

That was what was inspiring us, I have to say, at that time. We were really moving away from the literary stuff. I was also doing a lot of work with puppets, open puppet manipulation. Around the mid-'80s I got involved with a group called Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament, which was just that basically. People who were... this was the Regan era, "send in the bombers" stuff. It really was the issue in North America. A group of theatre workers – instead of calling ourselves theatre workers at that point we were actors and actresses at that point – were coming together around an issue, and we ended up creating a collective piece based around disarmament issues. At the same time, I was involved in an advocacy campaign because I was the president of Theatre Ontario, which is a provincial theatre organisation, and the provincial government was cutting back the arts councils. So we were essentially organising provincially to try and stop the cutbacks to the arts. Through those advocacy efforts - there were postcard campaigns and all that traditional advocacy and lobbying stuff - I connected with a woman who was the head of the Playwrights' Union at that point, a sort of body that sticks up for all of the rights and royalties and things like that for playwrights in the country. She came out of a labour union background. So when she saw the collective piece that Performing Arts for Nuclear Disarmament had put together, she cross connected us to a group that was forming independently, called the Labour Arts and Media Working Group, which was people from Sweden, Wildcat Theatre from Scotland, the predecessor to 7:84 or some of the same interlocking things; I never quite figured out the relationship between Wildcat and 7:84. But anyway, they were coming over and inspiring a group of unionists on one side, particularly labour educators, and artists, visual and performing artists, on the other side. In the middle of this was the representative of the Canadian Labour Congress, which is our equivalent of the TUC. This fellow called Doug Tobin ran a labour school, which there are variants on that there as there are here. In one he ran was week-long intensives. For a month you'd have people from all around the province, all different kinds of unions, coming to one school and studying everything from steward training through collective bargaining and grievance handling, all that kind of stuff. Basically what Doug did was he'd pick a theme for each school. The theme in '84 was disarmament, was nuclear issues. Catherine connected those pieces together and she sort of said, "okay, these folks have got a show about that"; Doug has an opportunity. So he essentially booked us to drive to Port Elgin, which is about a three or four hour drive out of Toronto. It's beautiful, it's on an old lake and it's an old resort with cabins, and you could

go swimming or whatever. The Canadian Autoworkers had turned it into an educational centre for the union movement, so people went there and it was this wonderful kind of environment to learn about unionism. It was a very intensive experience for people. On Sunday night people would arrive, they would go to their classrooms and learn where they're going, and then they'd come to the main hall and see something that set the theme for the week, and then have their beer and talk about it. So we, as you do with collectives, decided that we didn't like the first collective we'd created, so we had to create a new collective for this. "What the hell, we've got three or four weeks here, so let's just put something totally different together." It was about the people who are living downwind from the nuclear testing in Utah and Nevada. Very conservative Mormon communities were suddenly finding themselves pitted against the US government because they were experiencing really significant health impacts, being downwind. Of course the government was denying it, and it's a really amazing story about those people fighting to have their situation recognised. It ultimately ended up in completely banning first the aboveground testing and finally the underground testing. So we kind of thought, this is a really interesting story to tell unions because it doesn't come at it from any kind of doctrinaire position, it comes at it from the story of a group of people who are among the least likely to be organised. Something you have to kind of understand is that the class consciousness is not inbred in Canada the way it is in the UK, because we're part of the American mythology that anybody can be anything they want, which of course is empirically untrue. You have a better class of moving between social class in England than you do in the US, but it's the mythology that's gripping to people. Plus you don't have any of the sort of class and regional accent stuff. When Dean or Dave opens their mouth, people immediately go, "okay you're from exactly there. We know what block you grew up on, and that means we know who you are." That just does not exist in Canada. There's slight accents if you get used to it, but it's pretty generic speech. So it just doesn't impinge on your reality in the same kind of way. This comes back to the fact that in a Labour audience you can't necessarily know where they're coming from politically. They won't necessarily have grown up in a unionised household. There isn't a Labour Party, there's a New Democratic Party, but it's sort of Blair left. That's part of the education process, these schools, is actually to get people to have some sense of their identity. Anyway, we end up with a show that we are literally learning the lines in the van driving up; been there, done that. So actually when we get in the room we are thinking,

“we may not get out of here alive.” When the guys start coming in in their tank top vests – this was the ‘80s so you had these open mesh vests, and these big guys are coming in, plunking their beers down on the table and it’s like, “okay we’ve all been in bars like this and we don’t really maybe wanna be here”. Anyway, the long and the short of it was people were just blown away by the show. They were up on their feet and it was a really positive response. But afterwards what really did it for me was that people were coming up to you and they would start engaging with you on the level of, “you know when this happened I thought that about it, or, when that person said that I didn’t agree with it”. From the world I was coming from, which was about, “oh the costume concept was really brilliant in the show tonight”, for people to come up and go, “you know I was really thinking this about what you said”, it’s like, okay this is actually where I want to be. This is this room that I want to be making theatre in, because theatre is what happens in that space in that room between the stage and the audience, so this is what I want to be doing. That’s where it all moved. I should say at this point I was also doing lots of avant-garde theatre in Toronto at a little place called The Theatre Centre. But what was interesting there is it was the point at which at The Theatre Centre a feminist theatre company was evolving, a GLBTQ now, theatre company was evolving. It wasn’t called that at the time, it was just GLBT. Then a couple of other companies that had a very specific audience mandate. So their work was about narrowing down from this generic concept of doing theatre for the ‘general public’, whatever that is, but was actually about engaging a particular community around the work. So that was the other piece of connection saying, “okay there is this audience and there is a real power to working with this audience”, and it’s a valid thing for theatre to be doing that, which is connecting to a specific group of people and talking to them about their own issues. So those two things sort of come together and Ground Zero came out of doing that work. Then essentially we just went ahead and did enormous amounts of work. We worked for labour unions. There was a whole network of artists, like Carol Condé and Karl Beveridge, who were sort of the centre of that – they’re photo artists who do these stage photos, much like the Red Saunders thing, except contemporary, it’s not historical stuff. I worked with them quite a bit. They really came at it more out of more hard edged political tradition, the sort of Maoist background, but interestingly, they had done the same flip. Carole and Karl, Karl was a heavy metal sculptor, the guys who build those really big massive metal abstract things. He and Carole went down to New York City and during that time the Art Gallery of

Ontario, which is like the big art gallery in Toronto, had booked a one man show of Karl's work, which they were assuming was these big metal pieces. Carole and Karl got really politicised in New York City and started questioning the premises of artmaking, first of all in the terms of art for sale, that what their work was gets turned in conceptual art in the visual art world, but that you're not trying to create works and make your living off of having a gallery represent you and selling the paintings, etc., but you're finding other strategies for surviving, and creating work that's more meaningful for people. It also came out of a feminist critique of the male domination of the visual art world, and Carole demanding equal space with Karl in the work. So they came back to the Art Gallery of Ontario and the art gallery is expecting heavy metal. They hang a series of photo in the photos on the wall, large photos of the two of them sitting on a sofa talking about artmaking and whether this is privilege. One of the titles was "This is not Privileged Art". Well the Art Gallery of Ontario lost one of its corporate sponsors over that and it was like this big cause celebre. So that's another piece that's impacting, and I got to know Carole and Karl through some of these lobby campaigns. Then we started working with the Labour Movement; they were involved with Labour Arts and Media Working Group. Things start to come together and then it ends up with us, we did everything. We did big street demos, big huge 20 foot high puppets outside the Conservative Party convention with big corporate puppets manipulating the prime minister as a little puppet on a string – big statement, big straight up political stuff. Lots of stuff around the Free Trade Agreement and anti-NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement. That school in Port Elgin was almost a regular yearly gig; we would do that and build a show around it. Then we started with Carole and Karl and some other people, there's a labour educator who comes into this – D'Arcy Martin. This is the other train that was happening in Toronto at that point, is Nicaragua and the Sandinistas were going on. People were going down on support missions to Nicaragua, El Salvador, the FMLN. There was a whole school of Popular Education that came down. I was doing a gig at one of these labour conferences and D'Arcy comes in, the first time I met him. He says, "oh yeah, so you're doing Popular Theatre." I'm like, well for me popular theatre was like Broadway musicals. I said, "well I don't really think so". Then he starts explaining to me. He was the one that sort of said, okay a couple of books – "Gramsci, Paulo Freire, read these". Okay. Freire was really important in establishing that working methodology where you go to a community, interview them, talk to them, then present something. You go back and codify it, put it

together into a piece, reflect it back to the community, and then that starts another spiral as they talk about what you presented and how that impacts the issues and what they can do, and so on. It keeps moving. So our process started to become more and more engaged directly in talking to people. At this point we're still very much in the Canadian documentary theatre model, which is you go out and interview people and then you write the play. But it's also shifting insofar as the gigs you play. You're going into some union meeting somewhere and you get stuck in over a lunchtime, so you basically have to start carrying a PA system because otherwise you can't be heard over the people banging their plates and mugs. So the whole theatricality of the stuff started to open right up. You have to actually demand people's attention in that context or you don't get it. Music is a key element in that – it's the fastest, most direct way emotionally to start connecting with people. Then you can start for a minute or have a speech or you can stop and have a little scene, but then you come back and give them that energy again. So our work became increasingly open. Some people call it Brechtian, but it's really closer to being involved in a concert. It's an open presentational performance which is microphone driven and instrument driven, not usually with a drum kit or anything, but you know.... So increasingly that was the sort of work we were doing. It came out of interviews but the interviews were. . . And we just started using some bits of a person's interview literally, and we started I would think by the '90s experimenting with doing some of that work. At this time I was also working for a group called the Developmental Education Centre, which was a huge political collective of about 20 or 25 people. It had subgroups so one subgroup would publish books, another subgroup would distribute films, another subgroup did radio work. I was part of the radio subgroup where three of us would produce two monthly half-hour radio shows that were then literally the tapes were sent across the country to various college radio stations and alternative radio stations across the country. So I was shifting over. Roll back a little bit. My dad repaired radios and televisions, so I kind of grew up with tape recorders and stuff. I always was taping music and taping things and editing tapes and stuff. So by the '80s I'm producing a radio show, which at that point meant masses of tapes, razor blades and scotch tape, and staying up all night with a razor blade cutting people's ums and ahs out of their sentences. We produced radio shows. The funding came from international development sources but the collective was very political, so our focus was on telling politicised stories from the South. It was an incredible gig. I got to go to Africa and meet people in Ghana and

Burkina Faso; it was an amazing time. There's nothing like an interview for getting to know somebody; you find out all sorts of stuff. Part of my work at that time was just doing interviews. It's like, "okay I'm doing interviews over here and then I'm doing over here somebody pretending to be somebody else that's based on this interview". I hadn't put those pieces together but that was certainly a question that was going on for me. I was starting to think, well maybe we could just use what that person said; why don't you just say what they said instead of me trying to rewrite it somehow? At that point, this is the mid '90s, there's a couple of academics, Allan Filewod and Dave Watt. They do this book called *Workers Playtime*, which is about theatres that work around organised labour. There's four theatres in there: Banner, Ground Zero is the Canadian example; and then in Australia there's two companies, Melbourne Workers Theatre and the Darwin May Day, which is a big community event on May Day. I was changing relationships and there were all sorts of things going on in my life that I really wanted to leave Toronto. They used to have these grants at Canada Council for the Arts, there were these grants called B grants, which were really acknowledged to be somebody who's put in a whole bunch of years running a theatre and really wants to have a bit of time and space to go and figure some stuff out for themselves. It's the kind of stuff that never happens now but it was still going on at that point. So I got one of the last of these B grants actually, and I used it to get myself to meet all the people in that book. That's how I met Dave. I met the Australians and then I had just made the move from Toronto to Edmonton, so Banner in the UK was the last one I had to meet. So I emailed this guy; this was the beginning of email at this time too. I say, "I'm coming over, can I meet you?" Well I get an email back that sort of says, "yeah sure just come on over and you can stay at my house". I'm like, "c'mon, you don't have any idea who I am and you're saying, come over and stay at my house". This could be really bad for you or me, who knows? This is not what I was expecting at all as a response. Even though the Aussies have this great open reputation, nobody did that in Australia; nobody said, "oh I don't know you, but just come stay at my house". So I met Dave and what was really interesting from the beginning was the number of pieces of the way in which we performed and operated that were identical. Having had no contact with each other, this thing about highly presentational theatre, musically based, you really started to understand this is driven by the audience and the relationship with the audience; that you're trying to remake in some way from the traditional theatre world, that often, in its most classical form,

doesn't even acknowledge the audience is there. There's that fourth wall thing – yes they know you're there but no you don't really know you're there. It's the opposite of that situation. So Dave and I really got on extremely well because it kept being, "oh yeah this, oh yeah that, oh Latin American solidarity, oh labour unions, oh did you ever get a labour union that gave you money and they really hated what you did", all of this kind of stuff. We had just been through such enormously similar experiences and it made me realise the extent to which those experiences had shaped what the theatre looked like and how it was done. But the piece of course with Banner that was different was the actuality. I'd seen a little bit of that. Dave Watt when I was in Australia had a reel to reel black and white video of, was it called Collier Laddie, I think so. I was quite blown away because I was going, "here they are using the radio stuff that I've been doing, they're using it on stage. They're not trying to get actors saying it, they're actually just using it. It actually works". It was one of the Charlie Parker shows.

Q: Yes, so it would've been Collier Laddie.

DB: In this one there were actually moments in it where they were playing audio straight up, so maybe it wasn't Collier Laddie. It was an early black and white video. There must be one kicking around somewhere.

Q: And it was about miners?

DB: Oh yes. Anyway, when you say it I think maybe some of it was between scene stuff where they'd play some actuality between scenes and then they'd do a scene or something. But it was just like, okay this is just actually using those stories straight up, obviously edited, but with complete respect to the voices of the people telling them. I just went, "this really could go somewhere here". At that point I also saw Redemption Song. Dave said, "this is the show we're touring currently, and you need to go down to London". It was somewhere in Brixton; it was a classic. Again, I recognised all of the stuff. You go to the community hall and it's kind of half an hour from when the show is going to start, and I think there's a show here. There's kind of some people milling about but the doors aren't really open. Then of course as it evolves, that's because they ain't finished in there setting up yet. You can start

to hear the sound check going on while you're hanging out front. I went in and it was like, "oh yeah this is, yeah," and that one in particular was full on musical. It was really a band and there wasn't that much actuality, as I remember, in Redemption Song.

Q: There was.

DB: Was it recorded actuality?

Q: Just voice.

DB: I remember more the presence of the singers, but yes okay. Again, what it did mainly was say, okay this works. Once you kind of got the show up and started performing, you could see people connecting to it. That audience in Brixton was totally right there with what the show was about. I was like, "okay this is great". By the time I left about a week or ten days later from Dave's place it was like, "okay we have to figure out how we're going to do this, and meet again somehow". This was '97 so a couple of years later I was able to pull a tour together of the current show, which at that point was Free For All. Actually it wasn't a tour, it was basically just some performances in Edmonton. We put them in a small theatre in downtown Edmonton. There are a couple of distinct memories. One was that was the infamous days of Datatron [spelling?]. Kevin had created this multi-screen extravaganza cued, as you do, to serve every second line of dialogue had a new slide that interpreted it on three screens across, and it was controlled by this early computer kind of dissolve system for the projectors, except it never really quite worked. There was always one of six or eight projectors jamming. There was some live film in that or live video as well, just a couple of clips of Tony Benn or somebody talking. So it was an absolute nightmare. That's the first time I met Charlie by staying up all night trying to put slides in trays and get this all organised. Kevin Hayes had done the projections for it and Charlie, not Charlie Parker but black Charlie, Charlie Davis. So the two of them, I'm terrible with last names. So the two of us were up all night trying to fill these slide trays up and get the show to happen, which it did, but it was always flaky. Those Datatrons were, well carousel projectors to begin with are flaky, but put them together with Datatrons and it's almost impossible to have a show that doesn't have some serious glitches in it. I watched Charlie go out of his mind those

nights. That being said, the show itself was really interesting on the level of where we're at. There's this whole piece in the show about Rentokill and them being one of the private health providers. So we're in this public library downtown and the security guard is there, as they are in those situations. He's looking at the poster and of course it's that white gauze with all the corporate logos on it; one of them's Rentokill. The security kind of goes, "oh yeah that's my company". I went, "what?" "Oh yeah, Rentokil, they own the security firm here". I'm like, "what?" When I first heard it I just thought it was a joke, then I realised, no it's not a joke, this is an actual company that owns hospitals. Then to have the security guard in Edmonton, Alberta say, it's actually a multinational that owns all this it's like, "oh my god". So it was spot on. It was the first time I discovered what I was to discover, which was that whatever is going on in England was happening in Alberta five years later. This was the front lines, they introduced stuff, they worked the bugs out of it. You're talking about P3s and all this stuff, well sure enough in a few years they're introducing P3s in Alberta.

Q: P3s?

DB: Public Private Partnerships. That was the jargon at that time for those things. So at the same point Banner's coming over we were setting up a Labour Arts festival called May Week in Edmonton, which is around May Day, and it's different arts events. The third piece was that the government had introduced this piece of legislation, Bill 11, which was a full on attempt to open the doors to privatisation of the public healthcare system in Alberta. It was one of the, in my experience in Alberta, biggest grassroots mobilising thing that ever happened. The unions put in some money to prime some public events but they ended up with these enormous demonstrations on the steps of the legislative building ever night at that time. People were just, that was it. You went there after work or whenever, you went to the steps and made a bunch of noise while they were protesting this Bill 11. So guess what? Dave, Fred, Sophie, I think it was just the three of them in that show. Dave of course immediately goes into writing mode and starts learning a little bit about the issues and writes a song about this Bill 11 and the privatisation of healthcare, and next thing you know he's singing it on the steps of Legislature. Then of course they go into some kind of reggae jam with Fred and Dave, Fred anyway. Everybody's dancing and having a fabulous time, it was just amazing what happened. On one hand they're doing this show, which is directly

relevant to the privatisation issues in the theatre, but they're also on the steps of Legislature animating the demos. I kind of intellectually knew this is the sides of what Banner does, but it was just to encounter it like that and the sheer energy of doing it was amazing. So that was a really great time. Stuart was over for that as well, Stuart came over, at which point I figured he was like in Cuba every theatre company has a political commissar attached to it. I figured Stuart was kind of like the political commissar for Banner, because he was clearly the one who had the hardest political line of anybody in the crew, which is not to minimise Dave at his best. But if there was to be a discussion about anything, Stuart was like, "okay here's what it is politically, this is what we're going to say". "Okay, alright fine". I couldn't actually ascertain what some of his other functions on the show were, but he was clearly driving the politics and the energy of it. That was also a different piece of Banner at that time, is that the politics were very explicit in the process and in the presentations, in fact more in the process than the presentations at times.

Q: Could you explain that?

DB: This kind of argument would go on, a lot of the talk around when you're sort of writing the song or something like that. The first conversation was, "what do we think about this politically?" You do the analysis of it and then you create the song out of that. Again, it's not to say that all, certainly you see it in Free For All, there's a lot of actuality in that, there's a lot of character driven song stuff. But there's also this other element of really straight up political stuff put to a bit of music.

Q: How much of the show also functions as a historical record?

DB: That's a totally valid question. I would say two pieces. First piece, consistently in every show the first thing that Dave goes to, and I've got to confess it's one of my instincts as well so I was totally comfortable with it, is to go to the history of the event. "What is the context, how did we get to this point, what happened?" So in Free For All you go back to Nye Bevin and you look at where did the national health system come from, what were its ideals, 'free for all the point of delivery'. All of that kind of stuff becomes your point of departure for looking at what's happening now. The second piece is that you're consciously recording a

struggle as it's happening, and in that way historicising it. You are preserving in a very different way than the mainstream media does, which is a sound bite interpretation by a reporter. You're trying to create an oral history of that moment. Usually, as with Free For All, a lot of it had just passed. There's the story of the hospital closure, and I think they'd just won that campaign. It was taking that little moment and saying, here's an example of what can happen. Here's what the attack was, here's what they did, here's what happened – they actually didn't tear down the hospital or close it down or privatise it. So really the history is working in two levels – the history of how we got to this place and then recording the history at this moment so we can preserve it and pass it on. I guess if you really wanted to talk about the folk ballad tradition, that's what folk music is about in a lot of ways. You learn the traditional songs and you make up your own songs and your songs of their stories that you're passing on. It's all very coherent. I think that's one of the things that Banner certainly taught me, is that that coherence of a process and form and also political analysis driven into it. So we do Free For All and at the end of that Dave and Stuart and myself went off into the mountains. We got there at slightly different times, they got off before me, but we met up and went to an old cabin in the mountains for a while. We basically walked around and talked for a few hours and said, "we've got to figure out how we work together". We don't know what that's going to mean, but this is what we should do. The next piece really was that, I think it was Ian Gasse was just starting in on the scene at this point. He managed to, as he did, make some links with the arts council and got some funding for a collaborative workshop. The premise of that workshop going in was, "can you do a radio ballad using video?" That was the question that we went into the workshop with. The workshop was Mukhtar Dar, Pervaiz Khan, Fred Wisdom, Kevin Hayes, Dave of course, Maggie Ford; I think that was everybody who was there. We started off by listening to some bits of the radio ballads and Dave talked about what the radio ballads were. I'd sort of heard these stories beforehand but it was important that we all shared the same point of departure. Going back to the book the boys had written about us, that's some history there already. Then David played me some of the Radio Ballads the first time I was over, so we started from there. I have to back up for a second. Going back to some of the shows that I did in the '80s, I was trying to use video at that point. We did one show about nuclear workers in a place called Kincardine, and it was a big multimedia thing. But at that time I was doing these segments, so there was a character monologue that the playwright had written. She'd grown up in this

community where the nuclear power plant is the biggest employer in the community. So she'd grown up with her father and brother working in the plant, and she'd written the play out of her knowledge of their experiences. Their antecedents are Glasgow Scot, so they were pretty political. So basically that piece was really difficult. The thing about the video at that time was to make these, you record these monologues and then you either cut them with some cutaway footage and stuff, but you had to do this in, it was like an artist cooperative studio, but it's a big studio with banks of these ¾ inch tape machines and mixers and all of this stuff. It's like hours of work, by our standards very expensive, and you come out with something and you had to have it done before you start rehearsing. Well the first day of rehearsal it's like these video clips just kind of fly by. It's like, "What? What was that?" Then there's some live monologues and other stuff theatrically in the middle of it. Then of course as you get the show rehearsed and the actors get on top of their characters and their parts, suddenly that part gets its energy and its speed and its pace, and these lumps of video are still just sitting there. They haven't changed, because they're what you went into the first rehearsal with. Suddenly they are the longest and the most boring thing you've ever seen, because the live energy is just crackling around them and this thing stops you for three or four minutes monologue. So at that point I said, "no never again, I'm not doing this again, it doesn't work in live theatre, forget it, let's give that up". So at this workshop, it was at the Drum actually, which is really interesting, because the whole sort of Black Arts thing really didn't exist at that time in Canada. Also there's all sorts of different things, like when I first met Pervaiz and Mukhtar and they're talking about the black arts centre, and Mukhtar is working there and Pervaiz is on the board. I'm like, "okay in Toronto Black is African Caribbean", that's how it's defined. Mukhtar just goes, "no, black is a political colour". "Okay, gotcha". There's a piece around that, which I want to come back to. Anyways, we're in this workshop and Pervaiz has one of the first of the Apple MacBooks and he's whipping this out and playing around with the video on it. It's like, "oh that's really interesting", because at this point it was very kludgy, stuff didn't work and what have you. But you could actually, we did our thing where you break into smaller groups and work together, and you could actually edit video as you built the song, as you created the situation. So you had these interviews and then you started working with them and manipulating them in with the songs, and you could do it in the rehearsal song right there. You weren't having to leave and go in this big old studio somewhere and hide for a week to

get it done. It just completely changed everything in terms of both the actual ability to do it and also my attitude towards doing it. Suddenly you could make it connect in directly with the piece as you developed it and that kind of live interplay with the material, which is a whole other issue. I'm not sure that happens as much anymore as it did at that point, and that's one of the complex things that's kind of worth, we started talking about it yesterday so it's a topic that needs coming back to I think. People were working there, one person on the guitar and one person at a laptop, and you kind of were jamming together. I'm not quite sure how this morphed into, there was a couple of Kurdish musicians in the first version of Migrant Voices. There's somehow some connection to the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. That particular first version of Migrant Voices came directly out of that Playtime Workshop. Of course this was the glory for us, a bunch of artists who actually get paid for a week and you don't have to produce anything. You're just there to try and learn something about how, come out the other end of it saying, yes actually the idea that you could do a Radio Ballad with video has got some really interesting sets of possibilities here, and it is technologically possible to do it, just barely. The next version of that was the first version of Migrant Voices, which was a technical nightmare because Pervaiz is trying to like actually run a show off an early Mac book that basically you have to have all the cues up in Quicktime and you're, we were back to the Datatron. But there was enough there to figure out something could happen here.

Q: So the first show following the workshop was Migrant Voices?

DB: Part One, which was Kurdish musicians. I really should get their names; I've got some photographs of them somewhere.

Q: Galen.

DB: No this was long before Galen, long before. There were these two guys that barely spoke English.

Q: So they weren't involved in any show then, were they?

DB: I honestly don't know because so much of my participation was time limited to short chunks here. I got it to a kind of show and tell stage, as I usually do. It was in some little tower block in a community centre kind of space attached to a tower block. It's probably a piece of the history that you don't really know, but I've got some photos of it somewhere I should show. There was one of the two that played a violin, like a Kurdish violin. The other guy played sort of a bouzouki, I don't know. There's Fred, in the days when Fred was not exactly outgoing, and he's like, I can just remember hours of attempts of Fred and these two guys trying to figure out how the hell they're going to tune their instruments, because they were in totally different modal scales. Fred's a really good musician but it's way out of his comfort zone to say the least. I wasn't really involved in Black and White in the Red. I did see the show, and that was interesting because it was a full on band show with Fred acting in it, one of Fred's early attempts to act. At that point he was clearly not comfortable doing it; he got way more comfortable as he went doing things. He was game to do stuff but he was, you know, it's complicated. Anyway you can kind of see these things were started to go in parallel. We're starting to look at this Video Ballad thing but the show that's touring at that point, Black and White in the Red, was just David and Fred and was very much. . . no there was a drummer, a woman who was drumming with them. They're kind of like going in parallel directions but they're not meeting. This stuff with the old audio actuality and a full on band and the new stuff, which was world music, acoustic and video mixed in with it – just like two different trains passing each other. There's a transition point there, because that was really the last Banner show with audio actuality in it before video actuality started happening. This is jumping out of your timeframe slightly but it's kind of the completion of the piece. So then we went to Migrant Voices take two, which was Jilah, Fred, Dave and Charlie rapping. I'd worked on the initial stages of developing that with Pervaiz and I can remember going down to the People's Museum in Salford. We started from a clipping and some interviews with a Kurdish father and son who'd been badly beaten by skinheads basically, and that was the kind of kick-off incident in the original Migrant Voices. Also Aiden at this point was doing his piece on migration, his CD-ROM. Remember CD-ROM? He'd done a piece, so Banner was doing a lot of work around migration issues, so it was feeding into that piece. But I wasn't around for the middle stuff, so we'd done some of the initial research and some of the initial song writing, then I left and the show got put together. We booked the show to come on tour in Canada at that point. This was like 2004 or 2005,

somewhere in there. When the boys arrived they'd just had like a nightmare. They'd just started the show and it was a complete technical disaster: cues weren't happening and out of order, just a nightmare. Charlie and I ended up sitting down at one point and I said, "okay what would happen if we did this? It was all timing stuff, because the cues were all timed to the songs but the cue was timed to the song [the way it had been rehearsed] . You hit play, it [the cue] went, the band played, and if somebody's tempo was dragging a bit that video cue just ended and the band kept playing for a while until they got to the point where you could start the next cue. Charlie and I sat there and I went, "well Charlie, in theatre when you're doing sound you have two tape machines going so that one keeps going for however long the scene takes, and then when the cue happens you cross fade to the next cue. So what if we did that with the video?" What if we had two, at that point it was two DVD players, and a vision mixer. So each DVD has got, like in theatre audio, has got more than enough information that no matter who drags the tempo or what goes wrong, you're still covered at the point that the next chorus is supposed to come in with the next video cue, or the next bit of actuality is what we're talking about at this stage. That really shifted things. Once we sorted that out – and there was a nightmare, more all-nighters, getting the whole show re-cued in this new concept and then getting in burned to discs, because DVD writers were actually quite new at that point and they were equally flaky at times. So Charlie became the master of cueing those DVDs because they were like just total hell, lags for the DVD to get proper speed and stuff. You have to be a Charlie, he was just right there. He could get that timing with the delays and everything else, he did it. I used to go, that is amazing, I have no idea how you're able to do that. So that became the whole paradigm for Banner for five or six years, because we were running everything off of double DVD decks and a vision mixer. Then finally computers got to the point where they could play back video cues with some degree of consistency.

Q: Which was for what show?

DB: I'd really have to go back. I would say probably it was in the middle of somewhere around Mobile Phones.

Part 2

Q: How did you find working with a labour audience in the early days?

DB: In our case, and I would say this stands in distinction to Banner, in Canada there's no working men's clubs or any of that kind of stuff. That was certainly a piece of the early political theatre tradition in the UK. In Canada we were very much focused in working directly through unions on several levels. The first level was the kinds of Labour Educationals I was just talking about. The bulk of our paid work was that kind of thing. You would come in and create a piece that tied to the themes of a conference or something. Because the Labour Movement as a whole often has common themes across different unions, we could create a show on a particular theme like free trade and it would play well across a number of different unions when they would invite us to come into their school. As we did in Port Elgin, we would set a context for the dialogue around a given theme. When I say labour unions, it really is an explicitly contextualised audience of labour people. Another kind of project we did was more of a crossover. For example, in 1990 the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, which was a union that dealt with all the people in a hospital ultimately who weren't nurses or doctors – everything from the registered practical nurses down to the people that provide dietary and change the bed linens and all that kind of work. So we did one project with the Council of Hospital Unions that aimed to put healthcare issues on the agenda of a provincial election. They booked presentations in venues across the province through their union. We created a show with them that highlighted the issues: overwork, under-funding, all those kinds of things. Then we would go into each community. The union would book the hall, whether it was an actual labour hall or it was a community hall, invite the media and invite the community to it. So it was an audience that was rooted in labour sponsorship but they were inviting the broader community, and frankly had as its key intent immediate contact within the context of provincial election. So literally the show was designed, we had some actuality interviews we recorded, but actually the show was designed as a series of photographs. From the beginning I worked with the designers to create a series of photographic images. This again was the early '90s and that kind of thing worked. By the late '90s people had got wise to this stuff and they were shutting that out of it, but at that point it was still fresh enough. We did a gig in Windsor, which is at one end of the province of Ontario, and we're driving back to my home in Peterborough, about a five or

six hour drive. We did the gig in the afternoon and actually in that particular situation the people locally hadn't really got their act together, so they got a number of their own members up but really very few people from the community. But they got the TV crews in so they shot a whole bunch of footage of the show. But the person, the reporter and us were just going, "well this is going nowhere because there's not a lot of people in the audience". So we drive home five or six hours later and we turn on the national news that night at 11, and if it isn't the bloody show. Because it was a weekend night in a town that was on the provincial campaign trail and there basically was nothing else, and there was good pictures. Later on somebody said to us, that's all they need. If you give them some good pictures on a slow news night, that's it. So the shows were really designed to do that and I think it actually did affectively, cuz that's the year the New Democrats for the one and only time got elected to the government of Ontario. Not like I'm saying we did that, I'm saying there was a moment for change and the union actually was strategic in how they could use a theatre company to slot in and reinforce everything else that was going on at the time. So that's another kind of labour audience. But to go back to my very first experience at Port Elgin, the other thing that I understood immediately that night was that when people start coming back and quoting lines back at me, that's not something I was used to. I really went, oh this is an oral culture. People in the labour movement function in terms of, first of all, your word is what you go by. If you say you're going to do something, you either deliver or you don't deliver, and that stays with you. There's no mucking about. You either do it or you don't do it if you say you're going to do it, and then you get another chance, or you don't. The second thing is I think at first at Port Elgin we didn't even have contracts. Doug Tobin shook my hand and said, "yeah you're doing it." We went, "okay", we turn up and he pays us. It really was a situation in which people listened to what you were saying and acted on what you said and what they said to you. It was all about the storytelling, the language, or even the nuclear workers show. I remember the party at the end of the nuclear workers show and it was a classic kind of Gaelic ceilidh kind of thing where everybody had their party song. The people in the room communicated by the song they chose to sing or the story they decided to tell at the party. It was part of the party, it wasn't like people hiding off in corners. It was a big circle and you did your piece. What song they chose to sing was just totally revealing. So this older Glasgow woman, from Glasgow, she's been in Canada for 20 odd years at that point, she started singing this song. I don't

know the name of it, but it's a Scots song and it's about cocaine: have a toot, have a little toot on me. She starts singing this song and of course there's a really serious issue about drug use at those nuclear plants, because it is the classic job where people like operators, you sit around all day and you're there only if something goes wrong, and you get incredibly well paid for it. So guess what, there's a lot of young guys spending money and there's a lot of coke. So it was really interesting that the older mother figure at the party is saying to the younger people, I know what's going on, it's been doing on for years, don't think you invented this, and it's okay, just keep it together. It was really a very interesting dynamic how people were choosing to communicate. That's also a big lesson in terms of how we do this work, is that it's absolutely rooted in the songs people choose to sing to each other and choose to work from in their adaptations and the stories we choose to tell to each other.

Q: When you talk about a presentational form of theatre, is that to do with the dynamics between the performers and the audience, and within the audience itself and what the piece of theatre encourages?

DB: Yeah exactly. It's also just about the whole ethos of the performance. If you go to a folk club or something, somebody goes out on the stage, sits down, adjusts their microphone, starts to talk to you, acknowledges you're there, and then starts doing their repertoire of songs. Even by the time you get to the big rock tour there is still that element that not for a minute is anybody under any pretense that you're not there. I'm here, I'm singing you a song and I'm telling you a story through a song. But it's direct and there's not layers of stuff between the person on the stage and their story, and the person in the audience. That directness was ultimately what came across, plus a good dose of having power amps and speakers, which you need to get that across.

Q: You have through your practise this relationship and dynamic with your audience and the people you interview, etc. You witness similar relationships when you work with Banner or when you observe Banner's work. Are the archives of value to people later, and if so how do we make them accessible?

DB: The answer is yes, absolutely, but let me break this down. I need to jump back to something first and then I'll jump back to this question. It's the central issue around respect of the stories and storytellers that Banner has, and I think ultimately that's probably where Dave and I connected. Dave has later said to me, "oh yeah you would've got along well with Charlie". Well only on that, but I think I never would've survived Charlie's critiques, but never mind. But it's that sense of absolutely not just respecting the story and the storyteller but not wanting to impose something else on what they intended. This comes out of a tradition in Canada where performers would go into a community and listen to a bunch of stories and make up their play, which is in many ways a fundamentally irresponsible way of operating. What I came to with Banner was a sense of a group of people who at their core would always respect the people whose voices they recorded, and treated those stories as precious. Coming as I did out of a particular kind of radio tradition, in the shift to actuality it was rooted in that same sense of making sure that when the person saw their story represented that they felt that it was saying what they had intended to say originally. That has to do then with the process of how you create the pieces, and this is where the Freire piece also comes in. There has to be feedback points in the process where the people whose stories you've recorded and are using in the piece get to look at how you're using that and in a sense give their permission for you to then take their story out to other people. That is fundamental to the way we've operated. I learned that from a former partner when we were doing work with the 'hard to house' in Toronto. It was the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, so everybody and their dog were out on the streets creating plays and videos and stuff with homeless people. It wasn't quite as bad, but would practically go out and say, "so you're homeless, what's your story?" Then run off and make their play about it. The people we were working with, because we were actually working in some of the supportive housing communities, were going, "We're so tired of this bullshit. How the fuck do they think they've got the right to steal my story from me?" For a lot of them, that's what they've got. They're on the streets, they've probably got some issues which have put them there, and that's really what they've got is their story and their experience. So to just take that and not respect it and not talk to them again about how it's being used is really the worst side of this kind of work. I've never seen Banner do that. As we worked together we kind of formalised that a bit into the 'Show and Tell' thing. Show and Tell is when you're in kindergarten you bring in your doll from home and you do a 'Show and Tell', here's my doll,

here's the story of my doll. So it's just kind of a joke thing but it kind of captures the sense of we're here and we're telling you the stories; we've taken the story and we've done something with it and now we're showing it back to you. Part of the ethic of the Show and Tell is that you do everything you can to lower the expectations of the event in the sense that you want the people to feel that it's accessible. Here we are, we've kind of thrown this thing together, and we just want to get your sense of what you feel like about it. We don't want to turn this into a Big Thing. This is not like a theatre workshop performance and we've got all this dressing around it. It's supposed to be very direct and accessible, kind of using diminutives around it. Like kindergarten diminutive around it to say, okay this is like us here, these are your stories, we've kind of put them in a certain order and we're representing them to you. "Does that work, is that what you want to say here?" So that's really important, that whole issue that both Ground Zero and Banner have in many ways formally built into their processes that the thing doesn't go on the road until there has been an opportunity for the people who were recorded to actually see what's being done with their words. At least that's certainly how I operate. So then shift gears back to your question.

Q: Which was about the use or the value or the relevance of these. . .

DB: It's a process. From when I started doing it, the tradition was grab the recordings and then go off and listen to the recording and write the scene, then that recording just disappeared. You didn't have permissions for it or anything, it's just very disposable. Then as we started to move into the era of, well because Charlie came out of the actuality, Charlie Parker came out of the news documentary end of things, there you start talking about directed interviews but more open ended kinds of interviews. In the long form documentary you're basically getting a whole story, so that's more where Banner's style comes from and it's more where my interview style comes from. I'm not interested in either trying to get you to say something that I want you to say or to try and say it in two sentences or less for a sound byte. So that Banner tradition leads to the fact that what's left there is a record of certain subjects. Then as we started to try and move forward on this, partly because a lot of this work is character driven, you're always looking for a direct human story. It's kind of like when we do a show I personally find Dave's what I call his catalogue songs less interesting than his character songs, when he does so and so works and the chippy and does this, so and

so sweeps the floor and does this. I kind of get less into those characters than when he does even something like, there's one show where we have a long story of a guy from Iran, Pyam [spelling?], who comes to the UK as an asylum seeker. It's like a whole 15 or 20 minute unit just on that one character and that one story, and it becomes really rich. You get a sense of who he is and what his aspirations were, and then what happens to him. I'm way more interested personally in that kind of piece of the work. So to get that when you're starting to do the oral history stuff, you end up asking way more questions about "where were you born, how did you grow up, what brought you to the point where you're trying to leave your own country, why did you do that, why did you come here?" All of those kinds of questions build a much bigger picture than when you come to try and create a unit that's got a human being or a family or something at the centre of it, it's much more complex and interesting. That automatically then starts to move you in the direction, and also that you're dealing with feeling questions – "what was that experience really like, what were you feeling when that happened and you came in the back of a gas tank in a lorry", all that kind of stuff. So you're trying to get at the emotional context of the piece. It's really complicated but that sense of telling the story and just how much you start to fill in that story with those kind of emotional and human detail leads you down the path of oral history, which I didn't actually totally suss out until I started working when I got to Edmonton. I started actually consciously collecting oral history and learning how to do it. I started realising the differences between what's based in a news documentary style of interviewing and what's based in an oral history style, which is a much fuller and more open ended style of interviewing. It's also driven partly by the fact that the process theatrically was just enormously wasteful. You had masses of information that you never used in it that was really other great stories. There was one particular story that was simple and clear and was what you wanted to say at that moment, but there were other really interesting stories. How do we make this available as a resource to people? It was a double edged thing of on one hand trying to learn the skills of oral historians to make the interviews fuller and more complex, and on the other hand starting to look at what oral historians call dissemination strategies around the collection of oral history. It's the idea that you're actually collecting it with the intent of preserving it, as opposed to the instrumental process of grabbing it for a show. That's the learning experience that both in in Banner and Ground Zero I've been moving along. If we're going to do this anyway, you ask two or three more open ended questions and you get an oral

history instead of just a few comments on a topic. Actually, that really helps us create the show as well as insuring that you have a document that then becomes useful for other people. The other piece of this is because of this process of, both of us have done what you'd call hot projects, where you're going in in the middle of something that's happening, a campaign or a particular strike or something like that, recording what's going on with people before you know the outcomes of it, and then doing something with it that feeds back and feeds that process of the strike or the campaign and hopefully results in some positive change out of that, and then there's an outcome down the road. But you're going in and you don't know what the outcome is. In that process you're actually collecting a whole set of historical material that's completely different. What I've come to certainly believe is that the oral history is good for detail and emotion. You can get a sense of, like I always say, don't ever ask the person what the date was but absolutely ask them whether it was hot or cold that day and what was it like on the picket line – "were you cold, were you roasting?" That's the stuff that actually is meaningful to another person. We can all look the dates up somewhere. The second piece is the emotion, so that there's some sort of, "yeah it was great but what did it feel like on that picket line?" That's where you get really powerful answers from people, because it's often a life changing experience for them. Often what we're doing is we're talking to them about campaigns or issues at work, which are things that are life changing. So that really is where oral history shines. When you get good actuality, as I've learned to call it through Banner, there's nothing like it. It is deep, it is honest, it is truthful in a way that speaks directly to you, whoever you are as a human being, and is not mitigated by a lot of intellectualising around the issue. That's what it's about for me, is that directness of experience. Through the Alberta Labour History Institute we've now collected like 400 odd hours of interviews and we're busy getting all the transcripts corrected and up on line, just as you're doing with this project. What I call it now is 'Community Collections'; this is because I've been partnered with oral historians. That we can do in the next interview, but it's all about this process of seeing a much bigger picture. It's what you go into to collect this information and then the show is a subset of that. There's a community resource out there, there's a story that you've documented as fully as you can and as deeply as you can and okay, my little piece of interpreting this and sharing this is going to be to write some songs out of it.

Q: Is it correct for me to say that in addition to the detail on the one hand and then the emotion on the other hand, you also add information around the issues that you're staging, which would be the Freirean process.

DB: Usually you don't do it internally in an interview per se.

Q: No, you do it in the show.

DB: You do it in the show, exactly. That can be structured more or less directly, and certainly in Ground Zero's work it's a range. This is always about clearly stating your objectives and then working with the best strategy towards your objectives. Whenever I go in to work with a union or any other social group, the first question I usually ask is to complete the sentence, I want bank to blank. First blank is who is the group of people you're trying to reach, who is your audience? The second blank is what is the action you want to engage with them around at the other end of this? Then you start figuring out, going back to that political campaign, it was to get people who were members of unions and their communities to vote for the New Democratic Party. It's a very simple, very clear objective, and then you create a show and your principal focus is media. On the other hand, Banner and Ground Zero have both done things like anti-racist work, in which case the objective is creating a positive dialogue around the issues. The presentation is merely a kickoff point to a structured participatory discussion in which, like what's the show with Tshepe called, that whole equals project is like a gradually evolving series. Stories would bleed from one show to the next show.

Q: Wild Geese?

DB: No, post Wild Geese. . . . Strangers in Paradise Circus. That was one of the ones where we were working with the WEA and then going in. On one hand Tshepe's performing is part of the band, a guy from the Congo. Then the show would stop and would start to discuss with participants in small groups in like 20 or 30 person classrooms. Then Tshepe would bring his own experience of coming from the Congo and what he'd been through in the Congo, and bring that right into the discussion directly. Those were designed along popular

education principles. You were involved in that, I and a number of other people. We knew the questions we were trying to raise, we knew what information we wanted to put to get the question started, and then we knew what information we want to add. In the popular education manuals that people like D'Arcy have created, Barb Thomas who used to also work with Banner, they work off this spiral model where people start at one point and then through the interaction with the performance information is added into it and people kind of come back to where they started, but hopefully with some new information which puts them at a slightly elevated position where you then add information again and so on. It just keeps, we hope, moving upwards in the spiral. So that very much is a conscious design process in it. Again, it also depends on the subject you're talking about. In that case, it's not something simple like vote for somebody, it's a much more complex issue around race, class and the interactions around that, which may well lead to a political decision down the road but you are by no means trying to start from telling people how they should act in a situation.

Q: Talking about race issues, migration and racism, those were the issues that you were dealing with in your first show with Banner, is that right?

DB: Yeah pretty well, Migrant Voices was certainly largely about that. It was an interesting transition point for Banner insofar as, I mean Banner has always allied itself with the most excluded people in the social groups. Back in Charlie Parker's time that may well have been the coalminers in the north. But by the time you get into the end of the last century, there's another rung below that. There's people who are just here working under the table and totally exploited, and that happens in Canada as it happens here. So Banner gravitates to the bottom, as it were; there's a Banner instinct for that. I come to England and the joke would be that I would go on the dereliction tours. Dave would drag me around to various housing estates and closed pits and what have you; we never quite saw the sunny side, if there is one. But that's because it is rooted in a sense of social justice. You have to look at all the stuff about, it's the person at the bottom that, what you do to my brother you do to me. There's a million ways of saying that in the labour movement. But certainly in Canada and chunks of the UK people who are in unions actually have got a reasonable, until some of the downturns. . . But for example in Canada if you worked for the Canadian Autoworkers you

had a relatively secure job and a decent wage and a pension plan and substantial benefits. A bloody hard one and deserved, but it put you in a different class of worker than the person trying to work as a temporary migrant worker in a farm down the road. It was to say to some of those workers, “okay you’ve actually got a toe hold here. It doesn’t mean you can stop fighting to maintain it, but you actually do have a little bit of a controlled situation. There’s actually people down the road, some of them who are even doing the same work that you’re doing, and they’re not. So you need to be thinking about that or it will come back and bite you”, as it has. So on one level there’s that philosophical point of entry, and frankly there was money around for that kind of work. There is an economic reality to this work, as much as we’re idealistic. There’s a certain amount of you have to have the dosh to do the work and get the show on the road. In particular with European union money and the Equals project, it was a very complex dance around the fact that there was a pool of money out there for doing work in an area that it’s not like we didn’t want to work in, but that’s what fed it. There was only so long you could’ve kept doing that work if there was no support structure around it. That was that period.

Q: The reason why there was European money and other pools of money around was because of the scale of the social ?, so it works both ways.

DB: Ya, exactly.

Q: Is there anything you’d like to revisit?

DB: Just one thing quickly, which is a little bit about the mine field which is identity politics, speaking as a white guy in this context. It’s really interesting to me to work here as opposed to in Toronto, which was where I was coming from. Toronto had definitely moved to a point of identity politics where it was actually, because of the historical imbalances around resources, there was a lot of pressure to only have people who’d been denied those resources working and getting funding within it. So it became very difficult if you wanted to work in any kind of anti-racist context if you were working out of a sense of white privilege, which is not to acknowledge or deny that. But when I came to England and started working with at The Drum, which goes back to Black is a Political Colour, there was an extremely

different attitude. Talking to people like Mukhtar and Pervaiz later, there was a dialogue about how things had moved within various communities for them, both personally and within their communities, to say that “actually I feel more affinity working with Dave and Banner because I share some analysis and politics with the company, than I share with many members who happen to have been either from the same country of origin or racial identity”. So they began to look at racialised identity as a more complicated issue that has many dimensions to it, and that was tied to the fact that there was a lot – and I’m not saying for a second in any country that this is something that has changed completely or is whatever – but there was here during the ‘80s some redistribution of resources in the sense that places like The Drum came into existence. So you would have like at a meeting with Mukhtar say and Dave, well actually Mukhtar had access to more resources than Dave did in Banner. What it does is equalise the conversation at the table, because it’s not about who has the resources, it’s about what are we trying to do here and why are we working together, what can we do to get on with this work? That was really liberating for me and I still find it so much easier to work here within the network of people and the trust relationships that have been built up by Banner than it is within a city like Toronto which is still very much dealing with, and it’s because the resources haven’t changed and there’s still the same blocks to various communities getting access to resources. But it makes it much more difficult for everybody to operate that way. I think that was an important piece in Banner, is that by having this long-term relationship, so Mukhtar comes in at one point in the ‘80s on the Handsworth project and has one kind of politics and then comes back again in the workshop with the drum and comes back again even now working with Dave. I don’t know if you’ve interviewed Mukhtar.

Q: Not yet.

DB: It would be very interesting to talk to him about that. Dave has said a number of times and I’ve heard Mukhtar basically say it too, “in the ‘80s I never would’ve worked with you”. It’s because Dave is still doing that work 25 years later, and some of the people that Mukhtar was working with aren’t doing it anymore. So it builds a whole different way of operating with each other which allows you to operate as equals in this situation and basically you have to negotiate less baggage.

[END]