legislation. Large sections of it I think have been repealed now. It included stuff about clause 28 didn't it, or certainly at that same time. There was this attack on education and what you can teach people about same-sex relationships, which seems absurd nowadays but it was really horrible at the time. There was the attack on a whole class of music, which again seems utterly bonkers, totally extraordinary. It was deliberately aimed at so-called New Age travellers who were perceived to be playing a specific kind of music based on repetitive beats, which nowadays seems hilarious. Who in their right mind would ban music based on repetitive beats? All that would leave you with is a sort of bonkers ? atonal music from the weirdest 20th century composers and ambient music by ?. I like both those genres very much, but imagine banning anything with a repetitive beat, it's just impossible. So the company again had a field day with all that material, and it was one of the funniest things Banner had done in my time I think. It made the most of Dave Dale and Dave Rogers, this double act thing, but Paula fit very well into that and they played it very well in all sorts of ways. Again like all our shows, I think there was a bit of a running in period, but I remember seeing it a few times and just thinking how well it worked actually. The script was really good. I'm trying to remember anything else about it really. What it did get us involved in was it made links with a whole new group of younger activists, which was really important. I think that's how we found out about the Exodus Collective. We got involved with people working in the rave scene, which I freely confess was probably the first kind of music I completely didn't get, because I was getting a bit older. I got punk and all the rest of that, I got New Wave, I liked Clash and ?, but I just didn't get all that. I had no idea what was going on there, but to ban it was a form of insanity. The attack on New Age groups tied in with the attack on traveling people, which in a way was a deeper and more pernicious and almost fascist kind of racism that was deeply unsettling. It did a good job of tying all those issues together. Unfortunately it has left a legacy, which is that live music is now seen as a problem. I remember when I was living in Oxford I lived on this farm called Lower Whitley Farm, and there was a free festival that happened every year there. Bands

and people would just turn up, so some of the convoy would come there, they'd turn up and we'd have a great time. It was one long weekend a year, what was the problem with that? One of the weirdest and longest-term legacies of the Criminal Justice Act is the idea that live music is a problem, and we're seeing it now. I think the problem that the authorities and with live music is it's unpredictable, it's an agent for change, and it's also people having good fun. The other thing I think that is a desperately bad legacy of that Act is the discrimination that still exists against traveling people, who've almost been wiped out by it really. I've done work with traveling communities since then in the northwest and there are lots of strong and very ancient traveling roads up here. Settled people don't realise that they are the newcomers in some of these places where traveling people go to. The fact that there's now nowhere for people to park up as it were, to stop when the time comes, you get these things like recently there was a case of travelers being evicted from a school car park; they should never have had to park there in the first place. So these are some of the long term things that I think again Banner and the company generally saw as being implied by this ridiculous piece of legislation. So again, it was very much part of our political development and very much part of the capacity that we were developing to respond to the times. But I didn't tour with it.

Q: Did you record some of the interviews?

AJ: I might have done, I can't remember. I thought you were talking about the CD we did later. One thing I should mention quickly is of course what we've done as well, we've used our new studio technology to record music as we went, so we made a cassette; retro now, but we've got a cassette of Sweat Shop. They'd just done Elixir of Life when I joined the company, which is the music that I'd listened to when I came down to audition. So we did have cassettes to sell and stuff as part of what we did, as bands do. We recorded the whole Sweat Shop with some of the actuality included, so that was something that we were selling as it were. So that was very much part of the work that we did and that was possibly something I was able to bring to the company in that I'd developed those skills, which again was something that was really useful. That technology was new then so no one would've done it before, so I was able to get in on the beginning of it and learn as I went, along with

everyone else. Various other members of the company, including Dean, were involved in the studio sessions. That was really beneficial all around I think.

Q: Then you went on to the CD Rom.

AJ: Ya, probably best to come back to that in a minute, because that was such a difficult project.

Q: What about Redemption Song?

AJ: Redemption Song was the last major production that I toured with, and again that was very interesting, taking on a new topic but one that was implied by the other two big tours that we'd done, which is we started looking at migration. Sweat Shop looked at globalisation and Criminal Justice looked at the criminalisation of particular groups of people. In a way you've got both those issues in Redemption Song as it came to be called. The reason for that was that asylum and migration was just becoming a really big issue at that point, so again it seemed appropriate to look at that. We developed that over quite a long period of time. When Dave and Dave and Paula were off touring, I was still working on developing that, fundraising for it, and so on. I think we managed to get one of the largest set of grants available for that project that we'd ever had, which meant it was relatively well resourced. At the time, we were interested in working with outside writers and interested in trying to become more diverse, but it was really difficult to work out how to do that. I'm sure we made mistakes of various kinds. We had arguments about it. I think with hindsight we could've done that differently. One of the things I think was is I'd got very interested in the idea of bringing in people who were coming from very different sorts of backgrounds. I think Dave Rogers, understandably, in hindsight, was quite worried about that because of the politics of things. It's very hard to find people who both have the different points of view you might be trying to represent and to look for and that knew styles that you might want to engage with, and yet share your politics. So Redemption Song was just full of those problems. Some of this may be things that you don't want to make public at this stage, but we brought three new people in for Redemption Song. There was Amani Naphtali, who was great, at least from my point of view. I think he was the right choice as a director, politically

and in other ways. I know there was lots of difficult things about him and difficult times with him, but nevertheless he did quite a good job, and any black director would've challenged us on quite a lot of things, again seeing it with hindsight. The writer we brought in was C, and I think that was a mistake, to be quite honest. I think we didn't, or I take some responsibility, I don't think I understood what I was looking for or what we should be looking for enough. We didn't research her background properly as a writer. As it turned out, she was really probably the wrong choice completely. She had a very different way of working but also I think she found us difficult to work with; it probably cut both ways. That was a very fraught relationship and the script that she produced wasn't really up to the standard or up to what we wanted. Also, we found out later she'd plagiarised some of the script, which she was able to do because she was from the States and she'd seen stuff in the States that helped fill a gap in the play. There was a specific bit of writing that we came across that had been taken from some film or soap opera or something in the States. So that's something that maybe we need a 50-year Official Secrets Act thing, because I don't want to dis her because I don't know what it was like for her. But I think really she should not have plagiarised stuff actually, but I think she was under such a lot of pressure from both, probably from Dave and Amani. I don't know, I don't know what went on because actually they were very good to me, they kind of protected me to some extent from getting involved in those discussions. I was with the performing company and we had enough on our plate as it was. Dave had also made quite a courageous decision I think for him to not perform, which was really interesting. It's the first time he'd not performed in anything for ages. That was a big step for him and showed a lot of the ways in which he'd been changing and thinking about things. Instead, what we were able to do because he stepped down from that, is me and Paula kind of led the company. Again, I have to say Paula's role in all that was crucial. But we were able to bring in people with direct experience in what we were talking about. We had not one but two musicians from the Côte d'Ivoire, and they were wonderful – Leon Koffi and Firmin Gnali. They were fantastic. This was a key moment for me in my life because they taught me quite a lot that I've gone on to use since but also they were people who embodied... Up to then we'd represented people on stage by using their recorded voices, which is important and meaningful. But by doing this, we actually embodied what we were talking about; I didn't realise that at the time. This is something I've been thinking about recently with regard to other productions. By working with Firmin

and Leon we embodied the whole thing that was going on around asylum and refuge in that period. Me and Paula were white and they were black Africans from the Côte d'Ivoire. I should also mention, this is really difficult but quite funny as well, which is N, who was just completely the wrong choice really. We have to put our hands up and say we had responsibility for that as a company, but it was a complete disaster. Basically several things went wrong I think. One of them was that the time scale of this production clashed with various other things in a way that, had we been able to avoid, we should've avoided, but we make mistakes. For that reason we didn't audition enough people really for the central character that we needed. What we decided was that we would retain some of the storytelling elements and obviously songs but we also needed people who could act. So we auditioned for an actor, and the woman who we wanted became unavailable because she was doing something else. If we'd planned it better, the woman who was best in the audition could've gotten the role. Unfortunately, that didn't work, so we got N. Really lots of things went wrong there. I think partly it was that Maria Tolly, who was a musical director, and Amani were both strong characters and probably felt that they would be able to bring her on a bit. They probably saw some potential in her even though she's quite experienced, and they thought they could bring her on a bit. Secondly, I think she lied about her experience basically and I think she told a whole pile of shit actually. It gradually emerged that she'd basically done very little. She claimed she'd been in a band but actually I don't think she'd sung much. My memory of the audition is she sang for one of her audition pieces, What Would You Do if I Sang Out of Tune out of tune. Maria Tolly I'm sure, because Maria is a very experienced director, and we talked about this a while afterwards, and she was saying she felt at the time she'd be able to help that. Unfortunately, N was one of those very few people who was not able to be helped. For whatever reason, and it must have been very difficult for her in lots of ways and I'm conscious of that now, but for whatever reason N was not the sort of person who could take direction. I hark back to what I said about Sweat Shop, I know I had been a pain in the ass for Theresa in that process, so it's not an either or thing. But N couldn't take any direction at all. She was what actors call an energy vampire. She had this brilliantly ingeniously way of pushing other people offstage. When the piece was blocked, in other words when we had to move in a certain place, she always extended the range of the movement that she was expected to undertake slightly further so that you'd be given less space to work in; she may not have even been conscious

she was doing it. So that production had a lot of problems and it's amazing that we managed to overcome them. So we got the script to work, I think Amani and Dave took a hatchet to it and probably spent sleepless nights sorting it out. N lasted half the tour and then left. I think we'd got to the point where we were actually preparing to undergo sort of a mediation process with her, because she was a complete nightmare to work with really, and she left of her own accord. She didn't want to undergo this mediation process, because I think for one thing she'd have had to have seen there was something to be mediated and it would've been difficult. She and Amani, it wasn't just the company, she and Armani fell out completely over the politics, over the black issues of the time. This is interesting with hindsight, which is that Armani wanted to talk about political blackness, which is an analysis that I would share and organisations like Virtual Migrants that I work with would share. There's this idea of the concept of being politically black; whether or not you use the word black in that way now is neither here nor there. The idea is that racism is a construct and that it's done on the basis of a whole group of people in terms of power and prejudice in the old definition that still holds true. N was what you might call an identity politician if you like. She kept saying, I'm not black, I'm Southeast Asian. So N and Amani were like that over this differing view of blackness or what race constitutes. So there was a whole load of things going on there that again kind of we were living out the debates that were going on at the time. Anyway, what saved the piece I think was partly that N left and we were able to bring in a woman called 'Funmi Adewole, who was a stunningly brilliant Nigerian actor and dancer. She was amazing, she was everything we needed. If she'd been there at the start it would've been very different; she was just not available for the audition at the time. So she was able to come in and rescue the piece really, because it had sort of worked but N had taken it in a very strange direction at times I suppose is one way of putting it. It also meant that the rest of us were now playing to our strengths as well. This was my one and only real experiment with acting. I don't think I was the world's greatest actor really. In a good company I'm sure I could hold my own, but in the company of N I probably wasn't much help, shall we say. Anyway, when 'Funmi came in she brought a whole lot of energy plus the fact she was an astonishingly good dancer, she's a professional dancer. Leon is a master drummer so all that began to work properly for the first time and it brought the thing to life. All the soukous music that was imbedded within it, because for the first time we'd also written songs a bit more collectively, so we had Firmin and then myself and Leon and Paula

all contributing to the music, which gave it a greater breadth of style. Soukous was quite something to learn. I had to learn to play soukous guitar. Firmin had two music degrees. He had a degree from the University of Abidjan in the Côte d'Ivoire and then he had a degree from the Sorbonne. He'd look at me and say, Aidan can you play this? I'd say, well ya I can try. So anyway he taught me how to play soukous up to a point. I've got better since as well. So that was a really amazing thing to be introduced to. But also they were great in lots of ways. They were a pain in the arse like everyone is, but they also brought a whole new vibe, a whole new energy to it; they were young. There was this brilliant parody of The Girl From Ipanema which Firmin sang and we did quite a lot of schools. The impact was quite funny. We started teasing him because he had such an impact on the young women in the audience. There was a whole lot of other stuff going on around sexual politics and things. There were still some issues, but nevertheless the piece picked up and started working properly when 'Funmi joined. 'Funmi was inspiring. The only thing 'Funmi couldn't do was sing, but given that she could act brilliantly and dance, that was fine and we worked with her. The one song where she really had to sing, Paula sang it with her and it was fine. She wouldn't be the first actor who can't sing. The way she couldn't sing was in a totally different place than the way N couldn't sing, and also she knew she couldn't sing, she never said she could sing. So she was willing to work with Paula. The whole thing was an absolutely massive experience in so many ways that it's difficult to get it all into a video interview. There's probably just one or two other things that might be worth mentioning about the piece. I think one of the really interesting things was, because Firmin and Leon were seeking asylum at the time, they couldn't legally be working. I'm not sure that was true at the time, but anyway what it did mean was that one week Leon would be asked to report to an Air France flight leaving from Heathrow at a certain time. So we actually ran an anti-deportation campaign when we toured, but it also sometimes meant they weren't with us. So we developed this really interesting technique that I've actually used since, of becoming an ensemble and learning to make the piece work in some form regardless of who was or wasn't there. Sometimes Firmin couldn't be there and sometimes Leon couldn't be there, and now and then neither of them could be there. Full marks to C because whatever else she was, she was a trooper I think the word is. There was a time when she came in and read the part for us, I think it might've been after N left and before 'Funmi started. We kept it going somehow even when Firmin and Leon couldn't be there. We were able to use that

politically by saying, this is piece is normally performed by five actors but we've only got three tonight because. So I think it became really powerful because of that. We did hundreds of gigs, it felt like it. I might ask Dean, how many do you think we did? It was a very long tour and, a bit like Sweat Shop, it sort of happened in more than one section. It was very much in demand so we kept picking it up and it probably lasted a couple of years. It was a really important experience in my life. The whole process was fraught but kind of came out okay in the end perhaps. The whole methodology that emerged from it and being able to tour and perform it even if two of the key people weren't there became crucial to other things I've done and to kind of a way of keeping a political show on the road in difficult circumstances. So that's probably the main thing about that. We did so many gigs it's quite hard to remember particularly outstanding ones here and there. I remember little details like trying to smuggle an extra person into a bread and breakfast, but I don't remember why there was an extra person, and so on. Stories like that, lots of stories like that.

Q: What about Exodus at the doors of the HAZ Manor?

AJ: That's really interesting. The Exodus Collective were a group of people we encountered through doing Criminal Justice. They were a collective who had emerged as a response to police repression of black communities in Luton. They were a dance collective and they'd taken over HAZ Manor. It wasn't called HAZ Manor before. What did it stand for, can you remember? Housing Action Zone, right, so they were working around homelessness as well. They were very interesting politically. We went and did Redemption Song for them in HAZ Manor and that was very interesting. They had an outdoor stage, and Dean can probably remember it. The whole thing about that collective was fascinating and it was an interesting show to do. I'm not quite sure how we went down. I think they sort of quite liked it. One of the songs that we did in the show was about the Exodus Collective. I'm not quite sure how they felt about it being reflected back to them like that, even though we did work with them obviously to do that. So it was quite interesting going back to them. I remember the show being outdoors and it became quite a party afterwards I think, which was nice. The other memory I have of than, again I don't know if this one needs to be kept secret for 50 years or not, but they grew their own skunk, which in those days was super strong. I remember Leon

perhaps having a bit too much of it the night of the gig, and the next morning when we were due to leave he came downstairs. We were all having breakfast in this old collective space that they had. I remember him picking up a knife and then doing that as if he was trying to get the marg out of the marg tub, but not actually connecting. So he sat there for about a minute doing that while we looked and him and then helped him out. He'd really had too much, he was quite out of it. Luckily, he wasn't the driver; I was the driver. By that time we had the big white van though, so the big white van revolutionised our touring lives. It was brand new, very shiny, had a comfortable passenger compartment, and a huge compartment at the back for the gear so the gear didn't end up all messed up. So there are probably a lot of other things that I could remember about that if prompted, but for now we don't need to go into them. But we did so many gigs, probably more gigs than we did for Sweat Shop but again without looking at a diary it would be hard to say. We covered the same touring circuits, we covered a lot of places, but we also went to a lot of new places. Actually I have remembered one thing that I will mention, which is we went to the West Country. That was fantastic because you might think going to the west country would be difficult with a play like this, because it's predominantly white. But the people who booked us were all solidarity groups who were working in solidarity with migrants and refugees, so we got really well looked after. When we went to Plymouth, for example, there was a West African group who were involved and cooked proper West African food. So Firmin and Leon, it's probably the only time they felt they'd actually eaten properly on the whole tour, which was lovely. On the flip side of that is me, Paula and 'Funmi that went out for lunch in Plymouth. We found the old town of Plymouth. Most of Plymouth is very new but a bit of it was zoned for preservation so there's an old town by the harbour. We went to the One World Café in the old town, thinking that might be quite a good place to eat. The woman who was serving asked me and Paul what 'Funmi would like to eat. We just laughed. What can you do? So that was quite an interesting moment. Bristol was interesting because actually Bristol does stand out as one of the better gigs, again Bristol being the kind of town it is. But Bristol, it's the only time on the whole tour that Firmin bought a drink for anyone else. The reason that happened was there was a bit of role reversal going on. Firmin and Leon had a really tough time in a lot of ways, as had 'Funmi, but 'Funmi was British so she kind of understood the culture a bit more. We'd be taken out to places after the gigs and then Firmin and Leon would have to cope with looks, comments, all that sort of stuff. It was

hard for them. Also they weren't getting the kind of food they liked; food is really important on tour. Even though we'd send riders out saying, yes we're vegan vegetarian and meat-eating and so on, the things that would happen on tour would be one night you'd get a cheese sandwich, which of course Paula couldn't eat. The next night we'd be taken out for a three-course dinner before the gig, which meant none of us could perform properly, so it was really difficult. Then the other thing that would happen is if we did get some decent veggie food all the bloody carnivores would eat it, bastards; I want that on record. Anyway, so Firmin and Leon were off on the short end of the food situation, which is not easy. When we went to Bristol we went over to Easton afterwards, which has got a large African community in it, and we went to a shebeen. It's the only time I've seen Firmin really comfortable, and me and Paula went with him. We were the only white people in the room so I think people probably thought we were police officers or something. Were you there too? I've just edited Dean out of history; he can get his own back when he's interviewed. Dean came with us, sorry Dean. Dean, me and Paula were the only white people in the room. We were looked as though we were probably police. I don't think they thought Dean, they can't have thought you were police, because Dean doesn't look like a police officer by any stretch of the imagination. I think I might have passed as in plain clothes or something. Then Firmin and Leon, Firmin bought us all drinks. Honestly it's the only time that ever happened. To be fair, they needed the cash and were probably sending some of it home, I don't know. It wasn't an issue, but it was just funny because they were smiling, they were happy. They were introducing us, they were making friends talking about the play. So it wasn't uncomfortable for very long but I did get a taste of how it must have felt for them every night of the tour more or less. The other thing that would happen of course is they'd get terribly well-meaning people coming up and asking them inappropriate questions. I've just remembered something else that happened, which is I got blown off a ladder in Norwich by an electric shock, so we improved our health and safety policy after that.

Q: Where was that?

AJ: That was, no that was Redemption Song, ya. Some of the other joys of touring. I checked all the gear I was wearing and was wearing gloves, which probably saved my life. There was

a tiny nick in a lighting cable, which can happen very easily. So that was Redemption Song and there's a lot more to be said about it I'm sure.

Q: You don't want to say any more?

AJ: I can't remember any more, there's so much to it. If other things come up later or if Dean prompts me, I'll come back to it.

Part 2 after break (now Tim interviewing)

Q: Talk about technology and projects. Could you talk about the CD Rom project that came out?

AJ: The CD Rom project actually came out of Sweat Shop, or the idea did. One of the questions that we always had was, we've got this interesting archive of actuality and it's very powerful and interesting stuff – how can we make more use of that? In the course of the period between Sweat Shop and Redemption Song, one of the things I was doing was trying to understand and develop the use of some of these new technologies. It was a bit of an extreme learning curve, it was actually quite difficult for various reasons. Firstly, nobody around really understood it. We were working with various different companies. There was Tony Stanley and his company and then there was a guy at Macclesfield called Dave Addison. Tony and his son were a kind of multimedia company and were alert to some of the possibilities of what you could do with it, but they too were kind of finding their way. Dave Addison was developing something to control all the different elements that go into creating a theatre show. Actually both of these things became a bit difficult because, without going into a whole long story, one of the things is we were all very inexperienced in that. Although I got the kind of job to go and research some of it, half the time I didn't have a clue what I was doing. In terms of working with Tony, their agenda changing and the kinds of things they were talking about tended to shift because of the nature of the constantly changing technology. Dave, as it turned out, the show control system that he was developing had already been made by somebody else, so when it came to Redemption Song I think we did have access to a show control program that had been written already. There

was a lot of time wasted in researching those things and of course with the benefit of hindsight it would be possible to do it a lot better. But at the time it was quite difficult I think to understand where to look and who to talk to and how to develop it. CD Rom is now a dead technology, amusingly, but for about ten years it was a very interesting interactive format. You'd get a disc like a CD, you'd put it in a computer, and you could navigate your way through the disc. There's also all sorts of interesting learning possibilities. So given that we wanted to use our archive of recordings in a particular way, we thought there was a place for an educational CD Rom that could be used in schools. The development process was really difficult, partly because there were very few CD Roms that had been done like that already. One reason why we were talking to Tony Stanley was because he produced something that I think went by the name of the Black Knowledge Media Base or something like that. What he'd done is created a simple CD Rom, simple interactive thing that you put in your computer and then you could navigate your way around certain aspects of black history, which was really interesting. Interactivity is interesting because it allows you to make certain connections for yourself and it also allows you to combine media. You can have a whole lot of written stuff there, you can interviews, music, film, whatever, you can put it all together. You have to remember, young people watching this now, remember there was a time before the Internet. Although the Internet sort of existed in the 90s, it wasn't the Internet we know and love today. It was virtually impossible to download anything from it, websites were in their infancy if they existed at all, and it was essentially just used for email. That was a whole palaver where you had to be prepared not to accept any phone calls while you checked your email, and then it would make that famous modem dialing tone, and then gradually your in box would fill with emails. If anyone had actually attached something to the email it would take about three hours to receive it. So at that stage we're talking the early days of the Web in any useful form. So CD Rom enabled you to create something that nowadays looks basically like a website, but it wasn't dependent upon having a fast broadband connection, because such things didn't exist. We invested, particularly me, invested quite a lot of time and effort into trying to work out how this would work. We actually got a grant from Sandwell I think as well. I don't think we ever recorded that one properly; shows how the arts council has changed. It was either Sandwell Borough or the arts council or both, and nowadays they would've been on our backs a bit more I suspect. Anyway, eventually what happened was just at the point where I was more

or less leaving Banner we hooked up with Kooj [Chuhan] from Virtual Migrants and finished it as a project, and it became very useful for a while. I think it did sort of validate the idea in the end. I don't know what Banner has done with it but Virtual Migrants has been able to use that CD Rom in a whole lot of different contexts. It's only in the last few years really that it's become too old-tech to use, although somebody enterprising could possibly recreate it as a website or something if there was a need for it; possibly there's not the need for it anymore. What we all here did really was unpick the political analysis of asylum and migration as in about 1997 so that in theory schools could understand the background and reasons as to why people migrated, what the background stories were surrounding asylum and refuge, and in particular they could listen to a whole lot of really great interviews. Those interviews are worth their weight in gold because of course those are people directly talking about their own experiences and explaining in their own words more clearly than any amount of textbooks could ever do, how it is that people come to migrate and how it is that people need to seek asylum and so on. In terms of interactivity nowadays it probably looks laughably basic, and I actually can't use it because it doesn't play on a Mac anymore. So it's hard to remember how it worked, nevertheless it was quite an effective and simple tool I think, and quite attractive – the interface was quite clear, and just that sort of point and click and then listen. That way of doing things still works, that's what we have on the web now. So it turns out, with the benefit of hindsight, that CD Roms were a transitional technology. They were kind of the bridge between the old media and the web 2.0 which is fully interactive and responsive and all these other words. It was probably just as well that we did manage to get it finished in the year 2000 or whenever we finished it with Kooj, because I think any later and it wouldn't have had much of a shelf life. As it is, you can still play it on a PC, you can still access that information, so it's probably still being used. Until quite recently, I don't know about Banner, but Virtual Migrants was still selling copies of it. However, I think the problem was in the 90s in Banner the pace of technological change and all the other things we were trying to do at the same time was such that there were a lot of things that we did quite ineffectively really.

Q: You recorded a CD?

AJ: Yes that's right. I mentioned earlier on that back in the mists of time, 1993 probably, we got this lovely shiny Apple Mac Quadra. The one thing I forgot to mention actually is instead of having 160 whatever hard drive it had a 66 megahertz processor, which was really fast in those days. That enabled us to set up a recording studio, which obviously had to be in Dave's attic; that's the only place we could put it at the time. It was quite a good recording studio. We spent a bit of money on it, I think lottery money went into that, and we were outfitted by a really great company in Stoke, which is the nearest one I could find. Banner still has a studio, doesn't it? Ya, so this is sort of the origins of Banner's recording capacity, which has become quite important over the years I think. The first thing we did with that was the Sweat Shop cassette. Then after doing Criminal Justice and Redemption Song, it was felt that it would be a really good time while people like Firmin and Leon were still around to record the best of the songs from both shows. There were some absolutely cracking songs and we'd done so much work together that we were really working well together as a band, so the songs were really well run in. So we spent nine months I think recording the songs that went onto Fortress Europe. That was a contentious title for that play; there's a story around that. But the CD was called Songs from Fortress Europe, although for some reason I think of it as Redemption Song. But it's important to remember it's got about half the songs from the Criminal Justice play as well. So that was quite an undertaking really, almost like a whole project in itself. At this point for the archive I should thank Tim and Mogs for both providing me with accommodation and putting up with me in that period. As with all Banner projects, it was not without its stresses, although on the whole it went more smoothly than some and the results were worth it. It is a really cracking piece of work and captures the company at a certain time. One the one hand you've got all the soukous stuff as in some of the songs that Firmin and Leon wrote, and then you've got other things like the song, I can't remember the name of it, the one based on Pastor Niemuller's idea, first they came to the trade unionists and I wasn't there to help them and so on. That song people still tell me about. I've got friends of friends and other people who've bought that CD and they love that song. It was musically really eclectic and diverse, which obviously showed how the company had changed over the period between Elixir of Life and then, which I think was a great strength of it. On the one hand you've got Dave singing some of the really amazing ballad form things that he did, particularly the opening one All That's Solid Melts Into Air, for example, but there's a few others like that that are really powerful. Then you've got the

soukous stuff, you've got all sorts of different influences. Then Paula as musical director did all sorts of quite strange and wonderful things with it, including a song where there's various recorders multi-tracking, which again sounds preposterous but works beautifully. Nearly everyone had at least one song to sing, so I'm there on one that I wrote, Leon and Firmin are there on certain songs, Paula is there and so on. It's even got an interesting electronic track produce by Maria Tolly that I think is one of the best songs on it in some ways. In terms of the process, yes again it was quite difficult to manage in a lot of ways. Firmin and Leon obviously sometimes couldn't come, because again they were still at risk of deportation at that time; I'm not quite sure when they got status. We finished off with a big launch event which was great, but it was quite a long process. I remember feeling relieved more than anything else when it was done. As probably most of us who are involved in these things do, I don't really listen to it. I've not listened to it for ages but in my head it stands up as still being interesting and relevant, a good document of that period in the same way that the CD Rom We Are Here Because You Are There is a document of another aspect of the company's work. I think the CD came out in 1997 or 98, I can't remember now. This is where my involvement with the company tapers off. At the end of that process I was knackered, absolutely knackered. I had the chance of a part time regular job at High Peak Community Arts in multimedia resource, and I needed the money, so I started to bow out of the company. While I was working on Redemption Song, it might've even been 1998 because I think the two things overlapped, I think I'd started working at High Peak before that was finished. It also marks a yet more rapidly changing technology in that that was actually the first music CD that the company made. I imagine there's still a few left in Dave's attic, but I would've thought we've sold a fair few over the years in terms of the small scales of sales that this sort of work gives you. So I'm quite proud of that one actually. It was a good process between me and Paula on the whole. I'm trying to think if there are any more specific stories about it, but I don't think there are. There was the odd moment of tension here and there. Kevin got very adamant about the arrangement of one particular song and pursued me around Handsworth to tell me. Kevin, if you're listening, we kept it the way we thought it should be. Who knows who was right, it's so long ago now. I can't even remember exactly what he was worried about, you can ask him though if you interview him.

Q: What happened to the T-shirts?

AJ: All through the history of my time with Banner we did loads of strikes, industrial disputes, and other sort of solidarity things. Those ranged from things like women against pit closures, as was mentioned earlier, to big high profile disputes like the Timex one in Dundee. The dockers, we spent a lot of time with the dockers. One thing I haven't mentioned about Redemption Song which is really important was as well as working with issues around asylum and migration it linked that into the global context with what was happening to the Liverpool dock workers, who at that point were out on strike against the I suppose you'd call it containerisation now. Essentially the idea was that the port of Liverpool was essentially going to be closed and moved to Bootle, so people were being replaced by machines. The old system of unloading ships was being replaced by containerised docks, which require far fewer people. The immediate issue, if I remember rightly, was the casualisation of their employment contracts. They were quite an inspiring bunch of people but again unfortunately as I was saying earlier, this was one of our glorious defeats. Obviously in Liverpool there's still legacies of that struggle. There's still the CASA, I think it's still going, which is a cultural organisation that grew up out of the support groups that surrounded that whole dispute. But obviously the docks were containerised and there were lots of the usual betrayals going on. Although the dispute was solid through the dying days of Major's government, as is often the case, when Blair got elected I think people expected something might happen. He showed his true colours very quickly, and him and Bill Morris basically abandoned the dispute, which is a great shame. Those disputes were essentially understanding why we're now locked into this horrific kind of low pay and zero hour contract economy. People like the dockers and the miners saw the way things were going. So we did quite a few benefits for dockers over that period, including one at St. George's Hall, which is that huge building in Liverpool opposite Lime Street Station, Doric columns, very grand building. It was almost like a Spinal Tap moment for me. I'd not been touring with Criminal Justice, as I mentioned earlier. Dave and Paula and Dave Dale had been doing a lot of gigs, even ones that were not Criminal Justice gigs, and I hadn't been available for all of them or hadn't been needed. But for that one I turned up because we were researching the dock workers for Redemption Song and I was involved. There was this moment when Dave Dale or someone waved me onstage. It wasn't a stage, we were actually underneath the Doric column, but that's where we were performing from. He

waved me up and it felt like that bit in Spinal Tap where they've had a huge row and the last gig of the tour the guitarist, I think he's called Nigel, is encouraged back on by the lead singer. It was quite a nice moment because, not that we'd fallen out that badly at all, but it was just quite funny. There was a particular song called Women On the Line, and I played a fancy bit of guitar at the beginning, so I went up and did that fancy bit of guitar. I probably played it wrong, because I hadn't played it for years. It was just amazing because we were playing to probably 10 or 20 thousand people, so it was quite an incredible moment. That whole energy that surrounded those disputes was incredibly important, and that energy now you see more in a totally different kind of protest. You don't really see it now in trade unionism, you see it in the mass protests that happen since Trump was elected. You see it in various things like Black Lives Matter. So the energy is still there but the nature of the involvement and the nature of who goes to these things has changed I think. I'm not sure how we ended up there from where I was.

Q: T-shirts.

AJ: T-shirts, that's right. So one of the great things about the dockers was they were very media savvy and they had the support of some of Liverpool FC players like Robbie Fowler, and they produced these T-shirts, the dockers produced these T-shirts that looked as though they were Calvin Klein T-shirts but said dockers on them or something with a bit CK in the middle. Robbie Fowler wore one when he was playing, which was a controversy because it was on the BBC, it got filmed. Those are some of my prized possessions, those T-shirts. Some of them were very obscure disputes, very obscure indeed. There was a dispute at an engineering company in Reading called Helliers. There was a dispute in one of the old print unions, and so on. Because these disputes would create things like T-shirts in order for people to wear them to publicise what was going on, we'd be handed these T-shirts. I ended up with a collection of about 20 or more. I gave most of them to the Working Class Movement Library but I got to keep the dockers ones myself because the Working Class Movement Library have actually got a box of those, but also those are particularly significant. They're very interesting things. Most of them, as I was joking at the time I have them to the librarian, I said, most of them have been washed. I did wear them as well. We used to gig in them so they did get, what's the word these days, pre-loved, distressed,

especially under the arms. In a way it's an interesting pictorial archive, all those T-shirts of all these different disputes, some of which are now completely forgotten. For example the Helliers dispute, I don't think it lasted very long. At the benefit we did for them, a fight broke out in the second half between two different factions within the strike committee. It was terrible, we didn't know what to do. Do you carry on playing, do you stop playing? So ya, those are the T-shirts.

Q: How has your Banner experience influenced what you've done since, from what about 97?

AJ: Well ya and probably 2000 maybe. I didn't leave the company overnight, I kind of withdrew from it bit by bit. I ended leaving around 2000 I think, and by that time I was working with High Peak Community Arts. But then I stopped working for them in 2001 and went freelancing again. I think the key things I got from Banner is, again I can't say this enough really, with hindsight it turns out to have been an incredibly invaluable apprenticeship in all sorts of things. The apprenticeship was in the politics of struggle, it was in how culture can be used to assist that struggle. Also I just became a better musician through working with all the different people involved in Banner. Even though sometimes that was challenging, nevertheless the outcome was really positive as it were. One of the other things is it gave me an understanding that I never had before of the political tradition of song, which is different from folk traditions, different from traditional music. It's related to it and the two are often conflated, but they're not the same and it gave me a deep understanding of that, which I've carried on trying to understand and build on as I've gone. It introduced me to the radio ballad form, and that's been a key element in all the work I've ever done since. I think it's a really powerful form. Every single thing I've done I can probably say in some way, if it's been a significant project at least and I've had authorial control over it in some way as a collective or personally, I've used something of that radio ballad form and applied it in a whole load of different contexts. It gave me, through random conversations quite often with members of the company, including Dave Rogers, who's very knowledgeable about these things, it gave me a much clearer understanding of radical theatre of a particular kind, particularly Brechtian ideas and so on, that have stayed with me ever since and I think are really important. I was saying to Mogs earlier that I'm deeply

critical of things that are called political these days but aren't. I think it's a sign of the culture that we live in that even the most vaguely questioning liberal piece of verbatim theatre is regarded as radical; I think it's really worrying. Equally, the political counterpart of that is that Corbyn is regarded as radical. Much as I would like to see Corbyn lead a Labour government, that would just be the beginning. Corbyn is only a Labour politician perhaps from the 60s who believes in social justice. He's not a revolutionary, and yet the extent to which the establishment is scared of him is very revealing. I think the arts establishment are equally scared of having their boat rocked by stuff that actually is genuinely challenging. As we were discussing earlier, it's a very upper middle class dominated field and it's very hard for other voices to be heard within that field. These are the things I've carried out of Banner with me into all the various different projects that I do. The other thing that I carry from Banner is a longstanding commitment to working around issues of migration and asylum seekers and refugees. Amongst other things, I founded a project that works with survivors of torture, called Stone Flowers, and that's been an ongoing project since about 2009. That's one of the themes that I keep coming back to, is things to do with migration. Since then of course other things have emerged, like climate justice issues. Again there's a majority and minority narrative within that. When I say minority narrative, that's the wrong word because really what's happened is the arts establishment has got one view of it but the majority world have got a totally different view of it. The work that I've done has been informed by that kind of analysis that I've learnt from working with Banner, amongst other organisations, where you look for the deep questions and you talk to people who understand those questions better than you do. In terms of talking about productions about climate justice, Virtual Migrants recently did our first national touring performance, which was called Continent Chop Chop. That explicitly tried to connect climate justice, migration and austerity. A lot of the work that I've been doing has been trying to connect up these seemingly disparate themes and look at why they're actually deeply interconnected. I think the way that Banner works has been absolutely crucial in informing me and educating me to be able to do that.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

AJ: I think there's just a few little things that we talked about off camera that are worth saying on camera, a couple of memories. One of them is we were talking about Dave Dale earlier and he's somebody I still hold in very high esteem. He's a very funny man and I'd like that to be on record. Two of the things that I remember about him that make me laugh even now with pleasure are that on long journeys we would get into doing things like, he's a genius musician, he's unbelievable. He's got an incredible memory for songs as well as being a phenomenally gifted guitarist. He could do things like he could sing any song in the style of any other song. So to entertain ourselves we'd often try and get him to sing Dave's songs in the style of Abba or something like that. You could hear Dave clenching his teeth in the front of the car. All that side of touring is one of the nice things I remember about it. Another thing I remember about Dave is we always used to have to go and get his guitar out of the pawn shop, I think it was in Alum Rock, which is slightly more frustrating and reflects again the reality of people's lives. Banner Theatre was not for most of its history when I was involved with it, it wasn't an Arts Council funded organisation. At that time most major companies touring theatre and so on would've had Arts Council funding permanently. How of course it's much harder. Banner had lost its grant in the cuts in the late 80s and never got it back, yet still managed to tour. But the price of that was that we all at times got burnt out. For someone like Dave, we'd have to get his guitar out of hock before we could go and perform. That is a very harsh and difficult aspect of what it's like sometimes for some people to be a musician. That's why nowadays I think you see more and more rich people involved in these things, and less and less other people trying to do it full time. Of course if you don't do it full time you don't have the opportunities to develop, you don't get as good as you would if you were doing it full time. It's self perpetuating and really deeply worrying. The other thing about Banner that we mentioned earlier that I'll put on record as well is that by and large even though some of us were highly educated and had degrees in various things, we were all more or less unqualified to be doing theatre and music. None of us had come through a professional theatre degree, not since probably Fran Rifkin had. But in the company as I knew it, I don't think anyone in that company had a paper qualification for being a musician or a theatre producer or whatever it might be, and I think that was all to the good. It meant that we were more connected with the kinds of audiences we were going to, we were more equal between ourselves inasmuch as we could be. There were obviously inequalities in terms of experience and assumptions of various kinds, but by and large at

least we had in common the commitment to what we were doing and also the fact that basically we were all self taught in some way. When things were working well we were able to share quite a lot of skills, where earlier on I mentioned Paula Boulton, who I thought was particularly good that way. Paula was qualified actually; I think she'd done seven years study into baroque music, baroque violin and baroque recorder. But somehow she deprogrammed herself so she could talk about it in that sort of context. She had retained her commitment to the communities that she was part of, as well. I think it's very common for artists to kind of go and live in a nice part of town, speaking about myself here. If you're an artist in Birmingham you're supposed to live in Mosely, if you're an artist in Manchester you should probably go and live in Chorlton or Hebden Bridge and so on. These are all stereotypes, they don't apply to everybody. But I think the thing about Banner is it stays committed to an increasingly marginalised group of people who strangely are actually a majority, and it's still committed to that group of people.

[END]