

3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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**Andrew Newman:** Good evening everybody, I'm Andrew Newman, I'm the chairman of BAFTA's TV Committee, and it gives me great pleasure to introduce tonight's event. BAFTA A Life in Television is a new strand of on-stage events that will celebrate leading creative figures from the world of television. Shining a light on their talent, and expanding on what makes them unique and relevant to British television and culture. We'll be announcing more guests early next year. And this is the first one, so we really are kicking off in fantastic fashion and setting the bar pretty high, because tonight we will be celebrating the career of Julie Walters CBE, the multi-award winning and multi-BAFTA winning actress and BAFTA Fellow. Since her television debut in 1975, Julie Walters has firmly cemented her title as a national treasure, and one of Britain's best loved actresses across television, film and the stage. Walters' versatility as an actress is pretty much unique. She can do comedy, and has made iconic performances as Mrs Overall in spoof soap *Acorn Antiques*, and the eccentric Petula Gordina in *Dinnerladies*. But not only can she make you laugh, she can make you cry. In dramas, she's embodied raw and gritty characters including her BAFTA-winning performances in *Murder, My Beautiful Son*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Wife of Bath*, and recently for her momentous portrayal of Mo Mowlam in *Mo*, which won her the BAFTA Leading Actress award in 2010. This year, Walters received the BAFTA Fellowship in recognition of her contribution to the moving image industries. When we suggested, or when it was discussed at the BAFTA TV Committee it was pretty unusual because normally comedy producers on the TV Committee argue for comedians, the news and current affairs producers on the TV Committee argue for newsreaders, and drama producers fight their own corner. But once someone said, what about Julie Walters, it's not really worth having much more of a discussion. I think that is because she is popular, warm funny and really, really

a national treasure. So it's with thanks to our host, James Rampton, who's kindly stepped in as Jenny Murray sadly can't be with us and sends her apologies, and I'd also like to thank our event sponsors, Rathbones, for helping us put on tonight's event. And a bit of housekeeping. We're filming, as you can see, the event for future release on BAFTA Guru and possible broadcast, and we'd therefore ask you kindly not to film on mobile phones or any other recording devices. If there are any press enquiries could you direct them to [events@bafta.org](mailto:events@bafta.org) and they'll respond to you quickly. I would also like to trail some other events that we have coming up. On 6 January David Attenborough will be returning to BAFTA with his latest 3D offer, *Conquest of the Skies*, on 8 January we'll be at the BFI with a craft masterclass from John Conroy, the cinematographer behind *Broadchurch* and *Penny Dreadful* and on 26 January we'll be at the Totally Serialised film Festival with a panel of screenwriters giving their thoughts and advice on writing for TV. BAFTA's learning and events programme is designed to give you the best insights into the creative minds of TV film game so visit BAFTA Guru and you can see past examples of events we done. But now I'd like to hand over to James Rampton and begin to enjoy the evening. Please welcome James Rampton and Julie Walters.

**James Rampton:** Hello, good evening, my name's James Rampton, thank you very much for coming tonight. Welcome to the first ever BAFTA A Life in Television. It's a huge honour to be hosting this interview with one of our most celebrated and best loved performers. Julie Walters is adored by audiences all over the world and tonight will be exploring her remarkable career and celebrating her unique talent. Let's take a look at some of her finest work.

[clips package]



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JR: Please welcome to the stage, one of the country's leading actresses, the fabulous, the brilliant, the one and only Julie Walters.

**Julie Walters:** Lovely chair.

JR: Very comfy ... Mustn't fall asleep.  
[laughs] You received your BAFTA Fellowship earlier this year. Did that mean something special to you?

JW: No. [laughs] Yes... of course, it was about the whole 40 years and oh, that was long. Oh it was huge for me, and I know it's a cliché but it was a thrill and an honour, and it was a great night. It was lovely, it was wonderful yeah, what can I say.

JR: You also have received seven other BAFTAs. What is it about BAFTA that's so special?

JW: Well it's your colleagues, and your peers and the people that you work with. And its posh ... it's the best of all of them, as far as I'm concerned. So to get that for something that you've done. Everybody wants one. So I feel really lucky.

JR: There's another one there

JW: Yeah it's going in my bag. [laughs]

JR: The theatre is where it all began for you. You were in that famous photo outside the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, you and Bill Nighy, Matthew Kelly, Pete Postlethwaite. What did the theatre mean to you at that time, it was a very committed company that you were in, wasn't it?

JW: Oh it was. Well theatre first of all is where I wanted to be, I never thought about television at that time. I wanted to be on a stage, I wanted to be acting with an audience. The Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, that plus the Nottingham Playhouse and Glasgow Citizens was where everybody wanted to work at that time, they had amazing directors, you felt you were on the edge of a revolution with it, it felt ground-

breaking. And the Everyman was a real community. I always thought I wanted to be in the theatre but I always thought theatre was a middle class thing, because I only ever went to amateur with my parents, I never went to the theatre, I thought it was something other people did. So to go there, and the community was all sorts of people, it was working class people, middle class people, everyone. And the theatre itself represented what was going on in the community and it was really exciting. And nearly everything we did came down to London at that time, it was a fantastic place.

JR: An amazing group of actors, many of whom like yourself went on to become stars. Was it an amazing conglomeration of the stars that brought you all together, or was it just chance?

JW: I think it was, yeah. God knows how we all ended up there. We were all of a type, I guess, we were from working class backgrounds, generally speaking, the actors that worked there, and that was fashionable then. It started, didn't it, with Michael Caine and his lot, kitchen sink dramas in the 60s, so it was really then very trendy to be a working class actor. So I was lucky to come out at that time. 'Come out' being not quite the phrase I meant to use. [laughs]

JR: And many of those plays were transferred to the television. Was it hard to make that transition?

JW: the first big transition for me was *Educating Rita*. Because I'd done that on stage, Willy Russell's play, and then Lewis Gilbert came along and said: "Do you want to be in a film, darling?" and you know, it was extraordinary I was cast in it, and that was a bit of a shock. And Lewis would just shout, we'd be filming, from the sidelines: "No darling, too big, darling." And I have no idea, I'd been doing it on the stage for months. So it was a big learning curve that film, knowing that your audience was



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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actually here, not sort of 200 yards away, or wherever it was in Piccadilly.

JR: I think we actually have a clip from *Educating Rita*.

JW: Oh do you?

JR: Yes! [laughs]

[clips package]

JR: Does that bring back some fond memories?

JW: Oh god. Yes. When I first saw it, the film, *Educating Rita*, the film, I went into the toilets and cried.

JR: Why? It's such a wonderful performance.

JW: You see why we have James here this evening. Because I'd done it on stage, I had an internal picture of what I was doing, very strongly. I suppose you always do but I'd done it for months. I saw it and I thought: "Oh my god, is that what I look like?" I thought I was terrible in it and I still find it quite difficult to watch.

JR: Did you have any inkling when you were making it of what a massive film it would become?

JW: No. Well they were talking about Oscars and I thought, "are they mad?"

JR: You got an Oscar nomination for that film, didn't you?

JW: Yes, it was a real shock. Yes, fabulous, but...

JR: Why do you think it struck such a chord with people?

JW: I think it's someone triumphing over the odds. And someone getting an education, it's basically that. Her journey, it's what everyone wants to hear. And it's touching, it was a very parallel journey for me too, I was along every step with her in my own life.

JR: Did you really identify with her when Willy first offered the role to you?

JW: Yes, I did. Obviously I didn't come from her sort of background - I came from a working class background, but not quite like hers - but nevertheless, I felt I moved into middle class circles as soon as I went to college. So all her aspirations were kind of similar.

JR: And of course, the Oscar nomination, Hollywood came knocking at your door like double glazing salesmen.

JW: Won't talk about that [laughs]

JR: But you decided to stay and work here. Why was that?

JW: Well, they were interested in me doing something over there, everything they sent me... They didn't know what to do with me, basically. They tried to write working class parts, and it was "Cor, love a duck" sort of stuff.

JR: Dick van Dyke.

JW: Kind of, yes he'd have done them brilliantly. They didn't know what to do and the scripts were like 1970s romcoms and things that Glenda Jackson did brilliantly, but now it was 1985...or '84, and it just wasn't right, and I just felt all the best writing and all the best work was here.

JR: Yes, particularly with a certain writer called Victoria Wood.

JW: Especially with a certain V. Wood.

JR: We have some clips of your work with her. That was a great segue, wasn't it?

JW: Very good.

[clips package]

JR: How did you and Victoria first meet and start working together?



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: Well we first worked together at the Bush in 1978, in a show called *In at the Death*, which the audience were every night [laughs] but apart from this one sketch – well all the sketches were quite funny, little sketches we have to call them “playlets”, they had to write these sketches based on small, unimportant articles in the newspaper, like fourth page tiny things – anyway, Vic wrote this really, really hilarious one called *Sex*. And it took off. And we just got on really well, and she said she would write something for me. She did say she'd met me before, and I couldn't remember that, but she had in fact auditioned at Manchester Polytechnic School of Theatre when I was there. I was a first year student. And I said, “I don't remember that”, and she said “you were showing the auditionees in” and then I remembered this little girl, vomiting into a bucket. So that's where we really first met.

JR: But it was remarkable at that time it was the first-ever female led show. Why did it work so well, the combination between the two, do you think?

JW: Because she wrote brilliant things and she's just a really, really clever brilliant woman. You'd ask her to write a sketch and she could write it in three minutes and it would be genius stuff. And she wrote it for me. And she was very, very generous. That's why it works, I feel. There weren't many women ... at that time. With *Wood and Walters* we were the first on telly. So that put us in the spotlight.

JR: Did you use to develop characters together, then?

JW: No. People keep saying, “marvellous, your collaboration with Victoria Wood” and I'd go, “yes, that's right”. [laughs] But, in actual fact, she writes it and I do it. I mean, I interpret it a bit, as you do as an actor, but generally, that's her.

JR: Well it's such wonderful collaboration, perhaps the most famous of all the sketches

was of course *Acorn Antiques*, which we have a clip from now, I think.

[clips package]

JR: Do you like watching clips like that? Does it bring back happy memories?

JW: It does. That does, we had such a laugh 'cause it wasn't done in front of a live audience so you could relax a bit with it. We had such fun with it... it was lovely memories because we just laughed and laughed doing it.

JR: And even some of the corpsing is left in, sometimes, isn't it?

JW: Yes sometimes, yes.

JR: What an iconic character. How did you find her?

JW: First of all, she was written. [laughs] I guess, because it was sort of like *Crossroads*, the shaky scenery and all of that, and the extras and everything, and I guessed she was like Amy Turtle a bit, so I think she should have a Birmingham accent ... so I thought that would work. And then we went and got a wig. We had a grey wig with a bun, and the very first day we came to do it, they'd pinned up all my hair so it was completely flat on my head with a hairnet over it. And Vic and I looked at it, we were in the makeup room, and she said, “don't need the wig, do you?” So that was it, the wig went. Things developed during rehearsals and you know I used to watch the mount monitor so I could see myself, so I used to put the tray out, because it was not meant to be in shot, and all that kind of thing, you know, and then burst on. And everyone built up their parts, even the sound men and people like that, and the camera men were doing the wrong angles; everybody got involved with it, it was lovely.

JR: And great physical comedy. Was that fun to do, the walk, and the hunch...



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: How dare you? [laughs]

JR: I do apologise.

JW: What hunch? [laughs] Several people have said to me in the past, "so and that's padding is it?" "No."

JR: It's method.

JW: Exactly. It's for real now, unfortunately. Now I'm her age, of course. What did you say?

JR: Did you enjoy doing the physical comedy?

JW: Oh yeah, I loved all that. I was obsessed with old women, I guess it was because my grandmother lived with us for so long, she was a bit of a catastrophe in many ways. I was obsessed with it, and you know how old people sort of, the shape of them and how their bodies change... I loved it. Now of course I am that age it's rather depressing.

JR: And Bo, her alter ego, wonderful character as well.

JW: I love how she's completely different. It was sort of based on Noel Gordon a little bit, because you know how Noel Gordon, was she sacked from *Crossroads*?

JR: Creative differences I think.

JW: Yes I think it was, or she left. It was all terribly dramatic so we wanted her to be a bit like that. So that she'd be terribly grand as an actress [does impression]. No, it was great fun.

JR: Do you have any favourite Mrs Overall quotes?

JW: Can't remember them. There's often one that's said to me by members of the public: "What was it muesli?" and then she goes "What was it? Muesli?" and then gets it right the second time, and says it properly. So people say that one, and I can't

remember any others if I'm really honest, that's terrible isn't it, I should do. Yes, so I like "what was it muesli".

JR: You've also done many other wonderful comedy parts and we're going to have a look at some of them now.

JW: Oooh 'eck.

JR: This is fun, isn't it? [pause, laughs]

[clips package]

JR: Wonderful clips. Where does your love of comedy come from? Is it something you've always loved doing?

JW: Where it comes from I don't know. But my parents were both sort of jolly, liked a joke, and liked to laugh. I remember, I have memories of my father making my mother laugh and her face almost exploding with redness and her veins sticking out and her choking with laughter. They had a funny view on life so I guess it was then, and then at school it became a way of surviving, somehow. The very first thing, I guess, was when I was at this awful school I went to, where the nuns used to beat hell out of us. Anyway, one day this one nun, who was absolutely terrifying, used to get us every Friday afternoon to do these mimes. And so, I got up and did a mime and she went, "you should go on the stage." So she was the first person. And she laughed. And we were all frightened of her, and to see her laugh... that was a really special day, I can remember what the room looked like, the sun was shining... that sounds really wanky, I'm sorry. But it was like that, it was like... I don't know. What's the word I'm thinking of?

JR: Eureka?

JW: That'll do. How dare you... Yes, it was "eureka" if you like. And then at school later, you know fooling about in class, which is what I mainly did, all through secondary school, but it gave me a place in the class.





3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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Comedy is a great tool, sometimes. It puts things in their place, it makes things smaller than they might appear, when things are too big or overwhelming, it's good at putting things in their place and it's a good weapon as well, you know, if you need it. And so it's been very useful, from that point of view. I made people laugh at home, I made my parents laugh, family laugh, you know.

JR: Did teachers get annoyed when you were doing your comedy routines in the class?

JW: Occasionally. I didn't want them to not like it, I wanted the teachers to like it, it was for everybody's benefit; it wasn't to kind of upset the teachers really. Depends on the teacher, but generally speaking, it was to make everyone laugh.

JR: We've seen Petula, wonderful character from *Dinnerladies*. Was she based on anyone?

JW: No. Like, every dotty person I've ever met really. No. It's such a wonderful mix of things. You never knew whether she was quite telling the truth. Had she slept with Frank Sinatra? You know, she could have cleaned his dressing room when he was on in Manchester, we don't know ... She came out of Vic's imagination and then I added my own bit, basically.

JR: Well people love her, don't they? What do you they connect with, you think? That slightly random aspect of her?

JW: Yes I think it's the randomness. "I'm pregnant." Coming out with that sort of thing. She quite clearly can't be. And it's also the picture of her life off that set is absolutely appalling, it makes people laugh. This caravan that she lives in. Telling Vic that if she looks in the ... toilets and looks under her old cardigan there's a bit of shepherd's pie that's been there for a couple of weeks but it should be alright if she scrapes the potato

off. That sort of thing that gives people an idea of, you know.

JR: And the costumes were extraordinary. Is it very important to you, you know, when you mentioned the hair when you did Mrs Overall, does that help you get into the character?

JW: Oh yes definitely, the hair and the makeup is very important. We had such fun. When the caravan finally blew up, you saw a picture of it there, I mean Chrissie who's here tonight, it was great fun having her wig all blown up as if the explosion had gone off and her face was black. Yes, it's all part of it and it does help you believe more who you are, who you're meant to be.

JR: You've also been very good with props over the years. And I have a little game. And that was another terrible segue actually. I have a game here which I hope you don't mind playing, a lucky dip. I'm going to stand up. So you can choose a prop and then try and tell me what it represents, which of your characters.

JW: Oh my god.

JR: What does that represent?

JW: Well it's Mrs Overall. Right...

JR: Some other ones in there... [laughs] this is going well.

JW: That's Mrs Overall

JR: Yes

JW: Who the hell's that? A toilet.. Petula.

JR: That goes with this. She always had it in her handbag.

JW: She did, you're right.

JR: I've played this before, you see.

JW: Well I told you a thing or two about her life off screen.



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JR: What about this?

JW: That's the old *Two Soups* waitress.

JR: Yes.

JW: Is this going anywhere now?

JR: No, not really. [laughs] Here's one I made earlier...

JW: What's that?

JR: Now I think that is what Pat would wear.

JW: Ok if you say so.

JR: No it's not, I'm hearing in my ear like football results, it goes with this...

JW: Oh, it must be Cynthia Payne.

JR: Yes.

JW: Oh, right. Come on, bend over and I'll show them how I did it.

JR: Actually is that the time? [laughs] There are a couple more things here.

JW: This is like *Crackerjack*. What is that?

JR: It's a leg warmer.

JW: So it's got to be *Billy Elliot*.

JR: Right. There's a couple more things... That's a magic wand.

JW: Thank God you said that. [laughs] I was just about to ask where the batteries went. [laughter]

JR: It's not that sort of show.

JW: Oh, isn't it..? Well that's Mrs Overall. With a bit of pubic hair... Oh and this is, what'sit, *Pat and Margaret*, 'Pat Bedford My Life in Glamour'. That's right.

JR: And the final thing of the film we've seen already

JW: Oh, *Educating Rita*.

JR: Yes. Lovely, if you can put them back in there.

JW: Was this your idea, James? [laughs]

JR: It wasn't.

JW: It was the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, my dear. See me, thank you. Couldn't even have a glass of champagne.

JR: After that BAFTA award-winning idea...

JW: Carry on James.

JR: I've slightly lost my track here, but we're going to talk about drama now.

JW: Oh gosh.

JR: We've done comedy...

JW: ...have we...?

JR: ....yes that's it for comedy, we're now going to look at some of your most powerful performances from the world of drama.

JW: Who told you to say that...?!

JR: ...starting with *Boys from the Blackstuff*.

[clips package]

JR: I think that was made in 1982

JW: '81, I think.

JR: Still so potent, that scene. What is it about that particular piece that still resonates with people?

JW: Fighting back, I guess, like she says. And people losing hope. It still resonates because people are still in difficult positions, things haven't changed in some ways, people are still on the bread line and suffering.

JR: A lot of those parts you played at that time were strong women. Did that appeal to you to project that through your roles?



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: Yeah I guess... Not that you have a massive choice as an actor, you know you are at the whim of the business and what's being made and everything. They're the most exciting ones, yes. I've come from a line of strong women I suppose, my mother was strong, and my grandmother, and so yes, they appeal to me.

JR: Does it help that you feel a personal connection with a part, does it make you more eager to play it?

JW: I think you've always got to have some kind of, no matter who you're playing, or how awful they might be or perceived to be, you still have to have a connection, it's got to come from inside you somewhere.

JR: And if you didn't feel you had that, would you not take the part?

JW: Yeah I think that's what probably... occasionally things come up and I think, this is really well written but I'm not sure how I would get into this, I'm not sure who she is. That's quite frightening to me.

JR: But you still take on the challenge?

JW: I sometimes have, yeah. I'm very scared I'm not going to 'get' it. Because I like to feel an instant connection from here with it, you know.

JR: Did you feel that with the role in *Boys from the Blackstuff*?

JW: Yes. It was wonderfully written as well, it just comes up off the page.

JR: And it was very controversial at the time, I think there were questions in the House about it and people accused it of being propaganda but it was a reflection of a life that many people were sadly leading at that time.

JW: It's what Alan Bleasdale, who wrote it, saw around him in Liverpool so it was very truthful from that point of view.

JR: You've had an incredibly varied career, wonderful versatility you've displayed over the years, so we're going to have a look back over some of your greatest performances now.

JW: Ok, if you must. [laughs]

[clips package]

JR: Amazing just to see the variety of roles there, extraordinary. *Talking Heads* was the first one we saw. You've always had a great connection with Alan Bennett haven't you?

JW: Oh yeah, I love Alan's work. Doing that was fantastic, so funny and touching and true.

JR: Was it hard to do on your own?

JW: I was terrified not to be able to remember all the lines, because it was 40 minutes of talking, and I did ask to have an autocue at the side but of course as soon as I got there on the day, of course I realised I can't possibly use an autocue.

JR: Like Mrs Overall, looking that way [laughs]

JW: Exactly. And the minute you forget a line you're out of character. But it was comforting to know it was sort of there, but I couldn't look at it. It was a great thing to do. I wouldn't choose to do stuff on my own, I love the team thing. I love being part of a team. I love having people around. I love film sets and television sets for that reason, everybody's doing different jobs and all the actors, it's lovely.

JR: Another clip we saw there, *A Short Stay in Switzerland*, I remember I met you on the set of that, a hotel near Heathrow, which was quite grim, but it reflected the seriousness of the subject so well and quite controversial in its way. What appealed about playing Dr Turner?

JW: It was a fantastic script. Frank McGuinness script. He spent time with her





3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

---

and everything. It was an interesting subject, one that's still being debated. It's good to do something like that to bring it to the fore again. And she was an intelligent woman. She was a doctor. And what was extraordinary was her husband had had a very similar illness. Apparently there's a one in a hundred million chance that that could happen. So the children had seen him die a very slow and awful death, where he just wasted away, and they also witnessed her death, and said hers was preferable because it was what she wanted

JR: Going to Dignitas.

JW: Yeah but oh, it was a depressing subject. You'd look round at the crew every day and they'd be like... [pulls face] everybody. We tried to make a few lighthearted... You couldn't.

JR: Do you take a role like that home with you? Does it sort of invade your being, almost?

JW: People have asked that over the years and I've said, no, no, that's insanity, you leave it at the theatre or you leave it on the set. But things like that do affect you, there's no doubt about it, I felt very low by the end of it. And the same with that other one that was shown there, *Murder*, where her son is murdered, the first thirty seconds of the film she's quite jolly, then the rest, the four episodes, she's mourning and trying to.. it was about trying to grieve really, over a senseless sort of murder, and I thought I'd never do anything like this again. I was going through the menopause at the time so the tears and the flushes, oh my god, every time we did a rehearsal – "stop!" Every time we did a take – "stop!" It was just, and then of course I did Dr Turner and I wasn't quite going through the menopause then, I think I was over the other side. It never stops though, girls... If anyone had told me that at fifty, I'd have looked for a sharp implement. Honestly. [laughs]

JR: Or Dignitas.

JW: Yes exactly. Anyway. But worth doing. But I was glad to finish it. Most jobs I'm quite sad when they finish but no, I was pleased.

JR: Playing a real life character and also with the collaboration of the family, did that add to the responsibility of a roll?

JW: Oh god, yeah. Dr Turner's children, who were fantastic, you know I felt so responsible playing their mother who they loved. They were really helpful, they were there telling us stuff, I met with them, and we talked, and I'm still in touch with her daughter. It has to be right. I had little news clippings of her, and Frank McGuinness had spent a lot of time with her so I was able to use them. You do have a huge responsibility.

JR: I've met the son, and he said what a wonderful job you'd done and how you'd paid tribute to his mother in a very special way. And that must be a lovely feeling when you hear something like that.

JW: I hadn't thought of that, paying tribute, but of course it was. Yeah.

JR: And we saw a bit of *My Beautiful Son* as well, another tough thing to do.

JW: Oh god, yes, the mother and the son. But there was a lot of comedy in it as well, you know there wasn't any comedy in *Short Stay*... not any. But there was in that, which sort of helps lighten it a bit, you know.

JR: And that was another BAFTA-winning performance of course, *My Beautiful Son*.

JW: Yes that was a bit of a shock. Yes. That was great, that came out of the blue, it was fantastic.

JR: We also saw a bit of you as Mary Whitehouse, what made you want to play that part?



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: Well Mary Whitehouse was at her height if you like in about '72, '73 something like that, and I was of the '60s generation, then I was 21, 22, 23 around the time she was at her height, and of course we all hated her 'cause we were part of the revolution, women's lib had started, the pill, free love, it was all that sort of thing, we were hippies, students, and all of that. And there was Mary Whitehouse saying, "no, it's not right." We hated her. She was my mother's generation. We were rebelling against all of that. So of course, 40 years later, or 30 years later, coming to play her, it was absolutely fascinating, and again it was a really good little script. It was brilliant, very funny, but not taking the piss, basically. A couple of scripts arrived about Mary. It often happens, you get like a little rash of scripts about the same thing, I've had that happen quite a few times. And two scripts arrived about Mary Whitehouse. And one of them was really taking the mickey out of her, it was very easy to do that about anybody in the past who's not here to represent themselves and you know being very '70s and all of that. But this one was great. And it made me really like her. I liked her and I respected her and I thought, yes you had a point. We do need – and we did, she was right, we did need a watershed.

JR: She started the watershed. Was it hard, having said as a younger woman that you hated her, to make that volte-face if you like, to warm to her?

JW: No I was pleased to. I don't like hating anybody really. I was pleased to understand her. Because I didn't bother with understanding her when I was 19, 20.

JR: Too busy leading the revolution

JW: Yes exactly. In Manchester. Anyway it was great to do it. And Hugh Bonneville felt my bosom. I mean, I had that as well. I'd forgotten that until I saw it on Graham Norton the other night, they showed that clip.

It's very funny. It made me laugh. We snogged! We did. Any decent man would have put a ring on my finger, I said that. It went on and on, that snogging. Anyway.

JR: Another very famous real life character that you played was Mo Mowlam, and we're going to see a clip from that marvellous performance now.

JW: Thank you.

[clips package]

JR: I remember talking to you at the time and you said at first you were very hesitant about taking on that role.

JW: Yes. First of all I read the script and thought, this is fantastic. I couldn't believe what I was reading. I didn't know Mo Mowlam personally; I was one of the few celebrities who hadn't met her. I'm not a celebrity but you know what I mean. And so I was shocked by the script, apart from anything else. I didn't know the half of it, basically. I thought, I've got to do this, it's amazing. So I rang the agency and said, I'd really like to do it, and then of course I started to really think about it, and I thought it hadn't been long since she died. And I thought, how much do people remember about her, do they remember her voice? So I said to Grant, my husband, "do you remember how Mo Mowlam spoke?" He said "yes, she had that really high pitched..." I thought, oh no, he remembers, so I really have to get her voice. And then they sent me some footage of her. I don't look like her, I don't look anything like her. I thought, people aren't going to see through the disguise, so I rang the agent and said "I don't think this is a good idea Paul, I really don't think it's a good idea." And he said: "With respect, bollocks." Those were his words. "Just get the wig and glasses on and it'll be fine," basically is what he said. And then Grant said: "Look it's your Mo, it's your version of her. Do it, don't be afraid." So I was scared of it, she was nothing like me



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

---

physically, she was a big woman, tall and big, and blonde with great big pale blue eyes and big open face. Nothing like me! It would be like asking Daniel Craig to play Gerry Adams, or the other way around, Gerry Adams to play Daniel Craig. Anyway I got over it ... we did a sitting to put a bald cap on, because her hair went quite quickly and it was over that period of time so had to have different wigs. So we sat for hours having this bald cap made. And then two minutes later it was curling up or something was wrong with it. So in the end I said, what if I shaved my head? She was just waiting for me to say that of course. Because I'd be in the chair at 4 o'clock in the morning to have that put on, so I shaved it and that was a revelation.

JR: Was it quite emotional, doing that?

JW: It was a weird experience. I really feel for people who lose their hair in that way. I mean I just shaved it and I knew it was going to grow back. I'm quite hirsute, as it happens. I won't go into that now. It did feel sad, terribly sad, it's different for women than it is for men. And I looked like all my mother's male relatives and they're not as attractive.

[Laughter]

JW: Awful. And then you discover all these little dents and things. I thought my brother must have done that when I was little, you know. Little scars and things. And I didn't want my husband to see me.

JR: How did he react?

JW: "Just like I thought you'd look." I said: "What do you mean?" He said, "Like Harry Hill."

[Laughter]

JW: Honestly. I wore glasses in those days. Well after that. We're just about made up.

[Laughter]

JW: Yes, but I wore a wig, Chrissy got me a wig that I wore, that was similar to my hair before the shaving, and I could see people looking at me, people that I knew, they'd meet in the street and they'd kind of look at me and think, ooh something's happened. This was before the show came out. And I wondered why people were looking at me oddly and they thought I'd suffered cancer. Anyway, I didn't want anyone to see me in makeup, those boys coming in to do the filming, "no let's get it on before they come in!" It's like really intimate having your head shaved off if you're a woman, like that. You get used to it though.

JR: It did help with the performance because you were sort of almost going through a similar thing to what she went through. Maybe not on the same level, but does it help you get into the character?

JW: Kind of, yes it did. But I was having my head shaved three times a day, I put the men to shame. You could see it coming up, "oh god, another shave." Yes it did, sort of. I realised how cold you get, I'd wear a hat in bed. Very attractive on the whole.

[Laughter]

JW: Because I was bald with just a tiny bit of hair here, so you can only imagine what that looked like.

JR: But you've never been afraid to alter your appearance, we saw a clip from *The Hollow Crown* where you played Mistress Quickly and that was another wonderful performance. Wonderful look, as well.

JW: Well I begged them for eye makeup, begged them. He said they didn't have it in 1412 or something, I can't remember.

[Laughter]

JR: But you're not afraid to go through these transformations.

JW: Oh no I love that really.



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

---

JR: Is that an important part of it, you think?

JW: Yes if you're playing Mistress Quickly you've got to look like a woman of the time, haven't you. And she wouldn't be very clean, and she would have liked a drink. Let's face it. She wouldn't have been wearing her moisturiser and all that kind of stuff. I love that, creating the character in that way.

JR: And you're not afraid of playing older characters as well, sometimes.

JW: No. Now I'm the age of all the people I used to play. No I love that, yeah.

JR: What was the age difference between you and Robert Lindsay when you played his mother in *GBH*? Were you the same age?

JW: He was a year older than me! How dare you.

[Laughter]

JR: I do apologise

JW: Yes we went through the whole thing of getting prosthetics for the face, and all of that. And in the end I said: "Everybody knows I'm not that age, anyway, so we may as well go on and play it." Just have the wig.

JR: Yes, another wonderful performance. A lot of your performances have involved song and dance, and we have a montage of your great song and dance routines here.

[clips montage]

JW: Oh no! Get it off!

[Laughter]

JR: Many many wonderful routines there.

JW: Thank you James.

JR: The *Billy Elliot*, that must have taken so much work to do.

JW: Oh god, it was awful. Months of rehearsal and then I get there on the day - it took me ages, there was a hole in the kitchen floor nearly from doing it - then I got to the day when we were filming and Jamie Bell who played Billy was doing these steps in the corner and I said: "That's good Jamie, what's that?" He said: "That's what we're about to do." I didn't even recognise it. It was nothing like what I was doing.

[Laughter]

JW: It was awful, and I couldn't get the steps right. It was the menopause again, I don't want to go on, but it was. I went up to the end of the room, and I've never done this on a set before or since, and cried. But anyway I had to come back and face everybody. It was just terrible. Anyway we got it right in the end.

JR: It's a wonderful scene.

JW: Yes ok, alright. If you say so.

JR: A great director on that film as well, Stephen Daldry, obviously a great theatre director as well. Have you always had a sense that it's very important to build a good relationship with a director?

JW: Oh yeah it's important. And Stephen, I love the sort of director that he was. He was just endlessly creative and open, and very easy. He listened to people. Some people don't want to be suggested to, to be given suggestions, but he was just open. It didn't matter who suggested things, he'd listen, he'd maybe use them, maybe not, but he was very open so it was always very creative. We just suddenly decided to do another scene, I've never done that ever on anything. "We're going to shoot something else while we're here." "What? It's not on the schedule." "Yes, supposing she did this and he did that?" "Yes, let's do that." It was just great fun, I love that.



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JR: And we saw a bit of Mrs Overall on stage. How did you feel about bringing her back in the stage musical?

JW: It was heaven. It was very hard work but it was heaven. Because you never stopped as Mrs Overall, from beginning to the end of it. But it was great because I used to talk to the audience, stop in the middle of a song and talk to people, it was just fabulous. And people loved it. So to hear that, there's nothing like that.

JR: And when a routine goes well, either on stage or on film, that has taken so much work, is that a great sense of satisfaction?

JW: Oh yeah. And of course on stage, it's very obvious if it's gone well because the audience go "yay", or whatever. The *Billy Elliot* one particularly was because I'd found it very difficult. I'm not very good at choreographed steps. So difficult remembering them. And of course once you've forgotten one it's not like lines, where you can pretend to ponder. The music's gone on ahead!

[Laughter]

JR: And you made *Stepping Out* with Liza Minelli as well?

JW: Oh, there's another one. Tap dancing at 40! No, I'm sorry. I nearly kicked myself to death trying to learn it... Liza was at the top and quite rightly, she's a sensational performer. I mean, in the flesh as well, doing it there in the rehearsal, she was amazing. So she was at the top of course, being brilliant, I was at the bottom, still trying to tap out the time steps. Oh god, and being out of time, oh. Lewis Gilbert (director) had said to me: "Don't worry darling we'll shoot round it." No we didn't, we had to do it.

[Laughter]

JR: And we saw a bit of *Mamma Mia!*, a lovely scene there.

JW: [groans]

[Laughter]

JR: Do you not enjoy watching that again?

JW: No. I didn't enjoy that because foolishly, I knew it was coming up, that scene. When Phyllida Lloyd, who directed it, said: "You're going to dance along the table" I thought, oh no, not exposing then at all! So come the day - well what happened was there was going to be a rehearsal and the choreographer said I could do my own thing so I said I'd do my own thing, so I didn't have to rehearse it so I didn't rehearse it, I was scared of it, so I didn't rehearse it which was very foolish. Because come the day, they're all sitting there aren't they? Meryl and Pierce and Colin and all the dancers and all the other actors are sitting along the table and I've got to go along it. I had a coughing fit and nearly died.

[Laughter]

JW: It was nerves. At the end of it [sucking noise] it was like my lungs had collapsed and the nurse had to get a bag for me to breathe in, it was one of those things. It was all nerves about doing it. Jeez I couldn't wait to get off and jump, I didn't tell him I was going to jump onto him at the end. I had to just out of sheer relief that it was over. Get off the table, catch me now, blimey.

[Laughter]

JR: Another huge global success. Why did that film chime with audiences, do you think?

JW: Well the musical was already the biggest musical all around the world. So it was always, no matter what, it was going to do well. People would want to see it, we imagined. But nobody imagined it was going to be like that. I live in the country and every village hall had these *Mamma Mia!* nights and everybody joining in and singing and





3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

---

dancing schools. It was unbelievable. I think the reason is those Abba songs, they're pretty special. And they're much more complicated than you think they are. When you come to sing them they're difficult. When Meryl, Christine and I went into do *Dancing Queen* in the studio, we did the first thing and the Abba boys were there. So of course we'd all be singing it thinking we'd got it right but you know, "wrong." And I remember Christine saying, "thirty years of singing it wrong." You feel you know them, but they're quite complicated. But they were great to sign. They're great songs. And it's an uplifting musical, it's not up its own bottom. It knows what it's doing, it's not trying to, you know. It's got a sense of fun to it.

JR: So in that studio did Benny and Bjorn give you notes on the singing then?

JW: Oh yeah they were there. The very first day was quite nerve-wracking. First thing we did was record the songs. So I went with the MD and I did the harmonies on them. So I had to go and learn those, then we were going into the studio. So then I met Meryl Streep who's like an icon to me, even though she's only a year older than I am, it feels like I grew up watching her. And there are the Abba boys. And like within like five minutes we're round the bloody piano singing it! It's a wonder I didn't have another of those coughing fits, actually. It was fine, they're really nice, they're lovely.

JR: And you had a good relationship with Meryl as well, didn't you?

JW: Yes she's amazing. She's a force of nature. And she's not starry, she's a proper actor. And very involved.

JR: You've done so many wonderful movies recently. A lot of very lovely children's films. I took my children to *Paddington* on Sunday, it's an excellent film.

JW: Yes it's lovely.

JR: And of course you've done all the *Harry Potters*. Is there some particular appeal about children's films for you?

JW: Well I'd never been in anything that children watch before the *Potter* films. Not that kids recognise me, it's usually the parents: "That's Mrs Weasley." And the children go, "no it's not, it's not." Because of the wig and the padding. I wore padding. Yes, a lot of the kids didn't think I was wearing padding, it was very insulting.

[Laughter]

JW: Yes it's lovely from that point of view, appealing to kids and the magic of it and them coming to the cinema. Yeah, it's lovely.

JR: And those films have become a complete phenomenon. Do you get a lot of people coming up to you and saying how much they love them?

JW: Oh yeah. They were massive, the *Potter* films. There's no doubt about it, those premieres were like nothing on earth. The Oscars weren't in it, I tell you. I mean, the last one it was Leicester Square and Trafalgar Square filled with people. Kids. I used to say: "Does your mother know you're out?" They're all camping and there's no toilets or anything there. Anyway, it was amazing. I don't think there will be anything quite like *Harry Potter* again. The fact that kids grew up with each film was just extraordinary. And if you go back and suddenly the twins who were down here were up here.

JR: Yes, and audiences grew up with the characters. Is that one of the reasons why they continue to resonate with people just because they felt a kinship with the characters?

JW: Yes there's something about the fact that the kids grew up, they were a year older with each book and each film, it kind of suggests a life going on. It enhances that more than films that are a single story in





3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

---

each film, you feel you're growing with them and it is a life that goes on, in a strange way.

JR: And again, like *Educating Rita*, when you were making the first one did you have any inkling of the phenomenon that it would become?

JW: No, no not at all. It was a shock. Lovely shock. All that parading around America and stealing towels from hotels, it was marvellous.

[Laughter]

JR: Now you're doing a wonderful TV drama at the moment, you're just putting the finishing touches to it. *Indian Summers*.

JW: I forgot. Yes.

[Laughter]

JR: First of all, what's the premise of the drama?

JW: Well it's 10 parts, Channel 4, it comes out in January. And it's set in Shimla in Indian, which is in the foothills of the Himalayas, and it's where the British went from Delhi in the summers. So it's the summers between 1932 and 1947 when India got independence. So it's sporadic summers over about five series I reckon they'll try and do. I don't know what's going to happen with it. And it's about that, it's about the British community and the Indian community and how they dealt with the British and Gandhi's rise and all of that. And it surrounds the social club, and I play Cynthia who runs the social club where it all happens really. What I found extraordinary about it, all the dramas in the past that I've seen about India, wonderful dramas, but were all about frightfully posh people. And of course, they were there, but most of the people were sort of middle class, sort of ordinary people that were out in India, in the civil service, and working class people as well. So that was a bit of a revelation, because my character is an East End

woman, Cynthia. She's Machiavellian and her morals are based on what she needs, really, practicalities.

JR: We are lucky enough to have a special clip from *Indian Summers* which we're going to show now, yes.

JW: Are you? Oh my god!

[clip from *Indian Summers*]

[applause]

JR: A lovely clip, and you were saying Cynthia isn't all she might appear to be.

JW: No but it will be revealed over the series. Yes, well, no she's not all she might appear to be.

JR: Now you filmed in Malaysia, what was that like?

JW: It was fabulous. We were in Penang. Because they found a hill station, an old hill station, because Shimla in India now is completely built up, it doesn't look anything like it did in 1932. So they were almost tearing their hair out trying to find a place in India where they could to shoot it. And they just couldn't get the extras in the right place, this that and the other. And then they went to Penang, which obviously was a colony as well in Malaysia, and there was this hill station on Penang Hill, all covered in jungle, literally you could barely see it. It's sort of like the enchanted castle. And they cut it out, they cut it all away, and did it up and rebuilt it, and you'd just want to go and stay there, I tell you it looks beautiful. It's a really interesting place, Penang island, where we were.

JR: And were there many challenges during the shoot? What was the weather like?

JW: Well it's always hot and steamy, well I love that, hot and steamy, and massive ants.

[Laughter]



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: Like something out of a cartoon. Like this [gestures], I'm not joking. One of them got in my costume, I got a massive bite. But not much of that, people didn't get sick, it was lovely. Very hot at times, but you just get used to it, I quite like that.

JR: One of the wonderful things about your job is the opportunity to go to places like this you might not otherwise go to.

JW: No, exactly. It was great, went to Cambodia, had a holiday, lovely.

JR: Now, over the years you've worked with many wonderful people and some of them have paid tribute to you now. We're just going to watch.

JW: Stop it! Have they?

[tribute clips montage]

[applause]

JR: You touched on it earlier the importance of teamwork, is that something really crucial for you that the relationships that spring out of work?

JW: Yeah, because it's collaborative. Whatever way you look at it, you're collaborating with the writer, the producer, the other actors. And everyone, the camera man, the lighting. So getting on, on the set - I like a laugh and sometimes it's not appropriate - it's very very important to connect with everybody, I feel.

JR: And does that stem back almost to the theatre, when you started out, that wonderful ensemble picture with Willy Russell in it.

JW: Yes, because on stage you're surviving together so you really, really do have to be a team in order for it to work properly I think.

JR: Now audiences love you just as much, and we have a little montage of what

audiences think of you now. Not just other actors, oh no. Audiences too.

JW: Who are they? [laughs] Did you pay these people?

[Laughter]

JR: It's a fun montage.

JW: Ok. Oh dear.

[clips montage]

JR: It was of course clips of why audiences love you so much and there's a very widely held sense, Victoria mentioned it there, that people feel a connection with you. This phrase that's attached to you - 'national treasure' - how do you react to that? Isn't that a nice thing to be viewed in that way?

JW: Oh yes. No I'd rather be viewed like that than people thinking I was an old bag. Yes. Because I like people, generally speaking.

[Laughter]

And I want to communicate with them and be with them and understand them and for them to understand me. Work is much better if you do, if people get on and feel safe with one another. It's that really.

JR: Do fans often come up to you and want to chat?

JW: Some days you get it loads, and other days not at all. People generally speaking are really nice.

JR: Is there anything in particular that they want to talk about?

JW: No, they usually want to talk about what they've seen, "I saw you in that thing..." they usually say they've seen me in something and they liked it or something.

JR: And offer you two soups or something like that?



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: Well you do get that a bit. Actually in restaurants. Two soups. Deadly if I ever order soup.

[Laughter]

JR: We've been reading a lot in the papers recently about how hard it is to become an actor. Do you feel that it's tougher for young actors starting out today?

JW: Oh yeah much tougher. There's no reps for a start, that's all gone really. And that's where most of my generation of actors started. And it's a great place to start, you're away from London, away from everything, so it's brilliant from that point of view. And of course there's no grants, either, so it's very hard for them to go to drama school unless their parents can afford it. So I think that's sad.

JR: So it is excluding a whole level of society.

JW: Oh yeah it is. The arts need to be represented by everyone.

JR: Absolutely. If you had advice to give to a young actor, what would it be?

JW: I'd say – I don't like particularly giving advice, because it depends on who it is, but I'd say – make sure it's what you really want. Because it's not an easy road. I've been lucky. There's a lot of rejection in it. And people describe you. You have to keep your feet on the ground. I'd say, don't believe any hype. Be real with yourself. Be truthful to yourself. That's it really, and the same with the parts that you play. If you become famous, really don't believe the hype. And if you're struggling, then keep your faith, but know when to give up. I think some people spend their whole lives hoping for it, you know.

JR: And does it alarm you sometimes to see the way in which fame has become so all-important, you know with all the talent shows

on telly. People are kind of desperate to become famous.

JW: Yeah it's kind of misinterpreted, fame, as if it's something wonderful. And I must admit, when people first started saying, "you were in that show", I thought, "cor, look at me!" you know. It didn't take long for me to realise this isn't a good thing. It's nice, I'm not saying it isn't nice when people say, "that was great I love that show" and "I love your work" and of course that's lovely. Michael Caine once said it didn't he, someone asked "what's it like to be rich and famous?" and he said: "Well I'd much rather just be rich."

[Laughter]

People don't realise how precious anonymity is until it's gone. Once it's gone, it's really difficult to go and do things, you know. If you're having a dutch cap fitted you don't want the nurse saying: "I know you, don't I?"

[Laughter]

JW: You know. There are times when you really like to be private, and sometimes it's difficult.

JR: It does become quite tricky sometimes then, does it, to be recognised?

JW: Yes, well who would want it all the time? I have stood in Marks & Spencer's - I have told this story before - standing looking at the underwear and two women are standing a foot from me, or maybe two feet from me. I could feel one of them out of the corner of my eye, go [quiet whistle] and look at me like this. And I think, I'm going to move off in a minute and I heard her say, "That's Julie Walters." to her friend. I'm standing right there. And the friend said: "Ooh no, not dressed like that."

[Laughter]

JW: My eyes immediately shot down to my feet because not long before this incident I had gone out in my slippers. And they



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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weren't any ordinary slippers either, they had bobbles on, proper slippers.

[Laughter]

JW: And I was already in Guilford so it was too late to go home. So I just went shopping in them. Anyway.

JR: You've had such a wonderful varied career. Do you still have unfulfilled ambitions?

JW: Do I? I don't know, probably with my tomatoes more than anything.

[Laughter]

JW: Just to maybe go on doing a bit. I don't want to be working all the time, you know, I like being at home. But I don't want to give it up. I thought at one point, when I reach 60 and I'd shaved my head, hadn't I, for *Mo* and then it grew through, I saw it was white. That was a big shock, I'd dyed it for so many years I'd no idea what colour my hair was. There it was, this white hair, and I thought quite, sort of, aged. And I thought, well I could just retire now, this is when people retire, and I didn't do anything for a year and I thought, you know what, I think I could actually retire. Then a script came from *The National* and "Oh my god you should see this script!" So that was it, you know. I thought, oh no, I'm obviously not quite ready for it yet.

JR: So no thoughts of retiring now, then?

JW: No, I don't think actors ever do. I imagine that probably my health in later years might prevent me, but if it doesn't, I'd go on doing a bit if I could.

JR: And also, some people sometimes say there's ageism towards actresses when they reach a certain age. But that doesn't seem to have affected you.

JW: I think it affects everyone. No I've been very fortunate, but I think it affects

everybody. You do get offered the smaller part of the older person, you know. But that's ok, that's the way it is. But I think it is changing. I'm part of the baby boomers and there are more of us, there are more parts for older women definitely than there ever were. And there are more women in television, there are more women writers, there are more women producers, in high positions, it is changing. Slowly, those social changes take time, don't they.

JR: We've seen so many wonderful clips tonight. Is it possible to pick out one that's a particular favourite of yours?

JW: A clip or a show?

JR: Or a role perhaps?

JW: *Mo* was a favourite because it was such a challenge. And I loved doing *Mrs Overall* obviously, I would have to pick her for the sheer fun of it. Um, very difficult. *Boys from the Blackstuff*. There's a few really.

JR: Would you ever think of bringing *Mrs Overall* back?

JW: Oh god I think she's been brought back enough now. No. I can't bend that double, she'd be really bent. She's retired, she's hung up her overall.

[Laughter]

JR: Now to finish, we're going to have a tribute to *Educating Rita*, this is a quick fire round of questions called *Educating James*. So if you could just give me quick answers to these. What would you be if you weren't an actor?

JW: A writer, I think.

JR: Did you always long to write?

JW: I like it, yes.

JR: Did you write in your own time?



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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JW: I've written my autobiography which I loved writing, I wrote a novel which I also loved writing for 10 years, it's not *Anna Karenina*, so saying it took 10 years is not a good thing really. But I do enjoy the thing of it. Yes I'd probably go for that if the work dried up.

JR: And what always makes you laugh?

JW: Really crude things probably, slapstick a bit. Victoria Wood makes me laugh, always.

JR: What makes you cry?

JW: Kindness. I find that very touching, I think it's very underrated. The goodness in people I find touching. And people triumphing against the odds.

JR: Where are you at your happiest?

JW: At the moment probably with my husband on a Saturday night watching *Breaking Bad*. [laughs]

[Laughter]

JR: Do you have a favourite joke?

JW: Yes. Do you want to hear it?

JR: Yes please.

JW: Well a mouse met an elephant in the jungle. Everybody's probably heard this. The mouse says to the elephant: "Oh my god, you're absolutely enormous." And the elephant says: "Yes and you're really really tiny." And the mouse says: "Yes but I haven't been well." [laughs] That's my favourite joke.

[Laughter]

JW: The other one is, there was a peanut and it went for a walk on Clapham Common. It was a salted.

[Laughter]

JR: That's good. What are you most proud of?

JW: My daughter.

JR: That's nice. What's your favourite comedy character of all time, not one you've played?

JW: Ooh god, [pause] I think Peter Sellers in the *Pink Panther* is one of them. Oh god I can't think now, it'll come to me when we've gone. I'll come running up the street after you. I've just thought of something that's gone out of my head again, that's the trouble with this age, whole blocks of things go out of your memory. It's deadly with lines.

[Laughter]

JR: Or you could pick one of your own?

JW: No I couldn't do that. I'll tell you who I absolutely adore. Jack Black in *School of Rock*. I think made me die with laughter, he's just so funny in it.

JR: Great. Finally, who would play you in a biopic of your life?

JW: At what age, though? Tracy Ullman because she's a great actress and everyone used to get us mixed up. They used to say to me, "oh I loved *Educating Rita*, and your latest record." In the end I used to say: "Oh good, I'm glad you liked it." I gave up saying... Oh never mind.

[Laughter]

JR: Now we would like to ask the audience if they have any questions. I believe people might be circulating with microphones.

Q; Are you ever planning to work again with Victoria Wood on TV?

JW: Mind your own business.

[Laughter]

JW: Do you know, it's very funny you should say that because I had an email off her just the other day, and she said: "Let's meet for a cuppa, I want to talk about a film."



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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Probably nothing to do with me, probably just wants to ask me a question about it. Nothing to do with me in it, but anyway.

[Laughter]

Q: I know you said you found it really difficult to learn steps when you're dancing, but have you ever been approached to do *Strictly Come Dancing* and would you ever do it?

JW: No to both. I love it, I absolutely love it, but can you imagine the nerves on that Saturday night and trying to remember the bloody steps? And can you imagine Craig Revel Horwood with my posture? It would be murder. No I couldn't do it, and I wouldn't be very good at it. I love dancing, but it has to be to my own tune, basically.

Q: Hi Mrs Walters. Comedy or drama, what's more challenging for you?

JW: Comedy, probably.

Q: Why?

JW: Because if it doesn't work it's very obvious. And very embarrassing. It's much harder because it's about timing, and you can't learn it in any sense. It has to be instinctive. So does drama, I guess, but it's not as challenging as comedy.

Q: Going back to *Educating Rita*. You started in the theatre and got the role in the film. Is your impression also that it seems like when a movie is made out of a play it is not the people who are actually doing it on stage? That stars need to star in it and it doesn't give those chances to the actors who originated the role.

JW: That's right, it never usually is. I was fortunate in that what happened is Lewis Gilbert said: "I've seen the play and I'd really like you to play the part but you're not a star, so that could be a problem." So he went off to America to try and raise money, they wanted Dolly Parton [laughs] I can think of

two reasons why I couldn't possibly compete with her.

[Laughter]

JW: Anyway. And Paul Newman was who they wanted, and he said no, and Willie who wrote it said absolutely not, he wouldn't let this happen. And so he came back to England and eventually he got Michael Caine, so he rang me up and said: "I've got Michael Caine so you've got the part." So they got a star, because they had him I could have the part, you know. So I was very fortunate to do that, because it's true. Most people don't get to do what they've done on stage on film.

Q: Hi Julie. You mention about almost changing your mind to do *Mo*. Is there a role you did turn down, that you regretted afterwards?

JW: Yes but I can't say what that is, because if I did, the person that did it will know that it was offered to me. I couldn't do that.

[Laughter]

Q: They're not here!

JW: Oh but they would hear about it. I don't trust any of you.

[Laughter]

JR: There are dozens of journalists here as well.

JW: Stand up if you're a journalist!

[Laughter]

Q: How do you juggle being a mother and a full time actress?

JW: With great difficulty. I think everybody who works and has a child finds it very difficult. Mourning the whole time when I was away. Luckily I was quite old when I had my daughter so I was kind of able to say I'm not going to work weekends. So I rarely worked





3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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weekends, and I never worked at Christmas, and I only once worked in the summer holidays and she came with me. So I managed to do that. And I was away once for two and a half weeks and I cried myself to sleep. I did, I found it really difficult. But I needed to act, it's the two things. Very very hard, but I think for any woman it is.

Q: If you were asked to do *Downton Abbey*, given your past canon of work, would you be up or down?

JW: How dare you. To even ask that. I would be up! I would be with Hugh, of course. You saw him feel me. Or maybe you didn't. But he did. Felt my bosoms, in *Mary Whitehouse*. They didn't show that clip. Didn't want to upset you.

[Laughter]

Q: Which would you rather be, up or down?

A: I think I answered that, I'd be up! Up yours. [laughs] I'd be up. I'd be up, I'd want to be very posh. That's where I would be, I would be with Hugh. Think I should play Hugh's lover, actually. So there. Is there anyone here connected with the series?

[Laughter]

JR: That's definitely an exclusive there, to all the journalists present.

Q: *Calendar Girls* had some fantastic female British actresses in it..

JW: Are you a pervert? [laughs] I get a lot of them. No honestly, you come out of the theatre after a hard night's acting, and someone puts a picture of your bottom in front of you and asks you to sign it. And they're always a bit creepy. Anyway. You have a look about you.

[Laughter]

JW: No, I'm only playing.

Q: *Calendar Girls* had some great British actresses in it, did you mind getting your kit off?

JW: Say again, I talked over you.

Q: Was it fun to do, and did you mind getting your kit off?

JW: I knew he was a pervert. I knew it! I want a bodyguard when I leave here.

[Laughter]

JW: Yes it was fun to do. A lot of people said: "Ooh those women together I bet it was difficult." It was great. And we were all going through the menopause at the same time. And you could tell who was on HRT and who wasn't. I won't go into detail but anyway, it wasn't just about the sweating.

[Laughter]

JW: It was embarrassing getting the kit off, we were all a bit nervous about that. Helen got us all champagne, so that helped. And some of us had to be naked longer than others. I thought they might sort of – I had a bit of back fat – so I thought they might have got rid of that.

[Laughter]

JW: They shade out everything else. Anyway, there you go. It was great fun, it was.

Q: I wanted to ask about when you get a script and your agent sends it to you, what's the process, do they big it up before they give it to you or how do you decide on a script?

JW: Well sometimes my agent will say, I don't think you should do this, but he'll send you it. Because I always like to read them anyway. And he's usually right, I have to say. If he says that, I think these are not going to be very good. And other times he says, "here's a script, so-and-so wants you to play this, what do you think, let me know what you think."



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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And sometimes if something is really good he'll ring up and say: "We're sending you a script. We think it's a really good thing," or something. And then I'll read it and say yeah, or no.

JR: Maybe just take a couple more questions after this.

JW: It's 'cause we're going clubbing.

[Laughter]

JR: I told you not to tell anyone!

JW: Is your wife here? You said you weren't bringing her!

[Laughter]

Q: Hi Julie, just wanted to ask you about the autobiography. How long did it take to prepare, and have you finished it?

JW: I finished it a long time ago darling, obviously you're not in the know.

[Laughter]

JW: If it came out in 2008, I wrote it in six months and I wrote it, it wasn't anybody else. A load came out at the time - I think it was in *The Daily Telegraph* at the time - saying they were all ghostwritten. Mine wasn't, I did write every bit of it. The only thing I didn't write was the title, because I wanted it to be called *What Have we Reared?* because that was what my mother always said: "What have we reared!" Like cattle.

[Laughter]

JW: I thought it was quite appropriate. My husband said: "It is, we live on a farm as well, you know, reared." But I don't think they wanted the word 'rear' in the title so they decided they wanted *That's Another Story*. I said, oh alright then. And they wrote the chapter headings, because mine were just 'Birmingham', 'Manchester'. So they did that.

But all the text is mine. Six months of heaven, I loved it. Well, most of it.

Q: If you could have someone wave a magic wand and give you the most wonderful part that would really excite you, that would make you get up in the morning and be really excited, have you any idea what that part would be?

JW: No, I've never attached myself to parts. It's more been, what's the script like, who's going to direct it and who's going to be in it, the people involved. The part does come into it, but I don't think, I want to play Betty Davis. I don't think like that. I'd love it if something came from the National Theatre that I really wanted to do, I love the National, it's sort of like school a bit, there's all these other actors there, I love that. I've done three plays there and loved it. And so I suppose it would be something like that. But a particular part, I couldn't say, really. Except I want to play a baddie in the Bond films. Have they ever approached me? No. Never. Fools.

[Laughter]

JW: Watch this space. Anyone here from the Bonds?

[Laughter]

JW: The final question. No pressure, but it better be a good one.

Q: I saw you in the 60s.

JW: Eh?

Q: in a wonderful play on television and I'd never seen you before.

JW: Are you sure it was the 60s?

[Laughter]

Q: No, maybe not, maybe the 70s. It was about an actress, I think it was in rep or



3 December 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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something, it was a one-off play, and I thought, what a talent.

JW: You sure it was me? Were there songs in it? Was it with Victoria Wood?

[Laughter]

Q: It might have been? It was definitely you and I also saw you in *In the Blue* at the National.

JW: No, that wasn't me. Tracy Ullman.

[Laughter]

JW: I wasn't in *In the Blue* but I love the National.

Q: So you didn't do a one-off play?

JW: You know this is the last question, don't you? I certainly wasn't on telly in the 60s.

[Laughter]

Q: Or 70s. Because I just thought, what a talent. But obviously... I'm sure it was you.

JW: It could have been Victoria's play, that's all I can think of. But you're right, anyway.

Q: Never mind. You're wonderful.

[Applause]

JW: Thank you very much.

JR: Well Julie and I obviously have to go clubbing now.

[Laughter]

JR: So I'd like to say thank you to everyone for coming and to the event sponsors Rathbones. But most of all to Julie Walters!

[applause]

[ENDS]

