A Life in Television: Sir Michael Parkinson
23 November 2016 at BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

Krish Majumdar: Good evening, my name's Krish Majumdar, I'm the Chairman of BAFTA's Television Committee, and I'm also on the Board of Trustees. Welcome to this A Life in Television event with Sir Michael Parkinson. I'm really thrilled so many people are here, and we're very lucky to have him here. The point of these events, and all the events we do at BAFTA, are about two things for me; they're about inspiration and excellence, and I think Sir Michael Parkinson embodies both of those things. He made interviewing on television, he elevated it to an art form. And some of the most memorable television moments over the last few decades have come with his interviews, with people like Muhammad Ali, Tony Blair. And recently when Muhammad Ali died there were lots and lots of interviews on television about Muhammad Ali, and the *Parkinson* clips just brought it all back to me. When I was growing up, it's one of the few programmes that the whole family used to sit and watch, and it was real, incredible entertainment that kind of electrified the nation at times, that I don't think we have many televisual moments like that anymore. The person interviewing him today is Kirsty Young, and we're very lucky to have her as well. I think she's an absolutely fantastic journalist and broadcaster, she's obviously really well-loved for *Desert Island Discs*, and she's presented many, many programmes over the years including *Crimewatch*. And I think it's such a crucial part of the evening is the person asking the questions, it's quite interesting, you have one brilliant interviewer with another, so I hope you enjoy it. Just a couple of housekeeping points. Please can you keep your phones on silent, but please if you want to tweet or Facebook there's the hashtag on the screen. We are also filming this event for our website. If you've not been on the BAFTA website or BAFTA Guru we have an absolute treasure trove of events like this, and again we want to inspire people, so please tell people about it, go on, have a look at all the amazing content we have. And at the end there will be a chance for you to ask questions, so I hope you enjoy the evening, thank you.

[Applause]

Kirsty Young: Well good evening to you all, thank you very much for coming. There are, I think it's fair to say, very few people who seem to define an entire genre of television programming, but tonight's very special guest is one such person. Throughout the decades his programmes were what is now known as appointment to view television. It wasn't when he started making television. Let's just give ourselves a quick reminder.

[Clip plays]

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the broadcasting great that is Sir Michael Parkinson.

[Applause]

Welcome. Very nice to see you.

Michael Parkinson: And that's only one or two.

KY: I'm sure it's a complete treat for them, it is an entire treat for me to have you sitting here. When you were, you were standing there just watching that little montage of clips, what occurs to you as you see the decades fly by.

MP: What a lovely job it's been. How marvellous it is to meet all your heroes. And in the case of somebody like Muhammad Ali, to meet somebody who the rest of the world wanted to meet, and I mean there are so many wonderful people among that montage, but there's one man there that was so special, I mean it was like he was a Martian. I remember when he arrived on the show for the first time there was a gasp from the audience, I mean it was as if he stepped off another planet, off a rocket ship. And he walked on, beautifully, glided on, and sat down and he couldn't get his backside into the chair, he was so big, so we had to find a chair big enough to accommodate his bum. And we found it upstairs, Head of Light Entertainment, Bill Cotton, who didn't have a chair he had a thrown actually, and that's how we started the show.

KY: And the first of four interviews with Muhammad Ali, that was in 1971 I think.

MP: That's right.

KY: Your first series ran from '71 to '82, how did that initial series come about?

MP: Well I was working at Granada and doing sort of cinema and odd things like that, and an afternoon show for Thames Television, really freelancing around. And I

got this call from Bill Cotton saying, "I'd like to come and talk to you." And we met and he said, "Look, I've got this break, ten weeks in the summer," he said, "Can't promise you anything at all, but you know, let's try." He wanted to do a kind of a variety talk show, and I wasn't too attracted by that, so we didn't argue, I just found a producer who like me didn't want to do that kind of show, Richard Drewitt, dear Richard. And so together we devised this show which mixed comedy and entertainment with, of course, serious interview. And it kind of worked. And I mean nobody said anything to me, after ten weeks I just kept walking into the building and doing a show, so that's the way the BBC was in those days, after ten years they said goodbye, I said, "Fine, okay."

KY: But you said you didn't really want to do that kind of show. In those days what did you perceive that kind of show to be.

MP: I didn't, there wasn't one kind of like that, although there were magazine programmes that still did it, the *Late Night Line-Up*, that kind of thing. I wanted a mixture of *Late Night Line-Up*, the way they interviewed people, and also bring in some, because I love showbiz, comedians and people like that, but not have them as a separate spot, but to have them intermingling. To see if we could genuinely get a conversation going, I suppose that's what it was. And there wasn't a kind of precedent for it in that sense, not for a big Saturday night show, and you know we had that entire problem you always have, a lot of people in this room will understand, you know if you don't have the rating you don't get the big Yanks, that's the problem. And that was our problem, I mean our first guest was Terry Thomas, hardly likely to bring the American producers flocking to your door. We stat down and decided the man at the time who would impress them, the American agents, was Orson Welles, a great hero of mine and Richard's too. And off we went to sort of persuade him, he was filming in Spain, he spent a lot of time filming in Spain, I don't think he ever finished a film he started in Spain. But we talked to him and he said that he would come over for, a vast amount of money we thought, but that was okay. And the only other thing he wanted to guarantee the deal was that we took out four seats from a British Airways flight to lay a mattress down so he might sleep and rest his back. Well we fell for this, so sort of God knows how British Airways to do this, whereupon he got on the airplane, looked at the mattress, and then went and sat on the next seat over. Which was an indication of the kind of deal that he'd got in his mind. And I was in my dressing room having waited, I don't know, years I suppose to meet Orson Welles, all my life, and there was a knock on the door and there he was in a black sombrero, black silk cravat, black cloak with red lining. And he said, "My name is Welles." I said, "Well I'm Michael Parkinson." "May I come in?" I said, "Well of course, of course." I got on my desk and I got the sheet of paper which I'd taken about three years to produce this, the definitive interview with this great man, you know how it goes.

KY: Yes, there will never be a better one.

MP: Never ever will be, he will never have been interviewed like this, and he took the lot all in his cloak, and then he looked up by accident, "What's that?" and he knew what it was. And I said, "It's my question list for you, sir." "Aha," he said, "Well may I see it?" And I said, "Yes." So he petered up and he went like that and he said, dropped it in the waist bin like that, and he said, "How many talk shows have you done?" And I said, "Three." "I've done rather more than that," he said, "So let's go and talk." And talk he did, and he was magical.

KY: Talk he did, and he is indeed magical. We have a wonderful clip, let's take a little look.

[Clip plays]

MP: Well, there you are.

[Applause]

KY: Isn't that, I mean, when I first looked at that clip the thing that struck me was, well they don't make them like that anymore, because you know what was also interesting was the amount of time that he had. Now in an encounter, and we all know there is a sort of reciprocity in that, you know you have to be willing to give the person space, and the person has to be willing to fill it.

MP: It's a deal.

KY: If that was only your third, was that only your third show?

MP: Yes.

KY: Was that nerve-wracking for you?

MP: Terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. But you're not allowed to show that are you? No, you have to sort of steel yourself and pretend you do it every day. Orson Welles, who's he? You know it's all an act really. But with somebody like him, I mean if you treated him seriously, he treated you seriously. And he loved talking about that period in Hollywood, he loved talking about anything, you know the manners of Spanish peasants, he just goes on and on and on, and he was one of those wonderfully eloquent men.

KY: And he had thrown your notes in the bin as you told us, but did you go back through the things that you had crafted over those three years of anticipation, or did you really go with the flow?

MP: Well I mean the entire basis of the interview is what you do beforehand, you know you have to do the research, you have to. And you might only use I don't know, 10, 15 percent, but by god you can guarantee that if you didn't do that the one area that you didn't cover would come up and you'd look stranded, and you'd start looking like a goldfish. So you have to do all that, and I never once came to the end, I don't think, of my research, with any interview I did. I always sifted it, but in the end I got the beginning, middle and end, as I'd imagined it in my mind. Again, you can't do that with Billy Connolly, you couldn't do it with Muhammad Ali, you couldn't do it with Spike Milligan you know, but you had to at the same time go through exactly the same process all the time, just to quieten yourself, that when you walked on you knew this person.

KY: In particular, with that interview, what di you learn from it? I mean that was a real baptism of fire, what did you come away from it and think, 'from now on I will…'?

MP: I think that it just actually established what I'd always believed that the interview was about, that it was all about the preparation, I think that's what it was. I was never nervous of anybody in an interview, providing I had been given the time to prepare it beforehand. And that way you can cope with most anything, drunks or whatever it might be. They're a bit of a problem, we might talk about that later. But nonetheless, I just have this routine. My researchers, we'd pick them very carefully, and I would pick them as much for what they could write as well as what they uncovered. Because when you get a piece, we got a huge, imagine the research for Orson Welles if you really went back through everything he'd ever done, so you wanted a person who could edit through the research for you. And then you wanted a person who could write it in an attractive way so that it wasn't a chore, it wasn't just a list of facts. And more than that, what I used to say to them, I said, "At the end of it all I want you to lead into my intro. I might not use it, but just to see that you're getting the right shape in your mind." And that way I felt comfortable going on because I knew, all of us were knowing, which way it was going to go.

KY: And part of any glittering career such as yours is not just all that groundwork that you put in and all the hard work that nobody, probably quite often nobody even sees, but you know it's there and it underpins an interview, but also it is timing. I mean you came into television and you started to interview people at a time when we were talking about 'Old Hollywood', who didn't, they didn't care much about TV, they didn't necessarily understand it, and to that extent it was a gift, is that fair?

MP: I think that's fair. I mean they weren't let out by the studios, I mean the Hollywood studios for a great deal of time actually banned their people going on television because television was the devil's spawn. What is more, it wasn't going to last very long either. They soon changed their mind about that. And I just happened to coincide, quite coincidentally. Growing up my passion was Hollywood, I mean I used to go to the movies with Bogie and all, my inspiration. Lauren Bacall, I lusted after Lauren Bacall, and when she kissed me I nearly fainted. But they're all my heroes and I knew a lot about them, you know I didn't need the research in a sense because I knew them. And so that coincided with the studios saying, "Okay, fine, yeah let's use this new medium to promote these people." And when they, the audience had only ever seen them 30-feet high on a screen, and when you actually said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Fred Astaire," and he appeared, I mean come on. You could hear them going, "Oh," it was wonderful, exciting you know. And nowadays of course

everybody's famous, and nobody's got a private life, and so we know every inch about them, everything about them, that they walk down the stairs. "Oh I know all about him, I know a guy down our street looks like him," and all that sort of stuff. But with them in those days they were different, the were absolutely extraordinary creatures.

KY: And you have said, as we know you interviewed Muhammad Ali four times, and I heard you say as well on the radio the other day, you were talking about it on the Today Programme, you said there was, when he walked into the studio there was a sort of audible gasp that went around the room. And you said to me a minute ago, "I was never really nervous." With him, no nerves, you didn't feel a sense of nerves as he walked down the stairs?

MP: I was excited. I was really properly excited. As I said, I think there are certain people that the world wants to meet really. I mean Mandela would be another one, wouldn't he?

KY: Who you did, and you went there, yes.

MP: Exactly. And he did this wonderful thing on me actually, I sensed he was in the room we were setting up, and he said, "Where is the famous BBC interviewer?" And I turned around and there he was, I said, "Here, sir."

"I have to tell you," he said, "I'm slightly deaf." I said, "I hope, sir, you'll hear my questions." He looked at me with a smile and he said, "I'll hear the ones I want to answer." And I thought, "How many times has he caught a journalist like that?" 15 love, you know.

KY: We're going to take a look at some real classics now, which begin indeed with the great Ali. Let's take a look.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

What about that? Let's start with Tony Blair. He was the first serving Prime Minister who'd ever been on a Parkinson show, am I right in saying that?

MP: Yes.

KY: What were the circumstances of the booking? How did you get him?

MP: I don't know, I can't… They booked him. And it was a good time to book him, the war and all that sort of thing. And he was an interesting man, and I mean, and he liked talking, and people who like talking are good to interview, because they often speak without thinking, which is what he did there. He just said that thing about praying, and I thought, "Hmm, here we go," so then you move. So you have to listen as well as you know, construct the interview.

KY: In the Shirley MacLaine clip the audience laughed at something that the camera operator didn't quite catch. Did you lean over to touch her?

MP: I did.

KY: You did? Did you do that deliberately?

MP: Of course, I mean I'd loved to have touched her. I touched her arm and felt the electricity shoot through my body.

KY: The point I'm getting at is you were asking her about whether you were a male chauvinist, she thought you were a male chauvinist pig, and you then, so you deliberately patronised her by doing a sort of, 'there there, pet'.

MP: I didn't patronise her at all. I'm the kind of person who actually does like sort of touching people. I don't sit back away from them like that, I go toward them. In an interview that's terrible interviewing. You know this as well as I do.

KY: Of course.

MP: The body language to an interviewer is very, very important, and the more you lean in, the more you engage the eyes, the more chance you have of getting something said and done. And so that was a situation where I had to go forward and look at her because the question was, not pertinent, it was a bit cheeky, but I knew what she was like because I'd seen her before. She's a very witty, very funny woman and I adored her.

KY: And you very deliberately had gotten rid of, what they had in all of the American chat shows, was the desk. Because you wanted, you know in any interview there is a completely artificially created intimacy. Here

you are my friend, here you are, let's chat the way we'd be chatting. So not having the desk there kind of gave you a physical proximity that was an advantage.

MP: Absolutely, I mean you could say the greats of American talk show hosts who actually wrote the dialogue I suppose, they never bothered about interviewing. I mean Johnny Carson was not an interviewer, he was a comedian, and he didn't mind the desk between him, he didn't see it, he saw it as somewhere he could put his scripts on, he could see the joke or whatever it might be. But when you're interviewing people you can't have anything that bars you, takes you away from that intimacy that you hope develops. And with some people you can't do it, some people find it offensive, but generally speaking that is the only way you're going to reach in a totally false situation, lights into your eyes, makeup on, in the old days sweating like a dog, the only way that you can actually convince them that they are actually going to enjoy this was doing that. It's a great con actually.

KY: The moment when Noel Gallagher said to you…

MP: Wasn't that wonderful, though?

KY: Wonderful. When he said, "Where did you get all this?" That is the moment, surely, that every interviewer lives for, when they feel that they have reached originality, when they feel that you are not just stirring around the great anecdotal pot that people have heard in other circumstances and other places.

MP: That's right. And again you have to do the work, you just have to because otherwise they can get away with it. I mean I had Barry Manilow, I was talking to Manilow and I said, "You behaved very badly when you were young." "No I didn't." I said, "You did." I said, "You used to ring up restaurants you were going to and insist the management kick the people who were there out so you could have the restaurant to yourself." "I didn't." I said, "You did!" He said, "Where did you get that from?" I said, "Your autobiography."

[Laughter]

I mean he shut up after that.

KY: As you will know, and as I know, it is often the case these days, in fact I think literally always the case on television interview programmes or entertainment shows that people appear on, that there are agreed questions, people know exactly where they're going, and the publicists have spoken to the researchers and producers, and everything's agreed beforehand. I didn't see your interview with Woody Allen, and that is, when I watched these clips that was the first time I'd seen a part of it. He was obviously coming on at a time when the temperature that surrounded him was rather febrile. Did you have to gird yourself to go there mentally with him?

MP: No, not at all. I mean, two things, we were told by his agent if I even mentioned this girl he'd walk off. And so my producer, Bea Ballard I think it was, said, "No, we don't deal like that. He's coming on and Michael will ask him whatever he wants." "Well I'm telling you…" and all of that sort of stuff went on. And he did say to me before we went on, you know, "Just keep it sweet," or whatever. And I said, "Well, you know, it'll be okay, I'm not going to get nasty or anything like that." But you had to ask the question, of course you did. What I didn't want to do, to make it seem less prying and less sort of salacious, was to actually find a reason, a journalistic reason that actually justified the question. And what I discovered of course was true was that the affair that he'd had actually ruined his relationship east/west coast of America, only the central, or it might have been the other way round, but certainly he'd actually affected the number of people who went to see a Woody Allen film in America. So that's the way the I brought it in, you just saw the end of it, before that the preamble had been, "You know your career in America has suffered because of this, so let's talk about the reasons why." Now there's a journalistic reason, and a good one then, for me to then ask the questions about the relationship. And the other thing was that you could tie that with his decision to work in Europe more, because in Europe people just didn't give a damn.

KY: And how was he afterwards?

MP: He did not stay around for a drink or anything like that. And his agent was beside himself. But I mean we just said, look…. Or his agent said, "You didn't sign the agreement." I said, "We signed everything, come on."

And I said to him, you know, "I'm sure that nothing terrible is going to happen, people will enjoy that." You know it's a good question, he answered it well, and you know he's an extraordinary man.

KY: I mean he actually dealt with it brilliantly by dissipating it with a laugh. He timed it perfectly, he delivered it perfectly, and from that point on people were, when somebody makes you laugh you're kind of on their side even if you don't want to be. He did it brilliantly.

MP: That's right, he did.

KY: Meg Ryan, not so brilliantly.

MP: Ah.

KY: I tried to watch that interview again yesterday. I actually couldn't watch it. My palms were sweating. I want to know where the rot set in, because when I was watching it as it went out on television the first time, I couldn't really understand it, I couldn't unpick it. I'm imagining things must have happened before she even walked onto the set.

MP: Well what had happened in a sense, she was right at the end of promoting a film which wasn't a very good film, it didn't make it at the box office and she was sick of this long tour and you know the criticism of the movie and all that, I think. She'd also just split with Russell Crowe, and that hadn't helped quite obviously. And I never used to talk to people before except to say, "Hi, how are you," before they came on the set. On this occasion I had to go to her dressing room and went out there and said hi to her. And she was sitting on one side of the dressing room staring at the wall, and the entourage were at the other side staring at the wall, I thought, "Hmm, this is going to be cosy." So I just said to her hi, and I introduced myself, and she wasn't up for it at all. But the point was, and I understand that, and a lot of people are nervous and all that sort of thing, your job is to make them less nervous. But the thing that really did it was I had on the guest beforehand, and she was sitting behind the set watching it on a monitor there, so she knew damn well what was going on. And when she came on she simply ignored the two women, the fashion girls there used to be, whatever their names were. And she came on and just ignored them, and just sat down. And so she was being rude, she moved her chair so she was like front on to me and they were sort of looking around the corner. And then she started, I said, "Did you enjoy that fashion item?" "What fashion item was that?" Well she knew which fashion item it was, she was pretending she had fallen asleep or something, and she started to get under my skin, she really did, I mean she was rude to people. And I can't bear that you know, they've done a job, they've set the tone for her, and here we are and she's just not cooperating. Who does she think she is? And so that was my mood, I got cross with her, so we had a little sort of a disagreement. And you know there was a point where I was going to pull out long before that, but then I thought, no, I'll keep going because it might have one of those moments that people talk about, like the emu and stuff like that you know, they come out of the blue. But anyway, so I mean that was it, and I just was being honest with myself, I was just showing my disapproval of her, that's all. And we don't send Christmas cards to each other and anything like that, and these things happen.

[Laughter]

I mean that's the great thing about the talk show, was it was so unpredictable, there's no script. Well you'll know this, you've been doing it, you can do all the research in the world and it does depend on do you like that person? Can you get on with them? Are they trying? You know, forgive anything if they're trying.

KY: Let's, I want to talk about the craft of the interview, but it strikes me that if I were Sir Michael Parkinson I wouldn't forgive myself if I didn't ask this question, which is that recently it's been in the news, you know there's been a lot of talk about this memoir, the memoir you've written about Ali, but also people have been raking through the coals of past interviews, and you and I were just chatting about this before we came on. Infamously Helen Mirren was interviewed by you in 1975 and you asked her about stripping off, now it strikes me that every interview that takes place takes place in the moment of the encounter between the two people, and if you're encountering somebody in 1975 I would say you're probably going to ask them different questions from what you would ask them now. She subsequently came on later and

was interviewed. You did, you sort of I don't know if you kissed but you made up.

MP: Well we certainly made up, that was in 2006 or something like that, when we decided that we'd both like to look at the show again, and we did, and we just cringed because it was just, "Oh my God." And I reminded myself what I'd thought, and I didn't handle it very well at all, but it was when she walked on with a feather bower on. But really what I was thinking, because I was what, 40, and she was about just 20 or something like that, what I was really thinking, I was like a dad saying, "You're not going out like that are you?" You know it was that kind of feeling, and it wasn't sort of sexist, what do they know these people. So from that point, again it was honest television, honest reaction you know. And she's made the best of it because, and quite rightly so because I was rude to her and not nice to her, and similarly she I think also said to me you know, "Neither of us did well there, did we?" And I said, "No." We left it at that. But the kind of journalism, how far are we going to go back, 50 years it is, eh? Come on, we've all changed, but not according to some columnists we haven't all changed.

KY: Let's talk a little bit about the craft of the interview, and the relationship between, you said you would ask researchers to make you feel like they were doing the lead-in. Would you make, I mean it was interesting with Noel Gallagher there, would you make calls, would you talk to friends of people you were going to interview, or would you rely solely on what you were given through the sort of professional research?

MP: Relied solely on the evidence of what my team had given me, absolutely. I mean certain times I'd say to Frosty, "Have you ever interviewed so and so?" And he'd say, "Yes." I'd say, "Any tips?" I mean there is a kind of market for interviewers, they exchange information. But no, generally speaking I just relied upon the team.

KY: And you mentioned that idea that when it goes into unchartered territory is the great moment. There can be times when, I mean I'm thinking particularly of comedians, performers, they can be particularly hard to handle because they like being in charge, they feed off laughter, and to hell with your plan anyway. I mean how, did you approach interviewing comedians differently?

MP: I approached them quite carefully. I didn't have on comedians who couldn't think, you know what I'm saying, just guys who got the gag book out and, "Have you heard this one? Have you heard that one?" When you're talking to Billy Connolly or Spike Milligan you've got a brain working there you know. They don't have to have gags to make people be entertained or laugh. I enjoyed the company of comedians and I worked with an awful lot of them, all the Americans and all the great British ones, and they were some of my favourite times, they really were. Because everything you can say about Connolly, he was so refreshing you know, he really was. In '71 I'm coming back from Glasgow and the cab driver who was taking us to the airport, he said, "Do you know The Big Yin?" I said, "No, no, airport." He said, "Green's Playhouse." He said, "Look at that," and it said 'The Big Yin. Billy Connolly. The Great Northern Welly Boot Show.' He said, "That's your man. Have him on your show, you like a laugh." I said, "I don't know, airport, airport." And he stopped at a parade of shops and he came back with this CD, which was Billy with his banana boots on and you know that sort of thing, he said, "Here, have that on me," he said. "Because you're going to use him. I know you are." Put it down at home, three weeks, two weeks later, Andrew my eldest boy said, "Dad, have you listened to that?" I said, "No." He said, "Well what bit you can understand, he's brilliant." And so we rung him up, put him on, and that was in 1971, and from that point on he took off. And after that what 15, 20 times he did it, and became a friend. It's sad now to see Billy, but you know he's still working, you know he's still defying everything that's happened to him, and he's a remarkable man, he really is.

KY: We'll take a look now at some of your encounters…

MP: With Billy?

KY: With Billy, with other comedians. It doesn't begin with Billy, but take a look at this.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

MP: How we miss those two.

KY: Yes.

MP: How we miss them.

KY: Watching the Billy Connolly, I'm reminded, that was the first time I had ever seen a proper Scottish person on the telly when I watched him on your show. And that in itself was magnificent if you're a Glasgow girl, to see somebody speaking like you almost spoke on the telly. You say that you had him on for about sort of twenty-odd times after that, and that you became friends, was that unusual or did you tend to sort of spark up relationships?

MP: I never went out of my way to sort of meet people or make a lifestyle of chatting up people on my show and inviting them home and all that, not at all. One of two people, I just felt close to them, and I mean it was just a natural thing when we became friends. The same with Billy, I mean I think he was grateful for the fact of the assistance we gave him in the early years and the continued support. But nonetheless, that wasn't the driving force in our relationship. He came down to live two doors away from me on the Thames, and that was fun too. I mean imagine having Connolly, borrow the old cup of sugar from Billy Connolly would be rather nice, you'd have to make an excuse every day to go and see him. He's just a very fine human. You know the people I really like are people like Connolly who are genuinely funny, they don't need a gag writer, they don't need a script or anything like that, funny men, they have a funny bone which runs right the way through their bodies.

KY: How much did you know about what he was going to do when he came on?

MP: Oh, nothing. It didn't matter. I mean it just didn't matter, you could do all the research you liked in the world, but he'd take off. One thing, ah, away we go. And you could see him sometimes say something in a story, an anecdote or whatever, and you'd think, "Ah, here we go, and now he'll give us a routine of this one," and of course he did. But it was the unexpected quality of Billy which made him wonderful. Like Spike, Spike Milligan. I mean you could do all the research in the world, you'd have no idea what Spike Milligan was going to do when he came on. He didn't know himself, you know. But there's that lovely feeling of walking the narrow tightrope with people like that.

KY: Kenneth Williams was a…

MP: Ah well, Kenneth Williams, he said in his memoirs when he first met me he thought I was a crass working class Yorkshireman, and that I wasn't worth the time of day. By the time he came to the end of the book I was his new best friend, and friend forever. He was whimsical, to put it that way. But I liked Kenneth, and again he was a wonderful anecdotalist, he used to tell wonderful stories.

KY: Did you feel, I mean great box office, great television, but did you feel that you got to know him, indeed to understand him?

MP: I mean did he know himself? I don't think he did. He was a very troubled man in many, many ways. And a lot of comedians are you know, I mean aren't they? It's interesting when Billy you see of all people, you look at Billy and think, "Great Glaswegian, ah he can handle himself, what a tough guy." And I was in Sydney watching him work at the Sydney Opera House, and as he turned away I caught a tear in his face, in his eye. I thought, "That's very odd, he can't be crying." Anyway, afterwards we went for dinner and I said, "Can I ask you a question? Were you crying onstage today?" It was an anecdote about his dad. And he said, "Yeah, just a wee moment." And I said, "What was that about?" And he said, "One day I'll tell you." And he didn't tell me, he told his wife, and she wrote the book about it. He'd been assaulted as a child and that was the stuff coming out you know, the memory of his dad, it wasn't the funny memory, it was something else altogether. And that's the weird thing isn't it about the human mind, how it kind of protects things and then betrays it, and that's why comics do it I think, to find out about themselves or to get rid of something. You know it was a very odd moment.

KY: Have there been moments, that of course you would be sitting there with an audience and as you say with the lights, and you are working and you are aware you're making a television programme, but have there ever been moments when in reality as a human being, rather than as the professional interviewer, you have been profoundly moved by something that

somebody has said?

MP: Very much so, and in particular there was an interview I did with Professor Jacob Bronowski. And now can you imagine this today, Jacob Bronowski did an hour and a quarter, one-man show, primetime, watched by eight million people. I mean come on, things were a bit different in those days. But toward the end, it was an extraordinary performance by him talking about Auschwitz where his family were murdered, he came to the concluding part when they went to the pit where the ashes were thrown and all that sort of thing, and he told me that he had to make this statement to camera, just one take to sum up the entire thing. And he said, "I had nothing on my mind at all until all of a sudden Oliver Cromwell's words came to me: 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you might have been mistaken.'" I've gone now.

KY: You've gone; I don't blame you for going.

MP: Yeah.

KY: And when he said this to you there did the same thing? Yes.

MP: We took it out to do a clip show, right? I mean I just wanted to prove to people that you know, there are moments when you think, "What?" And the problem was that when we took it out of context, of course it worked, it was very powerful indeed, of course he was a wonderful performer as well as anything else. But what we couldn't do was follow it. I couldn't come up, say, "Hey, come on folks."

KY: No, there's no closer to that.

MP: There's none at all. And we didn't want to end on that, like that, because it was just too profound and too upsetting. And so then we remembered that the week, time before, some time before, I'd interviewed Itzhak Perlman and Larry Adler, and they had performed quite unrehearsed 'Summertime', written by George Gershwin of course. And so here we had three Jews performing this extraordinary thing, and so what we did we just tagged that on the end, and it just worked beautifully, just the music accompanied the thought, and we just fade into, "Thank you and goodnight."

KY: You were talking there about you saying that was, with Bronowski that was an hour and 15 minutes of primetime television, can we imagine it now? Well of course we can't imagine it now, and years ago I came across, I was looking for it again yesterday and I couldn't find it, but I came across an interview, and this must have obviously been the very early 70s, with W. H. Auden.

MP: Yes.

KY: Now, we wouldn't get that now on primetime television, but what do you remember of that encounter?

MP: I remember the creases his face. He had these extraordinary deep ridges, and I might have imagined this, but I did say to my producer afterwards, "Do you know, he's got dust on the ledgers." And I don't know whether it was makeup or not you know just got stuck there, but he had these little particles down. Well he didn't know what he was doing in that sense, I mean he'd never been on a talk show like that before at all. He came on with Johnny, Johnny Gielgud, and they were wonderful. But again you see, nobody was surprised that that was a Saturday night show at all. That's it, fine, go for it, entertain us.

KY: All of these names just roll off your tongue, and I'm just looking at every single face here, not a single one of them that you wouldn't want to hear from. And yet you, am I right in thinking you never got Sinatra?

MP: Never. Nobody did. Nobody did.

KY: what was the problem?

MP: His fame. He didn't need to do it. And he obviously imagined, and I used to talk to Sammy Cahn about this, Sammy was a songwriter who was very close to Sinatra. He said, "He won't talk, he just thinks that they're going to bring up the Mafia and all that association and all that," which was true, you know. He did belong to the mob at one point in his career, and throughout most of his career. So he thought you know, "I don't want any of that," and he didn't need it. I mean did he need publicity? Did he heck. I mean he was the greatest star in the world, people forget how big a star he was. And he just didn't want to do it, which was a pity because you know he was bright and intelligent and all that, and Sammy got an

introduction to me. He said to me one day, I was staying with Sammy in Hollywood and having a holiday and he said…

KY: What, this is Sammy Davis Jr.?

MP: Sammy Cahn.

KY: Oh, Sammy Cahn, I beg your pardon.

MP: And Sammy, well he wrote all of Sinatra's second period so to speak. After he got divorced, Sammy, from his first wife, he made millions doing the Come Fly With Me album and all that, and worked with Jimmy Van Heusen, a very rich period in Sinatra's recording career. And so we became very close, and he said, "I'm going to take you to a party tonight, Frank's having a few friends round." And he said, "And I'll introduce you, and then you know he'll know about you and when he comes to London maybe he'll do the show." And so we went around there and he was there, "Hi, Frank," he said, "It's Mike Parkinson, talk show, I've told you about him." Frank said, "Hi Mike, how are you?" "Good, fine." And then Sammy went off to some other party, and I was left alone in a room, I only knew me and Frank Sinatra, and I was wandering around and looking like a club pickpocket, and I thought, "I'm going home now." So I sort of wandered out, and I sought out my friend, my hero, Mr. Sinatra. I said, "Mr. Sinatra, thank you very much for the invitation but I've got to go now." "Okay, sure sure," he said. "See you in London, David." I thought, "I've really made an impression on this guy." But I never got him, nobody ever did. But what a performer, what a star.

KY: Could you give us your thoughts on the, I mean given that you are in that unique position of having started in '71, and having gone throughout the decades, different times at different broadcasters, but you were doing essentially the same job, you would have seen in that great sort of swoop the arc of your career, the change, the change that came about as you say because people now, you know we can watch what Brad and Angelina are having for lunch on their Instagram account, you know stars are no longer shielded, sort of shrouded in the mystique that they once were. Plus, you've got the publicists, plus you might have somebody coming onto your show in 2008, 2009 who has spent three days doing a junket at Claridge's, and then they get, makeup comes on and they get wheeled on, and you know we all expect them to be fresh and wonderful. Was that noticeable to you throughout the decades, that the landscape had changed?

MP: It changed, I think really basically later on in my career. When I came back in the 1990s and 2000s it had fundamentally changed. It didn't mean to say that you couldn't do a good show, you could, but those people were interfering more and more. But we had a golden rule, and you can call it arrogance or not, we wouldn't deal with them. If they wanted to impose any kind of rule about what we could do or say, we'd say we don't want them on the show. Why should we? But if you are the show around that everybody wanted to be on, then of course they were snookered. So were they going to go to some other show which doesn't have the rating? And by that time the reputation was such that we could get more or less what we wanted, but I see it as a problem. But also too, I mean I've been in television 60 years now, it's a long long time you know. And you ask me about the changes that I've seen, oh come on, I mean it was sort of like a broken down old bus to start with you know, nobody knew what they were doing. And they'd fleece you to go to Granada Television, I arrived there about two years after *Coronation Street*, and I said, "I can't produce this," and, "Neither can we," they'd say. We don't know what we're doing here at all." And we used to have a wonderful time there making it all up. I think the other think too that I was lucky, we were lucky about, came through that generation of television where Granada took over the north and Sidney Bernstein ruled the roost, and the place was full of journos and things like that. It wasn't just that the people were like-minded, it was just that the people who were bossing us, and if I think about Dennis Foreman at Granada, if I think about Paul Fox at the BBC, these were guys who'd had a war, so they'd come out of a war, they'd know what was the worst kind of kind of aspect of human behaviour was about. They knew they had an ambition to make a different Britain and all that, they were very used to commanding people and expected people to jump when they looked their way, and they were terrifying in many ways, but by God they created wonderful television. So when we talk about that period we kind of discount that quality that was there and in charge, and inspiration that was there for

any young person with ab ambition at all. And I feel that today young people coming into the business, which has changed radically as we know, but they don't have that same kind of guidance.

KY: What was your ambition? I mean you say you were at, you'd come from Yorkshire, you'd worked on local papers, you worked at the Manchester Guardian then you'd come to the Daily Express on Fleet Street. When you took your first steps into television, I mean I understand that you wouldn't have known the possibilities of television, but what were your personal ambitions?

MP: I wanted to be a film star, basically. I wanted to be famous, of course I did, like you all do. I mean I didn't deliberately seek a path there because there wasn't one that I could find, I produced, I produced for a few years and I enjoyed that immensely. And then Granada had this idea that everybody that appeared on television should be a producer, director, all that you know, so the idea of the ultimate all-rounder. And I just sort of took to it, I enjoyed it very much indeed, and I did my very first showbiz interview. I can't imagine actually, have you got that? My first…

KY: Mick Jagger?

MP: Yeah.

KY: We have. Before you say another word, let's watch it. Wait until you see this.

MP: Yes, I mean the thing is, the 60s were wonderful, I mean in Granada in particular was at the epicentre of the cultural revolution. All the actors, all the writers, Finney, Courtenay, all those people, were just centred in Granadaland basically, which Sidney had invented. And it was just very exciting. But we wouldn't know what really was happening until much later, and then we couldn't remember what had gone on in any case. But, and George Best arrived, and all that, it was very, very, very exciting. And I was producing one, and we used to have a music spot because the music was dominating everything. Our group, our local group when I first joined were The Beatles. We didn't know they were The Beatles, nor did they, and one day John Lennon said, "We're off to London to make a record." And when they came back with 20,000 kids chasing them through Manchester and the world stood on its head, and that was the cultural revolution, the beginning of it. And so it was very, very heady times. What was I going to say?

KY: I was going to say, let's take a look at the Mick Jagger…

MP: Oh no, well let me set it up first because Johnnie Hamp who was wonderful…

KY: Never try to interview an interviewer.

MP: No, because it just needs a tiny bit of setting up. Johnnie Hamp, the producer who was booking all the acts, rang me up and said, "There's a great group down here called The Rolling Stones." He said, "I think they're going to be wonderful. Also," he said, "I think that Mick Jagger, who's their leader, he's been to university, he'll make a good interview. So interview him." I on the day as a producer, I've got no interviewers, they're all out on some story, so I interviewed Jagger. It was the first time I'd ever interviewed on television, and this is my only claim to fame.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

KY: So young, so young he was. What did you make of him afterwards? I mean he spoke very well; he was very eloquent.

MP: Yeah, he was very posh wasn't he too. Talked properly, not like 'at. He was a very polite young man. We had no idea, who had an idea, you know everybody came on, performers particularly, nobody had a clue who they were and they all became famous, huge stars you know, very exciting times. Well I mean the world tipped on its head and there we were, bang in the middle of it. Like all those things, revolutions, you're actually not aware of what's happening until much later.

KY: There have been moments in your own career when, and I'm thinking now as you came out of that first tranche of the chat show which had been as I said when I was introducing you, appointment to view television. You were a big, big star, and you became one of the famous five in 1983 that set up TV-am, which was to those of us standing by and watching, it was a great you know fireworks show. But I imagine if you were in the middle of it, it famously, it

floundered amid, there seemed to be a lot of infighting, the ratings were poor because it was ill-conceived what was making it on air, it was very high-minded what ended up being on air.

MP: Yeah, you're partly right. The biggest thing that affected us was the fact that the authority delayed our entrance into the marketplace and gave the BBC the first crack, so by the time we got on they had breakfast television, the BBC had had it for three months or so, and that was the biggest thing of all that I think influenced us. I'm not saying it would have worked because there were problems, there were problems of ego, you can imagine with that five. There were strange things, and when I look back I felt very discontented in the sense that you know we'd all been so enthusiastic, but we'd been too enthusiastic, we'd not sat down and really worked it out. And I remember one marvellous moment when, that eggshell tower or whatever it was called overlooked a canal, and it had big windows, and I used to love looking down at the water. And one day I'm standing on the ledge of this window looking down to the canal below, and to my left, and David Frost was there doing the same thing. And I said to him, "Who's going to jump first?"

KY: What did you learn from it? What did you come out thinking, "Well, I wouldn't ever try that?"

MP: I learned a lot about the way that corporate bodies work, about people investing, kind of business people. I just was never comfortable with them at all, I couldn't understand what they were saying for one thing, I'd got no idea. And then all the, it all blew up, you know when the girls were sacked and all that stuff, and I sort of left then, but in fact I don't think that the two women ever believed this but it was true. Mary and I decided I was going to go, I was going to resign as well, and I had a call then from our chairman, Dick Marsh. And he said, "I hear that you're contemplating jumping ship." And I said, "Well I wouldn't quite put it like that," I said, "But you got rid of the two girls, and I'm not happy too, by the way things are going." "I have to tell you," he said, "I've just come from the authority, and if you jump ship then we're all done. They will actually reorganise the bids." And I believed him about that, I mean it was more than a likely possibility, so I stayed on. And I should have gone, I think.

KY: And the two women you're referring to, Anna Ford and Angela Ripon, or course.

MP: Anna and, yeah, yeah. And it was sad. Yeah, there were personality conflicts as you'd expect. You know there were some pleasing parts about it. I met Robert Key for the first time, because Robert was part of our famous five. And he'd always been one of my heroes and I used to love talking to him and all that. And David, I had a very, very good friendship with David all of my working life, and we became really, really good friends. And I felt sorry for him because it was his ambition, it was him driving it all. And in those days you know he was an extraordinarily powerful man in persuading business people to come and invest and all that sort of thing. And if anybody was broken hearted by what happened it was David, not I. I went to Australia, I made the best move of my life.

KY: Explain something to me, you will know this, there are only four people that have ever presented *Desert Island Discs*. There was Roy Plomley for 43 years, there was Sue Lawley for 18 years, I'm doing it just now, I've been doing it for 10 years, no intention of giving up any time soon, and you only did it for what, two and a half years?

MP: Didn't like it.

KY: Tell me why.

MP: Why didn't I like it? Well I'll tell you what, you've a lot to thank me for actually. I mean I took over from Plomley which was not the best news at all because Mrs. Plomley for some reason decided to still hang not her husband's memory, well I can understand that. Well I was this common Yorkshireman who was not able to take over, or not understand the Plomley project. Well let's be frank about the Plomley project, it's a little radio show which works beautifully because you get people talking about the music they love. Very simple, but don't let's say it's a work of genius who invented it for God's sake. So there's too much of that federation going on.

KY: And was that going on in the press, or was that said to you explicitly?

MP: Well you know the press like all that don't

they, and then of course she was making statements to the press about me, about being too north country for people to understand and all that. Which I didn't bother with that, I mean she was a widow, she was grieving, I understood all that, but you know it just made it less comfortable. I was also working with people, in those days it was done by the music department of the BBC rather than the current affairs department like it is now, and that was a strange body of men. I mean it was, they were nice people but they were the kind of people, you know when you walk down a corridor and someone comes towards you and they go like that in case you touch them, well it was full of people like that. I hope there are none of them here. And I just generally, I was uncomfortable. And the other thing, when I did *Desert Island Discs* with Plomley I was disappointed.

KY: As a guest?

MP: As a guest. We went for a nice meal at the Garrick Club, and then we came back and we sat in a broom cupboard in Broadcasting House, while he interviewed me but didn't play any music. And I said to him, "Why don't you play the music in?" "Why should I?" I said, "Because that's why we're here." And I said, "Also, because it's my experience that when I listen to something I love I think of things that happened," and all that. So anyway, so all that, it was just uncomfortable right, and I suppose I became kind of resentful of it. I would have actually had, and I said very early on, "This programme should be done by the current affairs department and not the music department." The music is chosen by the guest, not by the music department, right, anybody can do that for God's sake. And I tend to also, I changed the nature of the interviewing, and Plomley was a very soft interviewer, gentlemanly soft interviewer, nothing wrong with that at all. But I just you know, I felt it needed a bit of a kick you know, and I interviewed people properly I thought, in the way that I could do it, and I couldn't do it any other way, I'd feel phony. And that again didn't go down, so the people at, the BBC in those days was a strange place. I always felt uncomfortable there, I always felt like I didn't belong.

KY: Did you?

MP: Yeah, in radio particularly. It was run by strange people. And I was just, I suppose that I, I might have misunderstood the situation, I don't think I did.

KY: And given that you have worked across, well not just two channels, I mean many channels, but let's compare the two big beasts, BBC One and ITV. Would you say that you have throughout your career felt more comfortable at ITV?

MP: No, and it would be unfair to characterise my stay at the BBC as being unhappy, that's not true. But there were certain aspects to the BBC, I always felt an alien in that sense. I felt that I hadn't had the right education, that I didn't have the right accent and all that. I was never made to feel that by the people I worked with, and all people like Fox and people like that, I mean they were great and supportive and I learned an awful lot from them. But I just had that uneasy feeling, I'd not been to public school, I'd not been to university, all that sort of thing. You're made to feel that in a sense, not overtly, but it seeps into the woodwork you know. And particularly in radio, the old Broadcasting House, all that entrance, all that stuff they talk about Broadcasting in the world. And then as I said, specifically that music department which was full of people that people that knew everything about Johann Sebastian Bach, but damn all about me.

KY: But I wonder if, and I understand what you're saying, I mean I walk in those venerated portals and I see the busts and bronze of all the great people who've gone before me, and like you I started in news and current affairs and I did a lot of newspaper stuff too as I was a young journalist. I haven't been to university, not publicly school educated, but I wonder if you were brining that with you rather than anybody explicitly or even implicitly saying it to you.

MP: You might well be true. I mean it might be that all these years I've carried this huge chip around on my shoulder.

KY: And you a Yorkshireman too.

MP: Be careful, the Yorkshireman has a chip on both shoulders.

KY: I know, well that was…

MP: Absolutely. But it was part of me, I mean I

could never believe that I would get to where I did get. I've always had that sense of ponder about it, "They're going to find you out tomorrow, you know and then you're gone, you're through the door."

KY: Has that ever stopped, because when I look at your, well it's not your CV really, but everything you've ever done, you've had every bloody award going, has that ever left you? Have you ever thought, "Now I belong? Now I'm part of this television establishment. I am one of them. I'm no longer the person on the outside."

MP: No, I don't do that. I mean it's lovely to have an evening like this in your honour, I mean it's very flattering, but nonetheless I do have these things about, "What do they want me for? I mean what's the problem? Has somebody backed out? Has someone been knocked down by a bus?" And I'm not saying this just for the effect, it's something that's very deep in you. I mean certainly when I grew up in the 1930s, '35, life in a mining village with my dad and all that, you know you're expected to go down the pit. And the only reason I didn't go down the pit was because my dad wouldn't have it, basically. My mum wouldn't either. So I became the first Parkinson in 100 years, male Parkinson, not being down a pit. Now all that lingers, you know because I used to see my dad, see how tired he was, and you know and he died of pneumoconiosis, one of the problems he had, and you know spending a lifetime working underground in foul conditions and it killed him. And you're still looking back at that and thinking, "Why was that so unfair? That could have been me except for…" And I escaped, and I've always thought I've been lucky that I escaped you know.

KY: Did he live to see your success?

MP: He lived to enjoy it. I have to tell you, my father was a very extraordinary man, he had a great sense of humour, he used to go to the movies and he was once asked to leave the cinema for laughing too loud at Laurel and Hardy, he used to fall on the floor and his legs used to go. And he loved me dearly, and my mum too, and they were a wonderful couple. And we decided, the nice thing about the job was that when I started earning money that I could kind of try to repay, you could never repay them for what they've done, but I thought, "Let's send them abroad." They'd never been in an aeroplane, never in 50, 60 years and all that. So I'd gone, where did they want to go? Lanzarote or somewhere, where they wanted to go, so I went, "Fine." Rang up British Airways, BOAC in those days I suppose, and I chatted to them, I said, "Look, really look after them, it's their first time they've been in an aeroplane." And I got a Rolls Royce to arrive at our house, they were staying with us, and this Roller arrived, and it was one of those great monstrous things that had the compartment, glass compartment. So my mum gets in the back, to the manor born, my dad gets in the front with the driver. My dad said later, he said, "Ah, I'm going to get one of them, it's the best ride I've ever had in my life. She was banging away on the window all the way there." Anyway, so they've got to the airport, and we sent them off and about two weeks later we went to pick them up, and I could tell my father was in trouble, my mother was walking about 20 yards ahead of him. And he's laid up like a pack mule, and she's got this little handbag and she's pouting like this when she gets cross, and my dad's lumbering along behind. And I said, "What's the problem?" "What's the problem," she said. "Your father." I said, "Well what's wrong with my dad?" She said, "Well, he just let's you down. Honestly," she said, "His behaviour's extraordinary." I said, "Well what are you talking about?" She said, "Well we get on the aeroplane after you'd left us, we sit down in First Class, thank you for the First Class, Michael." I said, "That's fine, mother." "He's standing there and the waiter comes along and says to him, 'Would you like a drink?' And he said, guess what he said?" I said, "'Have you got a pint of bitter?'" She said, "Yes." And she said, "And the steward said, 'Sorry sir, we don't serve bitter on this aeroplane.' And he, who had never flown in his life said, 'What kind of aeroplane is this then?'" She said, "It was awful," she said, "Because the guy said, 'No sir you don't understand. We can, champagne?'" My dad said, "We can't afford champagne young man." "No sir, it's free." "Free," says my father. "Right." My mother said, "Two hours later, do you know, two hours out of London and he'd drink the ship dry." She said, "And he was so drunk, after he had the meal he offered to wash up," which I thought was wonderful, so drunk. Anyway, but that's my father, I mean that was my dad you know, and we were able to look after him in that sense, and my mother too, and let them see another life.

And my dad met all his old heroes, and Joan Crawford and Bette Davis and all that.

KY: Did he?

MP: Oh, you should have seen him with them, it was wonderful. "Hello." Alright, a bit of that, the old Yorkshire charm. So you know, again going back to what we were talking about, you never lose that sense that you know, why them and why me? Why did he lived underground all his life, and why didn't I, and was there any more you could have done for him? I mean the images of my youth are all about that. I remember the pit ponies, used to bring them up every June I think it was and give them a holiday, and we had a field outside our house. And they would be blind of course, those that weren't had very bad eyesight so they bandaged their eyes, and this was their holiday in the sun. And they would run around the field crashing into them like dodgem cars, and I used to think looking at that and think, "Well if they're doing that to them, what about my dad?" But I mean all those things, I mean you can't shake them off no matter where you go, it's there, it sticks. So it makes you less sure, less confident in a sense about what happens to you. It doesn't mean to say I'm frightened, it doesn't mean to say any of those things, it is to say you don't quite believe your luck.

KY: And is that still there?

MP: I hope it remains. Because I have been lucky, I mean I came into television at the best possible time. I went into journalism when Fleet Street was still around. What a place that was, like Dodge City, it was wonderful, vigorous and red-blooded and wonderful.

KY: When you watch, I don't even know if you do watch the shows now that have replaced your type of show, and to me they are hugely popular and very, very well-produced, but there's no question they are not chat shows in the traditional sense that you and I might consider a chat show. They are entertainment shows.

MP: Exactly, and very good too some of them. I mean Graham Norton's show is a wonderfully produced show, and he's very good at that, excellent. It's one I really like watching. But they're not talk shows as such, they're comedy shows. And that's going right back to where it started in America, you know they were all done by comedians, Carson being the most preeminent among them. And so they'd never done a show that I did, Dick Cavett maybe did for a while. But you know that's the way it is, and it's not the fault of anybody except the people who run television now look at the viewing figures, look at the demographic, and see that what they're aiming for is an audience, much lower than the one that I had or aimed for, and that's the big deciding factor I think across all television now is that.

KY: If you were, and it is such an entirely different landscape, and you've explained it so very well there, but if you were, I don't know if there's anybody in tonight's audience who is just starting out, but when young people ask you for advice about television, what do you tell them? What pearls of wisdom do you pass on?

MP: It seems to me, and it's a very old-fashioned view I know, but I don't know about these media courses they have nowadays. I mean I was at Nottingham Trent University, the Chancellor there for a while, and we had a big media course there, and it seems to me that a lot of the young people were there because they fancied it was a way onto *I'm A Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here!*, you know sort of thing, they want to be famous.

KY: But you said you wanted to be, you wanted to be a movie star.

MP: Oh, yeah, but I'd been in the business about 20 years then. I mean I was allowed to. I'd looked at people being famous and thought, "I can do that." But they convinced by things like *I'm A Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here!,* that's their idea of fame, you know or that instant fame which makes you a hero on the internet, you know that sort of thing. It's a different thing altogether. Well you know, fame's a very strange thing, and you've got to be mature enough to handle it. I mean that's a bit off what we're talking about, I know. But I think, my sympathy, and I have a great deal of sympathy for the young people nowadays who want to do the job that I've done all my life, is that I don't quite see where the openings are for them. I don't see that there's the newspapers around, I don't see, the television's changed so much now that they require a different person than the one that I became, training my way as a

junior reporter and then being shown the ropes by people who actually knew what they were doing in television. You know I left school at 16 and walked straight into a newspaper office and said, "I want a job." They said, "Sit down there, see that guy over there, go work with him for three years, and at the end of it we'll give you a proper job," and that was an apprenticeship. Can't do it nowadays.

KY: When you watch that brilliant clip of Orson Welles ruminating on what Hollywood does to people and what the whole movie industry had done to people, and thinking about, you know you have come very, very close, and okay most of these people, why would they, they didn't become your friends but you saw them at close quarters. You saw fame in the 20th and 21st century, what did you learn about fame and what it does to people when you were meeting these great, bright shining stars?

MP: I think that the ones I really liked were the ones who could do their job without being overweening about what they had. I mean if you talk about Welles then you talk about genius. If you talk about Billy, you talk about genius. They carried, generally speaking the ones I really admired, they carried their great gifts effortlessly. But more than that they were very generous with them too, they gave an awful lot to make you laugh or to make you think or whatever it might be. And I just think we're privileged to have the position where we could call anybody, anywhere in the world and say, "We'd like to interview you," and they might just say yes. And if you don't learn anything from that total experience then there's something wrong with you. But there's no overall, there's just that wonderful think of bring able to listen to talent, to wisdom, to funny guys, I mean it's just that, it's that totality of things. And to deal with the best all the time. And that's, you know you just do it and you hope that something rubs off on you.

KY: What did you learn about yourself?

MP: The thing I'm most proud of, if I was to be really honest about things, is that I can write. I loved writing, and I love writing still, and I think that's the thing I'm most proud of. I was gifted, I could write. At school I used to write other kids' essays for sixpence and make a fortune. I could write five a night, I could write on top of a bus. I had a mate called John Stoppard, he was a maths genius, I'm useless at maths, and one year I came top of maths and he came top of English. And he couldn't spell, and I couldn't add up, so there's something wrong there. But that I've always been please of, and I've been pleased that whenever television didn't want me, and there have been times when you know there have been periods where you could get a job doing some show you didn't want to do, but you couldn't get a job doing what you wanted to do, I went back to writing, and I earned a living through that, and I enjoyed it. And I always say to any young person who's going in, "Get some backup. If you can write, never lose that. Please keep at it."

KY: And so when you didn't get the commissions, or the contracts came to an end and nobody was waving another one in your face, did it hit you hard or was writing always…

MP: No, because I had the confidence I could get a job writing. And I did that, and it's a great consolation that, because you've never then getting to that depressed state really. "Nobody wants me anymore," and all that nonsense you know. Go and write, enjoy yourself, you know do that. And then of course I went to Australia which has been terribly important in my life because I had a wonderful time there. I love Australia, it's my second home.

KY: And all your programmes were shown over in Australia, the British programmes.

MP: Absolutely. It was very hard to arrive there, a long interminable journey, and you walk out and the first Aussie you see says, "G'day Parko, how you going?" And you think, "What? How does he know me?" Well he knows you through television of course.

KY: It's been great to see just little snippets of so many of your interviews tonight. It's very clear what you've given us as viewers, you've given the Great British public. There are a few familiar faces who wanted to say their thank you to you, so let's take a look at that.

MP: Oh. Well alright.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

Oh dear.

KY: In about 30 seconds we're going to go to the audience for just a couple of questions because we are running a little bit late. I've got my quick-fire questions here. These are very quick. Sometimes one word, two word answers. Here we go, are you ready? Yorkshire tea or double espresso?

MP: Yorkshire tea.

KY: A football match or a boxing bout?

MP: Boxing.

KY: Ah. *Loose Women* or *Marr on Sunday*?

MP: *Marr on Sunday*.

KY: I know the answer to this one, but it makes me laugh anyway. Frank Sinatra or Elvis Presley?

MP: No contest, Old Blue Eyes.

KY: Broadsheet or news blog?

MP: Broadsheets.

KY: Rod Hull and Emu, or Meg Ryan?

MP: I'd have to think about that one.

KY: Right, let's open it up to the audience, does anybody have a question for Sir Michael. Here we go, just at the back there. Thank you, go ahead.

Q: Michael, over here. Just wanted to say I've been watching you since I was a kid and you're definitely one of my heroes. I work as a producer-director at BBC. I just wanted to ask you who are three of your heroes, and how have they inspired you please? If you don't mind me asking.

MP: Who are my heroes?

KY: Three of your heroes.

Q: Yes, three of your heroes and how have they inspired you please.

MP: Three of my heroes. Ernest Hemingway, I always wanted to be Hemingway, to write like Hemingway. I started reading Hemingway when I was about seven or eight and always wanted to be like him. Not to top myself in eh end of course, but he was a great influence on my life. I loved American novelists, so he would be one. George Best was a hero of mine. I mean deeply flawed in many, many ways, but I loved him like a son in a sense, you know he was a lovely man. Michael my son's here tonight, my youngest boy. When George used to come down to the house we used to get away from the invading hordes of press in Manchester and he would play with the kids, he'd bring a bag of balls down and play with them all. And I remember many years ago Michael came from school in a terrible state because he'd been going to school on Monday after the Saturday George had been down, and the teacher said, "What did you do at the weekend?" And he said, "I played football with George Best," and they made him stand up for the rest of the class. And who else? There's a woman called Catherine Bramwell-Booth, who was the granddaughter of the founder of the Salvation Army, who we came across when she won the speaker of the year award, and she was 94 I think. And she was the most wonderful, feisty, funny woman I've ever met. She was marvellous, and I unwittingly made a joke which involved the use of the word 'bet', having a bet. And she picked me up on this about, "You're not a betting man, you're not a gambling man are you?" And she had a poke bonnet on. And the next five minutes I've never floundered as much in all my life. I've never been so beautifully and elegantly destroyed as by this woman in a poke bonnet who went on to live to be 104, and she was one of the most remarkable people I've ever met in my life. She was a hero, yes.

KY: Wonderful, what a lovely answer. Thank you very much, Michael. Again, one more from right at the back and then we'll come down to the front.

Q: Michael, is there anybody who you wish you had have interviewed who you never got round to interviewing.

MP: The only person I really missed was the aforesaid Frank Sinatra. I mean I could think of another huge list as well, but you tend to never to sort of think about that you know. We weren't turned down by too many people that we asked, but the ones that really I would have really loved to have talked to would have been people from another era. You know Garland, and I would

have loved to have talked to W. G. Grace and things like that you know, the impossible ones and find out about them. And so really no, we mopped up most of those that we wanted, that we required, and it was a long stint you know, it's twenty-odd years, and you can see just one or two, and that's just a few. No I mean I've been very lucky that way, very lucky. And I don't look back with any kind of, nostalgia certainly, but I don't look back with any kind of sense of regret or 'I wish', you know I don't do that.

KY: Just here, yes, thank you. Just here, yes, go ahead, in the pink sweater.

Q: Oh hi, hello, it's working. Whatever made you bring together the great classical musician Yehudi Menuhin with the jazz musician Stephane Grappelli? What made you do that?

MP: It's lovely isn't it. We had booked Menuhin for an interview, and my researcher went up to his home in Hampstead and noticed when he was waiting in the study, on the study desk there was a CD of Stephane Grappelli lying there. And so when Menuhin came in the room he asked him, he said, "Are you a fan?" "No," he said, "I know nothing about him really, I've been sent this." And so he came back the researcher and he said, "Listen," he said, "I think that this might be a chance to get them together." And so I called him up and I said, "Will you listen to it? Do you think you could join Mr. Grappelli?" And he called back and he said, "I'd love to meet him," and that's how it happened. And we rang Stephane and said, "Look, you know, would you like to?" "Oh no, I cannot go. He is a classical musician; I am a fiddle player." "Come on," I said. "I can't read music," he said, and he couldn't. But we eventually got them together, and we had arranged for him to go up to Hampstead to meet Menuhin, and he was like a child, he was shivering with fear. "I can't, I mean he's a great maestro." Anyway so he goes up there, and then he came back, and he had this, he was very childlike Stephane, and runs up with a huge smile on his face. Anyway, we said, "How did it go?" "How did it go," he said, "Tell you, five bars into Lady Be Good, who's the maestro?"

[Laughter]

He was of course, but it was interesting to see them work because there was no way that Menuhin could work out, he couldn't improvise in that sense, you know make it swing. He could improvise in the sense that he could learn how to do classical music as well, but he didn't have that rhythm. And so to watch the two of them, to watch Menuhin listening to Grappelli and Grappelli telling him how to play was wonderful. And they made five records I think, or more maybe, and they had a lifelong friendship. You know it was extraordinary, just one of those wonderful, silly coincidences that they pick up on and all of a sudden you've two great musicians playing together from entirely different worlds. Magnificent.

KY: That was a wonderful question, thank you very much. Finally, we'll just go down to the front row here in the centre.

Q: Evening. I'm an American who's been over here from New York for about 25 years.

MP: Welcome.

Q: If you were given a chance and an invitation, would you interview, before he becomes too polite, President-elect Donald Trump?

[Laughter]

MP: I think so. A very robust man. I'd have him on with Emu I think, and hope he might get attacked. What do you think about him?

Q: I voted for the other person, but I'm getting a bit optimistic about his turning around and doing a few correct things.

MP: We all might be very surprised, but nothing we saw in what led up to his election gave you any kind of hope at all, but we'll see.

KY: I want to end this on a note of celebration, so let's not talk about Donald Trump. So I simply, I want to thank the audience for some great questions, but most of all Sir Michael I want to thank you, not just for tonight, but for all of the considerable pleasure that you have given us all over the decades in a matchless career. Thank you so much for your brilliance.

MP: Thank you Kirsty, I've enjoyed it, thank you very much.

KY: Sir Michael Parkinson.

[Applause]