

Interview Transcript: Ted de Poitiers



During the 1930s we lived in Brussels - my mother was English - but we lived in the English community.

When the war came, we realized that we were not going to be able to stay within Belgium, so we decided that at some stage we would have to leave but I'm afraid we left it rather late, and we only just managed to get out in May of 1940. It was quite a hectic journey across, but we needed somewhere to live so I went to live in Egremont Road up in West Norwood, very close to Streatham, to live with my uncle Tom.

And he was very interested in the Streatham Hill Theatre. Well as soon as he had a boy of a reasonable age, he seemed to take to me and wanted to take me all over the place. So, he took me to the theatre where his great friend David Lean, the stage manager, seemed very pleased to receive me and was very, very pleasant to me. He took me all around showed me the theatre, took me all up in amongst the drapes and drops and I had a wonderful time. I was then just old let loose in the place like that. It was wonderful.

Then of course, I was allowed to stay backstage in the wings, watching the various shows that came on, and then being I am... I'd like autograph hunting so I just collected autographs as much as I possibly could. And of course, a few of those autographs went in from the Streatham Hill Theatre into my original, rather scruffy schoolboy autograph album.

And my Uncle Tom noticed that I was collecting these autographs, so he very kindly bought me a very, very nice leather-bound autograph album, and from then onwards, of course I only collected Streatham Hill Theatre actors and actresses in that book. So that has become quite a memento of Streatham Hill Theatre. And of course, in the process of collecting autographs, I ended up with pictures, signed pictures and I had a great many, mostly of the actresses [who] seemed very keen to have a young very, very nice to me.

Because it was one of the biggest stages in London, in fact I believe it was the biggest stage in London, they always tried out all the West End shows at Streatham Hill Theatre. So, it was very nice for Streatham people to get all these things first hand, and at least give some ideas of whether they liked them or not. So, I just continued to go there and I've always loved the Streatham Hill Theatre.

I'm extremely disappointed that it's now no longer a theatre. I'm only pleased that the stage still exists, and I suppose it could be possible to redo the theatre. I think it would be an extremely costly business to redo the whole auditorium, but even with a small auditorium the stage would be worth having, as it is such a large stage and they could stage some pretty healthy... well at least pantomimes if nothing else.

And I just look forward to Streatham Hill Theatre reliving its life. It was a wonderful place it was very well thought of amongst the theatre people and I just hope that we can all get it back.

<http://streathamhilltheatre.org/ted-de-poitiers-remembers>