TRANSCRIPT

Australia's Early Music Movement

Oral History Project

WINSOME EVANS

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Collyer: So, today is the fourth of July 2023, and we're speaking here in Sydney on Dharug land. My name is Rachel Collyer, and I'm talking to Associate Professor Winsome Evans. This interview is being conducted for the oral history project, Australia's Early Music Movement, part of my postgraduate research at the University of New England under the supervision of Associate Professor Jason Stoessel. I'll start by saying welcome, Winsome, and thank you for speaking with me today.

Evans: Welcome, Rachel.

Collyer: By way of introduction, Winsome Evans is one of the pioneers of early music performance in Australia. She has been a multi-instrumentalist, a professional harpsichordist, an associate professor of music, a music arranger, a composer, and the founder and director of several early European music ensembles, including the long-lived and influential Renaissance Players, who've performed medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and folk music across Australia and Southeast Asia as well as producing an extensive discography. So there's a lot to discuss here. So, Winsome, let's start by gathering some of the basic details of your life. What is your date of birth and whereabouts were you born?

Evans: I was born in Melbourne in 1941. Then, soon after, for various reasons, my mother moved up to Sydney and I lived in Lane Cove for twenty, twenty-odd years.

Collyer: Right? Okay, Lane Cove all that time. So, did you have any brothers and sisters?

Evans: Oh, I had one sister, who was, she was born – she was described as a "blue baby," which meant that she had a very bad heart. So all her life she had a bad heart. She was able to do lots of things that normal people could do, but she couldn't . . . she had to be careful, you know?

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: And my father left my mother when she was one year old, so I was one year older; so I was two and she was one. My father was a womaniser, and he stayed in Melbourne with his women. Kept bringing – whenever he came to Sydney to visit my mother, he came with a baby in his arms. "Will you look after this baby?" But he wasn't looking after my mother.

Collyer: No?

Evans: He wasn't giving her any financial support, so we had a very poor family. Fortunately, when we went to Lane Cove, we lived in a duplex flat, which the – the woman who owned the duplex flat, she allowed my mother, for twenty-five years, because of her financial status, to only pay two dollars' rent every week.

Collyer: What a kindness.

Evans: Amazing! So that was very crucial for us, because we learnt that people can be really kind, and they won't judge you because of your family situation. Which a lot of people did.

Collyer: Yes. Understood. Can you tell me your mother's name and what did she do? Did she have an occupation to help?

Evans: My mother was also an abandoned person. My mother's name was Winifred, and her father abandoned her at the age of 18 months to the Church of England Home for homeless children. And she was there until she was fifteen and then she was tossed out. She was very bright. She wanted to go to Sydney Girls High School, but they wouldn't – the Home wouldn't let her. Oh, there was – the Home was for the training of domestic servants. So, at the age of three, she was polishing stairs, staircases . . . polishing floors, you know, cleaning, at the age of three. But she was very bright and she wanted to go to Sydney Girls High School, but they wouldn't let her, because they said she was too small. Too small.

Collyer: Small?

Evans: Too small. Stature. But eventually, years and years and years later, she wrote a book about her life in the Home. At that time she was working for Gough Whitlam as – doing volunteer work for Gough. And when that book was published, the phone rang one morning, and this voice said, (uses a deep voice) "Am I speaking to Winsome Evans?" and I said, "Is that Gough Whitlam?"

Collyer: (laughs) I recognise the voice.

Evans: And he said yes. And I went, oh lord! (laughs) Yes. Because he actually knew me.

Collyer: Okay, that's an interesting correlation because I noticed that one of your CDs was dedicated to Gough Whitlam.

Evans: Gough Whitlam. Yes, one of the ones at the end. Because he was the one who sent my group – in 1975, he sent us on a tour of Southeast Asia, which was a cultural exchange program.

Collyer: Oh?

Evans: A cultural exchange program of the Australian government, and the governments of all the countries we went to. So, we went to seven countries, all the way through Asia, right up to India. We went as far as India. And then we came back via New Guinea.

Collyer: Via New Guinea? That must have been very interesting.

Evans: It was. Yes.

Collyer: What year was that?

Evans: '75, it was.

Collyer: '75, right? Okay. Goodness. Well, let's –

Evans: So, I've gotten off the track a bit.

Collyer: No, no! It's good to make these connections. So, you grew up with your sister and your mum in Lane Cove, and was music part of your household at that time?

Evans: Well, my mother decided when I was six – because my sister was so sick all the time, she had to work as a cleaner, my mother: part-time job. And she went to the local piano teacher, and she said, if I volunteer to clean your house, will you give my kids music lessons? So, at the age of six, I was going every morning – every week, sorry, every week to the music man, and she was paying with her services for me to have piano lessons with the local piano teacher. And my sister as well.

Collyer: Was your mum musical as well, or . . . ?

Evans: No, but she wanted to – because of the way she was brought up in the Home, she was not allowed to –

Collyer: Oh, of course.

Evans: – do anything about music.

Collyer: So, she was making sure you had opportunities.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: So, you were learning piano from quite early. Any other instruments or singing?

Evans: No, I was learning piano only. And when I was eleven, I got very sick, and I missed that exam that was to decide who should go to Opportunity School. So I missed that, and I

was so disappointed, my mother came to me and said, what can I give you to make up for this? because, you know, I was very sick. And I said I want a recorder. So, when I went to North Sydney Girls High – oh, I did do, my mother organised with the Education Department for me to do a Mensa test, and, as a result of that, I was going to be allowed to go to Fort Street Primary for one year. But I refused, because at Lane Cove I had a wonderful maths teacher, a wonderful old lady who taught all the subjects, but she was **so** good at teaching maths, and I thought, I'm not going to miss this year. Eventually, at the end of that year, because primary school was only six years, I think, at that stage, I did the exam and got to North Sydney High School, which was a selective high school. Where they had lots of recorder-playing, there.

The music teacher, her name was Patricia Quin, and she became fairly influential for various reasons. The first day I met her, she came to the class and she said, "I want all the kids who can play recorder to put up their hand," and she went to each one and she said, "Where did you go?" and they all said, "Opportunity School," and I – when she got to me, I said, "Lane Cove." And she said, "You can't learn recorder at Lane Cove! The only students who can play recorder at this stage are students who've been at Opportunity School." And I said, "Well, you wait and hear me play."

[0:10:04]

Collyer: And you played for her?

Evans: And she became very important. But my mother – at the time, at that time, many radio stations had children's programs, and she made sure that I, after school, I went every day to the city to one of these programs and played. Because they don't have programs like this anymore: 2SM, 2CH, 2KY, 2UW. So, . . .

Collyer: Do you mean that you were playing on the radio, during the program?

Evans: Yes, every week.

Collyer: Every week?

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Different music every week?

Evans: Yes, every week different music. My sister went there as an elocutionist, while she was well. So we were part of the, I think it was the "Wednesday gang." But many, many young people who were involved in that became famous actors and famous musicians. So it was a very good training ground.

Collyer: Can you remember what music you were playing for these?

Evans: Well, it was all classical music, you know, Beethoven, Mozart. Sometimes, I – also I **love** pop music, and I would play, when I hadn't got a piece to play on the piano, I would play some pop music on the recorder. And Patricia Quin's mother heard me playing, because she used to listen to these children's radio programs, and Patrician Quin was not impressed that I was playing pop music. "Swinging Shepherd Blues" was the tune.

Collyer: "Swinging Shepherd Blues." (laughs)

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Right. How did things progress through high school with music and your activities?

Evans: Well, first of all, because my mother was a cleaner, she would sometimes take me to – because we lived in this duplex flat, the people upstairs **hated** me practising, and I practised all day, every day. And I sightread a lot of music. By the age of ten, some of my mother's customers were giving me piles of music and so I would sightread through them.

Collyer: This is piano music?

Evans: So I got to be a good sight-reader. But the man who lived upstairs, would – when I was coming home from Lane Cove Primary School, he would stand at the head of the street with an axe.

Collyer: What!

Evans: And say, "I'm gonna get you. I'm gonna chop your legs off."

Collyer: Really?

Evans: And so, eventually, my mother realised, for me to practise, I would have to practise somewhere else. So I was practising one day at one of the houses that she cleaned, and the son came home and he heard me playing, and he said, you've got to go into town and do an audition for Hmelnitsky, and I did. I went to do an audition for him. But at the time, soon after that – I had some lessons from him, but then he became blind because he was smoking too much. Then I had lessons with his son, Igor Hmelnitsky.

Collyer: Okay.

Evans: In the city. My mother had to take me away from him because he was getting too touchy-feely.

Collyer: Oh, no. Oh, dear.

Evans: And I was an Argonaut, and – painting, writing, and composing things – I was Taras Golden Fleece 6 – Taras 6, Golden Fleece and Bar; and Mr Melody Man invited me one day to come in after school and play on his program. When he heard me play, he got in touch with my mother, and he got me enrolled at the Conservatorium. He organised all the lessons **free**. So I was taught – even while I was in school, I was going after school for harmony and counterpoint, history of music, and piano lessons.

Collyer: So how old would you have been at this time?

Evans: From about 14 or 15 on, until I – even through my university years. So that was another thing that was happening.

Collyer: Yes, okay, so your abilities, your talents were quite clear from a very early time.

Evans: Yes, I think because I wanted to play all the time and I read a lot of music. I think that's very important. The kids don't do this so much now. Sightreading is such an important thing, with music, because that's the only way that you can really get a good repertoire for your instrument. And it certainly facilitates your playing. So, I was also an eisteddfod kid, because my mother put me into all the eisteddfods. Mainly because, at the end of the eisteddfod, the adjudicator would say, "Do you want to take the money or the cup?" if you won a prize.

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: And my mother said, take the money, because she – some of the places we went for the eisteddfod, we went there but we didn't have enough money to bring us home. So we only had enough money to go **to** the eisteddfod.

Collyer: So you had to win.

Evans: She was banking on me winning the money prize, coming home – and if I didn't, if they would only give me a cup, we would get to Central – get the train, go to Central Station, and I remember spending hours scouring the platforms at Central for tickets that people had left. Eventually, once, my mother – we couldn't find the tickets, and she had to appeal to the stationmaster at Redfern, and she promised to send him stamps to pay for the tickets.

Collyer: And he did . . .?

Evans: He did. Yes. So that was another example of people's kindness.

Collyer: Yes, indeed. I don't think that would fly, these days.

Evans: No.

Collyer: Wow. Okay, did you do AMEB exams during this time?[1]

Evans: Yes, I went right up, right to the top. I also did Trinity College exams as well.

Collyer: Yes, and ATCL?[2] Goodness. And how did – did you have any connection with recorder playing, when you were a Conservatorium student?

Evans: No, because recorder playing was mostly what was happening at school. But I did meet a lot of very interesting people at the Con, like Roger Woodward, Richard Gill, and people who became, later on, quite important.

Collyer: Okay. So, you went all the way through high school and graduated from high school, would that be right?

Evans: Yes. I mainly, at high school, I did languages, because I decided in the middle of my high school that I wanted to be a language teacher. And I hated mathematics, so I did the lowest form of mathematics. General mathematics. They allowed me to count the music

[1] AMEB = Australian Music Examinations Board
[2] ATCL = Associate, Trinity College London

exams as part of my HSC,[3] but when the HSC came along, I had an accident at school in the middle of the exams: banged my head on something and got really sick. And I had to do the language tests at home, and they had to send out an invigilator to supervise this, because – which my mother – because she was very forceful, very strong-minded, and she didn't want her kids to go through the trauma that she had gone through as a child – she got in touch with the Education Department and organised for the invigilator to come. So I remember doing the French and German, Latin exams in my **bed**.

Collyer: With an invigilator.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Well, your mum sounds very determined.

Evans: Yes. Yes.

Collyer: Very strong, with strong ideals.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: So, what happened after school?

[0:20:02]

Evans: Well, I got to North Sydney Girls High School, which was a selective high school in those days, and I studied English and maths, general maths, but three languages: Latin, German, French.

Collyer: Latin, German, French. Right.

Evans: I wanted to – when I got to university, in Arts, I wanted to train to be a language teacher, and I just did music for fun, for one year. Because, in the Arts degree, you had, in the first year you could take three subjects, your main subjects, but you could also take a fourth one, so you would get through the degree quicker. I put down music as my fourth choice, because I thought, look I've done so much music before, while I was at school, that I don't want to go on with music. I want to be a language teacher. I trained to be a French, German, Latin teacher. But I sort of got sidetracked.

Collyer: Which university were you at? Was it . . .?

Evans: Sydney University.

Collyer: Sydney University, right. And roughly what year would you have started?

Evans: I started in 1959. Because that's the year that – oh.

Collyer: Oh. I think it's just gone to sleep. Yes. Just monitor sleeping. So, you started university in 1959.

Evans: Yes. Arts degree.

[3] HSC = Higher School Certificate

Collyer: And you would have done three, was it three years in those days, or . . .?

Evans: It was three years for a pass degree and four for an honours degree. So I did an honours degree.

Collyer: You did do honours. Right.

Evans: And I got cajoled into doing music as my honours.

Collyer: Cajoled! Okay, so who cajoled you?

Evans: Well, Eric Gross cajoled me. He taught composition. And when I was contemplating going into second year at university and dropping music, he persuaded me to do the music honours course, which meant I had to drop one of the languages.

Collyer: Oh!

Evans: So the one I dropped was Latin because, I thought, with Latin, it was simply knowledge, whereas with the others it was pronunciation as well.

Collyer: Fair enough.

Evans: And a lot of history, a lot of literature. So I stayed with French and German all the way through, until my fourth year when I just did music. But the way Donald Peart organised the music department was, in the honours year there was an unseen translation paper which all students, honours students, had to do to get an honours degree. It could be in Latin, French, or German, or Italian. You had to know all these languages. So, it would be something taken out of a treatise, a music treatise, in one of those languages, which you had to translate. See, it was really tough, a tough degree. I think of all the students that I taught who wouldn't possibly have been able to do this. So, it was a very rigid sort of degree because he was Oxford trained, and that was what you had to do at Oxford. He wanted to keep that tradition going, so we all had to be prepared for this paper. And I thought, oh, I'll be alright, because I've already done three years of Latin and French – one year of Latin and two, three years of French and German, so that wasn't such a bother for me.

Collyer: Glad that's not part of it now.

Evans: Well, a lot of people wouldn't be able to do it.

Collyer: No! So, that's interesting, you've mentioned Donald Peart now, so you had crossed paths with him by this time.

Evans: Well, he was the professor of music at Sydney University when I went there, and he was, as I say, he was Oxford trained, he was a student of Ralph Vaughan Williams. He put on many – during my years at Sydney University – he put on many opera productions of Ralph Vaughan Williams' operas, as well as *The Rake's Progress*. For those I was always the repetiteur, because my keyboard skills were still working.

Collyer: When you did the music honours, it was in composition, is that right?

Evans: Well, the fourth year was in composition, but along the way I had to do a course in palaeography, sixteenth-century counterpoint, which all honours students had to do, which now students couldn't **possibly** do. And the keyboard skills: being able to have, say, a Beethoven symphony score plonked in front of you on the keyboard, and you had to sightread it on the piano. You know, you had to score-read it on the piano. Also, I was taught figured bass playing; so I was given a passage at sight to play and get the chords right. So, this of course was wonderful when I went to the harpsichord, because you had to have that skill of reading figured bass. When I graduated, I started a sort of postgraduate degree and I studied composition with Peter Sculthorpe. But, at the time, Peter was a young man – had composed a lot, but he had never taught before. He didn't have a **clue** how to teach composition. But I think he got better by the time Anne Boyd came along, because she was a couple of years behind me.

Collyer: You mentioned doing a palaeography course.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: In terms of dealing with manuscripts?

Evans: Oh, manuscripts. So, let's see. Yes, so that became very useful when I started the Renaissance Players. Renaissance Players were a long way coming. Well, it wasn't really. I had already started Renaissance Players by then.

[doorbell rings]

Evans: Oh! Come in!

Collyer: I'll just pause it.

Evans: I think that's the gardeners.

[pause in recording]

Evans: [Palaeography] at Sydney University was taught by another Oxford – he might have been Cambridge, actually – Dr John Steele. He was a very learned person.

Collyer: Was it unusual, to be doing palaeography at that time?

Evans: Everyone had to. If you were doing honours, you had to do palaeography.

Collyer: It was part of it.

Evans: So, I think I wrote down – this is what I was looking for. Here's the courses I did: palaeography, performance practice, sixteenth-century counterpoint. Then I taught – when I was teaching, I taught the history of music: various subjects, like Wagner. I used to teach the Wagner Ring cycle. I taught, also, harmony and counterpoint, aural, sixteenth-century counterpoint.

Collyer: So, this teaching, is that what you did after the honours degree?

Evans: Well, I went into postgraduate study because I got a scholarship, and so I was doing a thesis on the history of the piano, which – Donald Peart decided when I, in my graduation

year, to graduate I would have to do an exam in performance. I had to present a recital at the Opera House. And I had to do a thesis. And I had to do a significant composition as well. Because he decided I was going to be his, you know, centrepiece, to show people what I could do. But when the thesis and all that, you know, the performance was due, that was the year that we went to Southeast Asia. When I came back, I was exhausted; I'd lost two stones of weight because we all got Delhi belly. I simply couldn't do it, so I didn't ever finish. I didn't ever get a postgraduate degree. Because I did all that study, and I was ready to do it, but I had used up all my time. So, then I saw an advertisement for a teacher at one of the private girls' schools. Ah, where was it? The headmistress was Gough Whitlam's sister, and she decided that I could teach all these wonderful aural and history and counterpoint things.

[0:30:59]

Collyer: At a high school?

Evans: At high school. And so I was a high school teacher for two years. But then, Roger Covell at New South Wales University – because I was doing a lot of playing as well while I was teaching –

Collyer: Piano still?

Evans: Harpsichord.

Collyer: Oh, so you had gone across to harpsichord by now?

Evans: Yes. He offered me a tutorship at New South Wales. And as soon as Donald Peart found out, he immediately offered me a tutorship. So for two years I was working at both universities.

Collyer: Oh, you did both? Right!

Evans: Yes. Both.

Collyer: So, University of New South Wales and University of Sydney. Tell me, though, you were playing harpsichord by this time, so when did the harpsichord enter into your sphere?

Evans: The harpsichord was – because I did a lot of repetiteur work around Sydney University and elsewhere, for various singers and so on, the director of SUMS said, we need a harpsichord player, a continuo player, for such-and-such a work that he was putting on with SUMS.[4] And he came to me and said, would you like the job? For this concert? Eventually I ended up playing harpsichord for all sorts of university groups, like the Leonine Consort which was run by Charles Colman. The Leonine Consort eventually became The Song Company. So, I had that connection with the Leonine Consort, and all their concerts, playing harpsichord. Of course, I knew Roland Peelman, so that was another thing that was happening.

Collyer: So, to clarify, SUMS would be Sydney University Music Society, right?

[4] SUMS = Sydney University Musical Society

Evans: Yes. Donald Peart used to get me to play concertos with the university orchestra on the piano, but not on the harpsichord. The harpsichord was mainly for accompanying – well, doing earlier music. But I did – at Sydney University I was doing a lot of harpsichord playing.

Collyer: So there was quite an awareness of early music performance: of Baroque, presumably, performance at that time. Was it popular? Was it – how did it sit alongside more canonical repertoire?

Evans: Well, it seemed to be pretty normal at Sydney University, I mean, everyone had been doing it before – maybe not the harpsichord, but once John Winstanley had invited me to play for SUMS, I used to get jobs from **everyone** at Sydney University.

Collyer: So, this was 1960s?

Evans: It would have been . . . in the '60s, not that early. But I did, of course, I knew – at the same time, I was doing courses at the Conservatorium. I eventually got a – and I got to know a lot of the teachers and performers at the Conservatorium – and I got a phone call one day from John Paynter. He said, we've started this new orchestra, my wife and I, and we need a harpsichord player, and we're rehearsing in the Musica Viva studios, you know, all professional players. I think the lead violinist was a guy called Robert Ingram. So I went one night to sightread whatever they were playing, and at the end of it, Lois Simpson said, my god, she's got wonderful rhythm! So I got the job as the founding harpsichord player. I was there for – I was the harpsichord player for ACO for over twenty years.

Collyer: So, this was the start of the ACO. The Australian Chamber Orchestra. For over twenty years, you say.

Evans: Yes, I played all the way at the beginning until Richard Tognetti came along. And I played for two years – oh, one and a half years, with Richard – but Richard decided that he wanted to get rid of all the old players and start his own band, so I was thrown out. But one of my students got the job after me.

Collyer: Oh, that's nice.

Evans: Because it was Erin, whom I had met. I had met him as . . . he came years and years later when we were doing auditions for the Music Department, and he came to audition to come to Sydney University. Anne Boyd was auditioning with me, and she turned to me and said, oh, wow, and then she said to him, oh, you must have lessons from Winsome. And I thought, no, no, I don't want to teach him. He knows so much already. Anyway, he opted – because I think he decided he didn't want to go to Anne Boyd, as professor – he went to the Conservatorium, and he did his degree there, and now he's the main player. And a wonderful career, Erin Helyard.

Collyer: Now . . .

Evans: You haven't asked me about the beginning of Early Music.

Collyer: I know! I'm trying to contextualise, because it's as though it's, sort of, crept down: you've got all the harpsichord and the Baroque involvement . . . . Okay, well, tell me about –

Evans: Because I really had three careers. It's harpsichord, teacher – university teacher – and the Renaissance Players. But where it's all started was 1959, when, in Sydney, the Guild of Pope Pius the Tenth – with help from the North Sydney nuns, who made all the costumes and props – they mounted the first production in Australia of liturgical drama.[5] It was *The Play of Daniel*. And they needed more wind players. And some of the Catholic girls who were in the Music Department – this was my first year at university – they said to me, why don't you come and be in it? Because the music director of *The Play of Daniel* was my high school teacher.

Collyer: Really?

Evans: Yes, Patricia Quin.

Collyer: Oh, right. Oh, you said she was important.

Evans: So, everything is connected. So, I went down and I heard this wonderful music which I'd **never** heard before. And that – that was it. You know, I thought: "medieval music." *The Play of Daniel* has wonderful melodies. I'd never heard anything so wonderful. It was a very successful production, so it had to be repeated the next year. And it was in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral.

Collyer: In the crypt?

Evans: Yes, in the crypt.

Collyer: That would be some resonance, I should think.

Evans: Yes. Wonderful. So, the next year we did it again. Then two years later they put on another liturgical drama, I think it was, ah, let me see – I'll have to check my notes – it was *The Play of Herod*, and the musical director was Nigel Butterley.

Collyer: Oh, yes, the composer?

Evans: Nigel Butterley. Because, you know, a lot of the people who were in *The Play of Daniel*, the adults, were from the ABC,[6] and Nigel had been – he wasn't a Catholic, so he was different, he was just interested – he sang the part of Habakkuk in *The Play of Daniel*, the old guy who's taken to feed Daniel when he's in the lion's den. But when we did the next production, *The Play of Herod*, he was the musical director.

[0:40:02]

And that's – it was . . . sorry, I forget what I'm going to say . . . oh, that's right, another person who was in *The Play of Daniel* and *Herod* was a girl called Dindy Vaughan. She was at Sydney University, and she was the director of SUMS, Sydney University Musical Society. And because I knew many of the players from both of those productions, and we had

[5] The *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper advertises this production as 1961.
[6] ABC = Australian Broadcasting Commission (1932–1983), subsequently Australian Broadcasting Corporation

sometimes met and played together, she – one year she was the director of SUMS, and one year she got – the year was 1966 – she got sick and she rang me and asked me if I would conduct the SUMS concert, and I decided to bring all the players from the various plays to come along and play with SUMS. And we all – I got in touch with the Catholic Church at, somewhere, one of the suburbs where they had stored the props and the costumes for *The Play of Daniel* in the attic on the top of the church. I had to climb up this ladder. No lift or anything, no stairs: a ladder to get the costumes. The priest very willingly lent me, or gave me, the costumes from *The Play of Daniel*, so when we did that concert with SUMS, the musicians were all in *Play of Daniel* costumes. And because that was such a success, that concert, we kept playing, through that year, we kept playing early music. Because I did, you know, I **plundered**, plundered the library at Sydney University for early music.

Collyer: Okay. And that's where you – they had sources?

Evans: So, they had things like *Historical Anthology of Music*, Davison and Apel, which I plundered, as well as other things. And the University organist at the time, Norman Johnson, who ran a choir called the Oriana Singers, he was invited for the Sydney Proms to put on the Machaut Mass, the Mass of Notre Dame. He rang me and he said, I'd like your players to come and play it, play with the Oriana Singers, because we need instruments to go with the Machaut Mass. And he said, but you'll have to find a name. This was 1967. The Sydney Proms, 1967.

So I thought of this name, The Renaissance Players, for my group. So that was the first use of the name Renaissance Players, whereas – even though previously we had been playing, giving lots of concerts. So, 1966, we were already playing, and then the same players came along and had to have a name for the ABC. So Renaissance was chosen as meaning "rebirth," not meaning "music from the Renaissance," which was very confusing for a lot of people because they didn't know French. **Re**-naissance: re-birth. Rebirth of old music. And so, after that concert of the Machaut Mass – which was fantastic, which I'd never heard before – we kept playing. Then we were asked to play at more Sydney Prom Concerts, in the Town Hall of Sydney. We would often do pre-concert concerts. At one of these pre-concert, pre-Prom Concert concerts, one of the people I'd met at Sydney University had been coming along to all my concerts, and he came to me and he said, why don't you have the spoken word in your concerts? So, you'd have music, and then poetry or text from the same period, or from **another** period completely which was about the same sort of thing as the music. So at one of those pre-Prom concerts, he was the poetry reader, the first time we'd ever had a poetry reader. And so that established the practice with the Renaissance Players of having poetry or text read, as items which were connected with the music we were playing, or **not** connected, you know, completely not connected. So, in 1972, I looked for someone more professional as a reader. At the time, the professor of Italian, Frederick May, was known as a very good reader, and so I contacted him, would he like to read in one of my concerts? And he became the reader, for years. For years.

Collyer: Not necessarily in Italian, then?

Evans: No.

Collyer: No. He had a good voice.

Evans: No. Although sometimes he would, he would sometimes do a text in Italian.

Collyer: Yes. Understood. So, **that** was the beginning. I wonder if you could think back to, when you were performing with *The Play of Daniel* and *The Play of Herod*, you said how you felt about the music. You said you'd never heard melodies like this before. Can you expand on that? What was it like? Was it new or different or . . .?

Evans: I don't know, I just felt a connection with that melody, and the way it was used to tell the story of Daniel, or Herod.

Collyer: And it was fairly unusual, was it? In Australia, to be producing that kind of music.

Evans: Yes. Completely unusual.

Collyer: And yet, you said, it was well received?

Evans: It was **packed**. The crypt would be packed. That's why they had to do a repeat season of *The Play of Daniel*. And, of course, then a couple of years later we did *The Play of Herod*. Then, because of my connection with Frederick May by that stage – he was also a theatrical producer, so **he** was putting on plays in Italian every year at Sydney University, in the main theatre, for his department. And he did – because of my repetiteur work, I had been asked by a group called Young Opera if I would be the accompanist for their operas. You know, modern things, blah blah blah. And because in my plundering of Sydney University library I had discovered *The Son of Getron* from the same manuscript. So, with Young Opera as the – who organised the booking and the – who offered their services as a producer, I put on *The Son of Getron* in the crypt – no, it was in the Cellblock Theatre at Darlinghurst. And the ABC found out about it, so, lo and behold, they rang me up and asked me if I could perform, if my group would perform *The Son of Getron* in one of the Prom Concerts: in the Sydney Town Hall, on the stage of Sydney Town Hall. The boy who was going to be the "son" came from one of the schools nearby, and he found the Latin very hard. In the end, two weeks before the performance, his mother rang me and said he can't do it, because he simply can't remember the words. So, I had heard about, from the Young Opera group, there was a young singer, thirteen years of age, fourteen years of age, very good singer and very bright, and they suggested I use him. And that was Christopher Lawrence. So he became the Son of Getron. He learnt the part in two weeks, Latin. And the way he remembered, he had all the texts written down the sides of his fingers, and in the goblet that he presented. Latin text everywhere.

[0:50:23]

Collyer: Right. Good thinking.

Evans: Yes. He then had a role to play in further productions that I did with Frederick May. Oh, we did – what did we do? (pauses) So, yes, *The Slaughter of the Innocents* that was in the same manuscript as *The Play of Herod*, we did at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, which was a bit of an eye-opener for them.

Collyer: Right. This is another liturgical drama.

Evans: Yes, liturgical drama.

Collyer: What century were these from?

Evans: They were all from the twelfth or thirteenth century. Also, there was another one. [paper rustles] With Frederick May and the Young Opera group, we also mounted a performance of *L'Amfiparnaso*, which was a set of fifteen madrigals; but Frederick May sort of dramatized them, so we put on a performance of *L'Amfiparnaso* in the Union Theatre at Sydney University.

Collyer: Roughly what year would that have been?

Evans: Oh, in the '70s. And after . . . (softly) oh, yes, that was at the Con. (louder) Years and years later, when – Frederick died in the year after Gough Whitlam was outed, because he did too much work for him to be restored, and it was too much for him – his son David became the poetry reader, and with David I put on, for Sydney University Music Department, *The Beggar's Opera* of John Gay. And I did a huge amount of research on English folksong, because *The Beggar's Opera* is a compilation of different music that was popular at the time, like things by Handel or Purcell, but a lot of folk music, a lot of folk music in it. So actually I put **into** the production a lot of extra music, as well as that, the music of *The Beggar's Opera*. And I did the production with students at Sydney University.

Collyer: Were you – you were teaching at Sydney University at that time?

Evans: I was teaching there, yes.

Collyer: Okay, so how did the students feel about doing these old texts and these old performances?

Evans: Well, they had such fun in *The Beggar's Opera* that they didn't mind when the last liturgical drama that I did was – I **re-did** the production of *The Play of Daniel*.

Collyer: Oh, you did another one?

Evans: I did it at the Seymour Centre with the students of the Department. And they loved it, they loved it.

Collyer: Actually, I was thinking, by this time, though the '60s and into the '70s when all these things were happening, you must have been playing a few different instruments by then.

Evans: Well, when I was postgraduate, I decided that I had to learn a different – I was only playing keyboards and recorder at that stage – and I decided that I had to learn to play a new instrument every year. A new one.

Collyer: Every year!

Evans: So, I started with the clarinet, and I was practising the clarinet, because I was self-taught, and I was practising one day and Peter Richardson the flute player heard me playing, practising, and he said there's something wrong with your embouchure, you're not getting the

reed to vibrate in the right way. And so I went down to the Con and had lessons from Tim White, who had been the clarinet player in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and then he came up to Sydney, because he was fed up with the Melbourne Symphony, and taught at the Conservatorium; and he was such a wonderful teacher. What he taught me about embouchure meant that I could, therefore, I was able to play **any** wind instrument, whether it was a trumpet mouthpiece like a cornetto, or a reed. So, every year, with the help of Donald Peart, because he would organise instruments to come through Customs for me, I ordered all these instruments from overseas, and every year a new one. Or a new one or two, actually. Also, Nigel Butterley – who had been in *The Play of Daniel* and then the producer of the next, *The Slaughter of the Innocents* – he came back from winning the Italia Prize, music for radio, he came back from Italy **brandishing** a crumhorn, which we had never seen.

Collyer: Really?

Evans: Yes. He became the first Australian crumhorn player. The first and the worst. As he described himself.

Collyer: Okay. When would that have been?

Evans: When he won, the year he won the Italia Prize. I mean, you'd probably have to check that out.

Collyer: I can look that up.[7]

Evans: And so then I ordered a bunch of crumhorns and, you know, we all played the crumhorns.

Collyer: So, you had to order them from overseas?

Evans: Overseas. I ordered them from Moeck, in Germany. Jason will probably know that company.

Collyer: I wonder if they . . .?

Evans: Moeck, M-O-E-C-K.

Collyer: Oh, okay, I'm thinking of –

Evans: And I ordered from the English maker, I ordered a set of cornettos, which were very hard to play. Zinc, as they were known in German. I did a lot of research as well of instrument makers in Europe and England and was getting things like sackbuts to go with the cornetts, so we could perform music of sackbuts and cornetts. And I managed to get students to be – students from the Con as well as the University – to be interested in playing them.

Collyer: Right. Stringed instruments as well?

Evans: Stringed instruments. Donald Peart taught the viola da gamba. He had a viola da gamba group. And he taught me viola da gamba.

[7] 1966

Collyer: I understand. He taught you viola da gamba. Because he learnt from . . . Arnold Dolmetsch at some stage?

Evans: I think so, yes.

Collyer: So there's a direct lineage there.

Evans: Yes. He also played viola in my group for a while, but he was too distracted.

Collyer: Okay, I can see he was a busy man. And where did you get the music, so the sackbut music and so on, where was that coming from?

Evans: Well, as I said, I plundered Fisher Library. I spent, it seemed to be, every evening I was searching.

Collyer: So they must have had a bit of a stock there.

Evans: Oh, Sydney University Fisher Library in those days was wonderful. Because Donald Peart made sure it had a really good music collection.

Collyer: Okay. And this was early music –

Evans: He wanted it to be like Oxford.

Collyer: Oh, like Oxford!

Evans: And so, you know, he brought out John Steele from Oxford – no, he came from Cambridge. And Simon Harris. They were all ordering music. We got a huge Bach collection, for instance. The complete Bach collection: Bach *Gesellschaft*. And lots of early music that no one seemed to be actually **playing**, but they were looking at. They would **look** at, but not play, which seemed to be a bit funny to me. Because music is meant to be played.

[1:00:07]

Collyer: Okay, they would look at it, but not play it. And did you make arrangements for it yourself, or . . .?

Evans: Yes, I arranged music, I arranged it. There was medieval and Renaissance music which I arranged for what we had at the time, and then eventually I did much more research, and I got the right instrumentation. As well, I was very interested in **dance**, medieval dance, and I researched a lot of German and French sources for how it worked in the church. How it worked in the church, for instance –

Collyer: Dance?

Evans: Dance in the church. Sacred dance.

Collyer: Right.

Evans: One of the things that I was looking at were the labyrinth patterns on the floors in medieval churches, which only the acolytes who knew the secrets of the labyrinth could – they would, through a secret ceremony, they would know where to start, where in the labyrinth to start, and what journey to take, because there were lots of traps along the way.

When they got to the middle, that was their goal: to get to the middle of the labyrinth. And the circle dances. I made a – the first, no, not the first – I made recordings with a company called Cherry Pie. But then I did recordings with this mob, Walsingham, and one of the Walsingham CDs was actually about medieval church dance. I discovered the apocryphal book of Saint, I think it was Saint John. There's a text in there which describes Jesus standing in the middle with the twelve apostles circling around him in a **dance**. A **dance**. Circling around him in a dance. And he would say something, and they would reply, so this question-and-answer thing was going on. And that seemed to be one of the sources for medieval dance which became the way the **people** danced, out in the meadows. You know, because there was no such thing as couple dancing in those days, it was all done in circles. And you circle to the right and not to the left, because widdershins, going to the left, was towards the devil.

Collyer: Okay.

Evans: Dancing in circles, moving to the right. And you look at a lot of European dance from various European countries, it's still this circular dance, it's still happening. I was very interested to find music that was involved in that process. So one of these Walsingham CDs is actually about sacred dance. Actually, the reader reads from the book of Saint John, that paragraph about, that section about the apostles dancing around Jesus: the twelve apostles around Jesus as the centre point. So, that's the labyrinth, because Jesus is in the centre, which is where the labyrinth led, and the dancers were dancing outside the labyrinth in the circle.

Collyer: So, this was your work, you did the research.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Okay. And you also were fairly self-taught with a lot of your instruments, with some guidance.

Evans: Oh, I was self-taught with everything, everything except the piano.

Collyer: And then you passed a lot of this knowledge to your students?

Evans: Well, there were a lot of very talented players of **modern** instruments that – for instance, the guy who played, my best shawm player, was a bassoon player, and he came from the University of New South Wales. He had been to Renaissance Players concerts – because we were giving concerts from 1966, and then when we got the name in '67, we continued, and they were **very** popular concerts at Sydney University – and he had come to one, and he came to me and said, I'd like to play in your group. So he played shawms and crumhorns; any wind instrument, he could play. And so this is how people would come to me and I would use them in the group, in my group. So I had –

Collyer: Right. Professionals were coming to you.

Evans: Yes. Well, some of them were students. Roger Brook was a bassoon player who was also, like John Noble, who could take up any reed instrument and play it. So, he had a lot to do with the concerts; and he ended up – both of them, John ended up playing in the Opera orchestra, and Roger ended up playing in the Sydney Symph. So, they did become professionals on their main instrument, but they still played with my group.

Collyer: What do you think was the attraction?

Evans: Well, I think they liked the sense of fun, you know, because we dressed up in costumes. Because my sister, even though she was quite sick, she made the Renaissance Players' costumes, the special costumes.

Collyer: Oh, she made the costumes!

Evans: And the banners. And I got Bill O'Toole to make the music stands, the wooden music stands that were in three pieces which slotted together. So we would have these low music stands, and over the stands we would have this – a banner, draped with some sort of icon on the banner, like a cross, or a gryphon, or something like that. So, when people came into the Great Hall, they would see this wonderful display of banners and not just music stands.

Collyer: Yes, it was pageantry as –

Evans: And then we would always process in through the Great Hall – singing a piece, playing a piece – and come in and take our place.

Collyer: This is the Great Hall at Sydney University.

Evans: Great Hall at Sydney University. We would also dress the statues in the Great Hall, which were – I didn't want the Vice-Chancellor to see.

Collyer: Right, okay!

Evans: But we did get invited to do, by outside groups, to do many, many concerts. So we were playing all over the place. We played at Glenaeon School, which is a special school. Music clubs all over the place.

Collyer: Mostly in Sydney?

Evans: Mostly in Sydney. So, at the beginning, in the beginning, we were doing 90 concerts a year.

Collyer: A **year**?

Evans: Yes. We were **very** popular –

Collyer: A year! My goodness.

Evans: – for a while. Yes. It didn't last. You know, after – what was it, how long have we been going? we've been going 49 years – the patronage drooped off. But . . . so we were doing maybe, there were maybe 10 or 12 concerts per year at different places. Then I got really interested in Jewish music, because the recordings I made of Alfonso the Wise, Alfonso the Tenth, who adored the Virgin Mary . . .

Collyer: That's the *Cantigas* series.

Evans: The *Cantigas*, yes. I realised, reading about him, he was the king who – he was like King Charles, our King Charles – really interested in Muslim [sic], Christianity, and Judaism. So I got interested in **Spain**, because Spain – I should have done this earlier – Spain was the

one European country where the Christians came last. The Jews came over from, when the Second Temple was destroyed and they were sent out, they travelled to Spain, to Andalusia. But before then, the Arabs came from Africa; so Muslim was there from about 711 AD, the eighth century, and then the Jews came a couple of centuries later, so it was Jews and Arabs living together in **peace**. And then the Christians came in and spoiled everything.

[1:10:14]

Collyer: Yes. In the late '90s, the Renaissance Players did four CDs of "The Sephardic Experience." Is that that section of music?

Evans: Yes, that happened because . . . in 1992 was the five-hundredth anniversary, was the anniversary of Frederic and Isabella chucking out the Jews. It was the one, you know, the one date that people remember, but they were actually doing it earlier than that and killing Jews at the stake, burning them at the stake, taking away their property. The edict was issued in that year. A lot of them tried to escape in boats, and they travelled across the sea, drowning – to their death – to avoid being burnt at the stake, they drowned at sea. Some of them arrived in Italy. But in the Muslim world, the head of the . . . oh (expletive) I'm having a moment, what do you call that Muslim world?

Collyer: The caliphate?

Evans: No, I don't think it was the caliphate, it was the country where they had a ruler who ruled over this dominion of mainly Islamic people, but they made the . . . . I need the CDs to remind me. The person in charge of the country at that time sent out an edict saying the Jews are welcome in this country. So, the Jews, many of them managed to escape to this world where Jews and Christians were tolerated and were welcome. And that – because of all my reading about that, I decided, when the five-hundredth anniversary came up, that I would do a concert of commemorating this, what had happened. So I put on this really big concert in the Great Hall. It was **packed** with Jewish people, and we played all this music from – Sephardic music. Poetry, folk music, Arabic music. And women, I mean, the women came up to me afterwards, after the concert when we were packing up, with tears running down their face, because they said no one had ever, you know, no one has ever done something to recognise this. And one of the people who was at the concert was the guy who ran, Bill O'Toole, who ran – no, Warren Fahey, who ran Folkways in Paddington, he was there, and he got in touch with this American company, and he told them about this wonderful group that was doing this music, and blah blah blah. And one morning I got this phone call from America, in the middle of the night, from Eckart Rahn at Celestial Harmonies, and he said, I want you – I've heard about this concert, and can you make a CD for me? I ended up making four CDs with him. And I made lots of others –

Collyer: That was that set.

Evans: – lots of other CDs for him as well. See that booklet behind you, that's – the one on the top – that's the last set of CDs, which was *Monserrat*.

Collyer: Right. *The Red Book of Monserrat*.

Evans: He also brought out my – the Bach CDs. Because I decided to transcribe **all** the solo music of Bach, all the solo music for cello, violin and flute, and make arrangements for the harpsichord. So, there were five CDs. The ABC got three, they got the cello suites and the flute sonata, and Eckart got the violin pieces. He also published the score, big thick score which is up on the shelf there, and an American company published the cello suite arrangements. So, when Eckart put out the flute, sorry, the violin sonatas which I had performed, with scholarly notes, really scholarly notes, really – I reckon I proved that all these solo pieces, he, Bach actually, he would compose them during the day and in the evening he and his musicians would go off to the court and entertain people with whatever he had just written. So they would just sightread. They didn't wait. And he would – there is evidence that he played these solo violin pieces on the harpsichord. So he was adding a bass. He was adding a second part.

Collyer: And that's what you were . . .

Evans: That's what this was based on. When Eckart brought them out, when I played them and recorded them, again he rang me in the middle of the night from America, and he said, I'm kneeling down, I'm on my knees because I've just listened to your recording of the Bach, the Bach pieces.

Collyer: Oh, that's beautiful.

Evans: So, I had a good relationship at the beginning. At the end I was getting ready to sue him, but I was told by the legal team I went to that I wouldn't get anywhere with him because the contract that his company put out was . . . it was a shambles. And if you wanted to query anything, you had to go to America and go through the American courts. And I was advised by the legal teams not to do that.

Collyer: Okay.

Evans: The same thing happened with the very first LP that we brought out, from – it was –

Collyer: Ah, *Memories of English Minstrelsy*?

Evans: That was – because there was a series of dance programs that Beth Dean and her husband put on in the Opera House, dance from different countries, and they invited me to do the music for English dance. So, the pieces that we played for that concert, I got a phone call saying, from this record – Viking Records, who was a New Zealand company, would I come along and record it one night? And they didn't do the recording properly. They just – we just played the music we knew, which we'd already rehearsed for the Opera House concert. So, we knew it really well but we didn't have a chance to tidy things up, which you usually can do when you record. And they brought out this record and produced a dud contract, which, you'd say a certain thing at the front of the contract, reference to the back. And you look at the back and it'd say "nil." So it was about payment. Nil.

Collyer: Oh, no! Oh, dear. Well, actually, thinking back to the '70s, because the *Memories of English Minstrelsy* was 1976, I think, there were a couple of other things that you did that I thought were quite interesting. One was the Runnymede Pop Festival.

Evans: Oh, yes. Now, you –

Collyer: 1973. Can you tell me about that?

Evans: Well, in the end, eventually, I decided on three main concerts that we would do, every year. The first one was the Runnymede Pop Festival, which was at the beginning of the year. In the middle of the year, we would do a concert in memory of Frederick May, which **always** contained a concerto by Bach, which I would play with the Players. And the third one was at the end of the year, a Christmas concert called the "Christmas Pudding Concert."

[1:20:06]

Collyer: Yes! I've heard of these.

Evans: Which was full of fun things. So, Runnymede Pop Festival was mainly medieval stuff and the program for that was a scroll. So, at the door, if people wanted to buy the program, they were given a scroll, which was shaped like a pencil, which you unrolled during the concert. It was in my special handwriting and it had lots of pictures of medieval things, like medieval knights or all sorts of medieval things. And I had to do a lot of research to find these pictures. I found a publisher who was willing to publish: make the scrolls and put the pictures on that I'd chosen, where I'd chosen.

Collyer: So he printed the scrolls?

Evans: Yes, they were printed. Unfortunately, when I was chucked out of Sydney University, I had all the scrolls for every year on the walls of the room that we rehearsed in . . . and I had been in hospital when they decided to pack everything up. Didn't consult me. So I came out of hospital and I went up to the Department one Saturday and found everything in boxes. And all the scrolls pulled down. All the pictures, your photos of Nigel Butterley and various Players through the years, all destroyed.

Collyer: Destroyed.

Evans: Yes. Just thrown out.

Collyer: Oh.

Evans: I had to go through these, there was – the same thing happened in my office. They went through and packed everything into these boxes. And they didn't – they just packed them anyhow. So they would have LPs, which are fragile things, they would be on the bottom, and all the heavy books would be on top. So I had to unpack everything.

Collyer: Oh. Okay. This was, what, 2014 or so?

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Right. So, about forty years of scrolls?

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Oh, my goodness.

Evans: I think that's why I had a stroke. My first stroke. Because I was **so** upset.

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: And then I had to go through all the boxes and re-pack them, properly, so that things would not be damaged. But all the scrolls went, of course. And I managed to get some of the programs which I had kept from various years, I managed to salvage some of them and got them properly boxed. But the University gave me one week to do this. This was after I'd just come out of hospital, and so I wasn't very well. And then, a week later, they would – this truck pulled up outside my house, and they dumped all the boxes in the porchway there and through the hallway. And – what am I going to do? I've just come out of hospital. I'm not very well.

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: So, I managed to ring some of the Players and they eventually put the boxes in various rooms in my house, because this is a three-storey house, which I actually restored. This house was a dump when I bought it. It was made into six flats, with illegal . . . ah, there was a board across here, which I had to destroy, and I had to paint the walls and the ceiling. So, this ceiling here – there – that one that's, very detailed one, that was so that I could avoid my group being asked to play at the 200th anniversary of the landing of Captain Cook in Australia, because I wanted to avoid it because I didn't believe it was the right thing to be celebrating. I knew that my group would be asked to play by various people, to play at celebrations for this, and so I took six weeks off, six weeks' leave from the University, and put on a pair of overalls and bought a ladder, and painted.

Collyer: And did this.

Evans: And did this in the – didn't answer the phone, so I didn't have to do any of those concerts. In the meantime, we were doing lots of Jewish concerts. All the, you know, Temple Emmanuel, we did lots of concerts there, and we also did concerts at the Hakoah Club.

Collyer: Right, so, I'm still wondering about the Runnymede Pop Festival.

Evans: Oh, okay.

Collyer: Did your audience ever come in costume?

Evans: Well, yes, some of them did. There was a group, they had a special name and they went round everywhere in groups, dressed in costume.

Collyer: Oh. Like a medieval guild.

Evans: Yeah, something like that. And they would always come to my concerts in costume. But no one else did, no.

Collyer: What was special about the Christmas Pudding Concerts? I've seen people speak quite fondly of them.

Evans: Yes, well, they were a lot of fun. It wasn't – they weren't always, or hardly ever, medieval music or whatever . . . well, they **were**, but they were played on the wrong

instruments, you know. So, it was – like, I did an arrangement of a Mozart symphony for my group.

Collyer: Okay. On . . . ?

Evans: Yes, which was very funny. You know, we played, it was Mozart's . . . (sings melody) oh, what was that symphony? It was very popular at the time because it was used as the background for a film, and we played it on kazoos. So, we did funny things like that.

Collyer: And this is still the Renaissance Players, it's still that group? Okay.

Evans: Yes, so we did things like "The Twelve Days of Christmas," and it would be acted out by the Players, and I had a clown, of course, in all the concerts. We would change the animals; we would change who was the recipient of something on a certain day. "On the third day of Christmas, my true love sent to me" . . . and then it would be something funny.

Collyer: Right. Okay, so comedy was a part of your –

Evans: Yes, comedy. Very much comedy.

Collyer: And . . . eclectic.

Evans: Yes. And, of course, the clown, he acted out what the music was . . . if the music had a text, he would be acting while the music was on. Or he would do funny gigs, funny things, like when Peter Platt's daughter came from New Zealand to Australia. She was a clown, a professional clown, and she was very small, and she got into a double bass case. And my clown came on carrying this double bass case, and then he plonked it down on the stage, and he did all the funny things that the clowns do, and then he finally, "Oh, maybe I should open this case," and when he opened the case, she popped out! So, we had music, so we would be playing things like English folk music, or . . . all while all the action of the clown was going on. So, we **were** using medieval and Renaissance music, but, sort of, changing the context a little bit.

Collyer: Yes. Yes. And was it you making those decisions?

Evans: Yes. I arranged all the stuff. All that. And I made special programs for the concerts. All my concerts had copious program notes. One of the – Fred Blanks was the Sydney music critic, he once said in one of his reviews, "You need to come half an hour before the concert starts to read Winsome Evans' program notes." Which I noticed him doing, actually! He would come into the hall half an hour before the concert, and there were – in those days we would put the program on the seats, give them away, and he would read through the program notes before the program –

Collyer: That's lovely.

Evans: – before we started, so that he knew what everything was about; but, of course, other people didn't do that. They had to look at the program notes.

Collyer: I know some of the other early music ensembles around that time were quite serious and used formal concert settings for their music production, but you've obviously made quite a different decision on how you were going to present that music.

[1:30:15]

Evans: Well, I wanted it to be an occasion which, sort of, made people feel like . . . I mean, apart from the Christmas Pudding Concert, that was not serious, but the other concerts were quite serious. I wanted people to use what they saw to help them understand the context of the music. So, you know, because most people wouldn't know anything about medieval music, or Renaissance music, and even though the program note would tell them in great detail about what it was, and the pictures would help tell what it was, and the costumes I thought would help them sort of get into that frame of mind, I had to use some way of getting people into the mood.

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: My attempts at bringing early music alive were basically quite serious. But the way we, sometimes, the way we presented it – like, for instance, with the *Cantigas*, if there was some . . . . There was one which, like, the piece of meat that was stolen from the pilgrims who came to worship at the Shrine of the Lady, they were very upset about, because – this is the text of the original cantiga – they came to worship at the church. Before that they left all their meat, all their meal, at the inn, and so they expected when they'd finished the worshipping they'd come back to the inn and eat the food that they had left behind. But when they came back, they found one piece of meat was missing, and they were very upset. This is the real cantiga, you know, I'm not making this up. And they heard – they prayed to the Virgin Mary, "Oh, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?" and they heard this knocking sound coming from a chest, beside them. And there's a picture in the *Cantigas* manuscript of this happening; it was that when they opened it up, the piece of meat flew out! And so my clown would be – while the music was happening, he would mime that, the text, so that they could, if they were reading the program note, they could understand why he was miming certain things, or if they were **not** reading the program note, what he did helped them understand the context of the text.

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: And the one that was – and another one was the pregnant nun, who . . .

Collyer: I don't know that one.

Evans: Oh. Ah, the pregnant nun, she was very religious, but she had a friendship with another religious man and she discovered suddenly that she was going to – there was something happening to her stomach, and so the clown was miming all this. She also prayed to the Virgin Mary. And the Virgin Mary made it disappear!

Collyer: Oh, okay. Right.

Evans: "Where's my stomach?" So, the *Cantigas* texts are, a lot of them are quite serious, but some of them are quite amusing.

Collyer: Okay, so you were – it was instructive, all that you were doing.

Evans: Yes, and I thought that the theatre was part of what we were doing, you know, presenting everything in costume with banners and so on. That was the background of the **theatre**, and the music was the main source of the theatre, but the clown helped some people understand. The other thing was, we would get – with the dance music, because there was a lot of dance music, we would – one of the singers, Mara Kiek, was very good at Bulgarian dancing, and we were playing a cantiga which I had put into an additive rhythm like 7 or 5, because the *Cantigas* do not show rhythm, they only show melody.

Collyer: So you interpreted that.

Evans: And we would – yes – so, we would, there would be something in the text which suggested it was to be performed while dancing. And she would get up and start dancing, and then she'd go down into the audience and grab a child's hand and get the child to dance with them. And then she'd get people in the audience to come and dance, and she would show them how to do a dance in five, with a five rhythm, da-da-dah da-dah, three-two three-two three-two. Or in seven, which would be three-two-two. And she would lead them in a dance through the Great Hall, in a procession, all around the Great Hall while we were playing the music. So, dance, the element of dance, was there as well.

Collyer: And it was an interactive experience for the audience.

Evans: Yes. Yes.

Collyer: Right, yes, they could actually experience . . .

Evans: The audience was not very good at doing three plus two plus two.

Collyer: No, no, we don't have that skill in the western world. (laughs) Oh, okay, that is very interesting. It's a fairly unique approach, I think, that the Renaissance Players had.

Evans: I think some people, maybe Jason Stoessel, might not approve of some of the things that we did. (laughs)

Collyer: It's all education! Well, I have another question. Again, looking back to 1976 I've got it, you were invited by Gordon Anderson to perform at an MSA Conference.[8]

Evans: Oh, yes, in Canberra. We actually got a couple of invitations to perform at, I think they were UNESCO conferences, one in, I think they were both in Canberra. So, that was very interesting.

Collyer: So, that was performing, that was the Renaissance Players, I presume. And performing your –

Evans: Yes. We were quite serious there.

Collyer: Right! Okay, right, it was a serious concert.

[8] MSA = Musicological Society of Australia

Evans: But we did perform in costume, with the banners and all that sort of thing. So, that was very integral to what we did.

Collyer: Did you cross paths with Anderson very much?

Evans: Yes, I knew him. I knew him quite well. In fact, I used a lot of his transcriptions. You know, he gave me permission to perform any transcriptions of his that I wanted. So I did get to know him quite well because he was a friend of Peter Platt's, the professor of music.

Collyer: Right. Yes. At University of Sydney.

Evans: So, he came from New England, didn't he?

Collyer: Yes. He was a lecturer in music at New England, and became a professor there, and was fairly instrumental in early music.

Evans: Yes. He was a wonderful man. Thank you for reminding me. I'd forgotten about my UNESCO performances. And, you know, doing it in the milieu of all those learned musicologists, as it were . . . who often were not involved in the actual performance of things. So, it was quite interesting.

Collyer: Yes. Okay. Did you ever communicate with musicologists such as Anderson as part of your studies?

Evans: Yes, I did. Well, about the way to perform the music that he'd been transcribing. There was always to-and-fro between us.

Collyer: Okay, so you were always performance-oriented.

Evans: Mainly because of his friendship with Peter Platt that I knew that he would be a very willing person to engage in such question-and-answer sort of thing.

Collyer: And I think, some time, so in 1991, which was after Anderson died, you in fact directed a concert in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney devoted to his transcriptions.

[1:39:58]

Evans: Yes. Yes, I'd forgotten that as well. I'm just wondering if there's anything I'd forgotten to . . . . Oh, I haven't mentioned my, I did vaguely mention my relationship with the Leonine Consort, which became the Song Company. When Roland Peelman took over the Song Company, they one year put on *L'Amfiparnaso*, but they didn't stage it. Because it's not meant to be staged. But when **we** performed it, Frederick May thought it might be a nice idea to stage it. But the Song Company did perform it, many, many years later, and they consulted me about the music; which was very interesting that someone actually noticed that *L'Amfiparnaso* existed.

And I didn't mention the Baroque Guild which I started with Robert Miller. He was the cello player, one of the cello players in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and he agreed to organise the concerts, you know, where they would be, and organise the players from the orchestra who were interested in playing Baroque versions of the modern instruments that they played. So, some of them had not done it before; but people like John Harding, he was director of

ACO for a number of years, he was willing to try, and others from the Opera Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, some of them were interested to try to play Baroque versions of their instruments. And he would organise the publicity, I would choose the music and write the program notes. So, this group, this Sydney Baroque, lasted for quite a few years and it eventually became known as the Baroque Guild.

Collyer: Oh, okay, they're the . . . one has morphed into the other.

Evans: The Baroque Guild grew out of the Sydney Baroque, because there was a bit of a disruption between Robert and Pam Monks, the violinist, because they eventually didn't agree on things. So it just became a bit of a . . . well, a very uncomfortable situation, having the top and the bottom, sort of, frowning at one another. So we moved on, we moved company. Then, years and years later, Robert Clancy, the lute player whom, as a student at Sydney University, I had persuaded him . . . he came in as a guitar major, and I persuaded him to try the lute, and eventually he went off to Europe where he met Jordi Savall, and he ended up playing in his group – playing the lute and the theorbo with Jordi Savall. Eventually he came back to Australia and he started a group called . . . oh, what did he call it? The Broken Consort. So, it was Robert Clancy on theorbo, I was the harpsichord, Catherine Finnis was the viola da gamba, and Gerald English. We did a series of concerts, all round the place, in the Cell Block, in the Sydney Town Hall, and various other places. We did a lot of concerts for a couple of years. But eventually, Robert got a problem with the second finger. Wouldn't pluck. This thing that lute players suffer from.

Collyer: Oh, yes, goodness. I notice that, so, you didn't travel overseas to train, did you?

Evans: No. No. I did . . .

Collyer: You were able to do everything . . .

Evans: Well, I did get a scholarship in my postgraduate years to go to Holland to study early music. And I got sick. I think I discovered that I had, ah . . . there was some disease that I had that made it impossible for me to take out this Netherland Government Scholarship in Early Music. So, my career would have been **completely** different. I mean, the Renaissance Players were going when I got the scholarship, and the Professor of Music Donald Peart thought I ought to go, but I got sick with – I don't know what it was, I wasn't in hospital but I had to take a lot of medication, and I thought, no, it's not the right time for me to go. Maybe I can go next year. Which I didn't go because I got sidetracked.

Collyer: Right. (laughs)

Evans: And I'm so glad I didn't go, because I wouldn't have done things my own way, if I'd gone there. I would have, I think I would have become more sort of rigid in my thinking about things. Because, you know, . . . I was a painter as well as all this, and I did the artwork for many of my CD covers. You know, the first four, maybe five, CD covers, I drew myself or designed myself. The Walsingham Classics ones. There's a picture of . . .

Collyer: You had some with Cherry Pie label, as well?

Evans: Yes, started with Cherry Pie . . .

Collyer: *Adam's Apple*, *The Captive Unicorn*, in the '70s. [Paper rustles]. Ah, I see.

Evans: That was a copy of a medieval drawing, which I painted. You had to have the right dimensions. This one I drew myself.

Collyer: Okay, the *Garland Dances*.

Evans: I think that was our best medieval dance recording. And I did this cover as well. And I did this one.

Collyer: That's the 1990s. Okay. Oh, they are beautiful. But they are in a medieval . . . style?

Evans: Yes. They were copies of –

Collyer: Very beautiful. *The Muses' Gift*.

Evans: – things in medieval iconography.

Collyer: Oh, that you had recreated as your album covers. They are very lovely.

Evans: So, we started – our first recording was with the Viking Records, New Zealand, from the dance program we did at the ABC for Beth Dean. For the cover of which my sister, who was a photographer as well as a seamstress, provided the photos for that. Then, after that it was Cherry Pie.

Collyer: Cherry Pie in the '70s. You had –

Evans: Cherry Pie, and then Walsingham.

Collyer: That's the dance series in the '90s.

Evans: And Celestial Harmonies. And because of the dispute about this one, that – Eckardt put this out – because I decided I would **not** give him the music because he had been so, well, (whispers) dishonest (speaks) about the contracts, that I gave that music, that recording, and the notes – the copious notes – I gave them to Tall Poppies. So, the last CD has that title, *Montserrat*. Has the *Montserrat* title.

Collyer: Oh, yes, *Pilgrimage to Montserrat*. That's 2014.

Evans: Yes. Which is a double CD.

Collyer: Yes. That was Tall Poppies. I'm interested by what you said about, you thought that you . . . presumably you were concerned that you wouldn't have the artistic independence, had you studied overseas.

Evans: Well, I don't think I would have gone into a more creative way of presenting concerts: thinking about entertainment as well as teaching. The concerts were about **teaching**, because of the program notes, which were very heavily scrutinised. And I wanted to make them more acceptable to modern audiences, so that somehow, **somehow**, they get introduced to medieval music. Or Renaissance music. Or Jewish music. Or Islamic music, you know, because the four-CD set of Sephardic music has got a lot of music from that culture, from different cultures in that country.

[1:50:36]

Collyer: Yes. I noticed on Trove you used to get concert reviews in the *Jewish Times*.

Evans: Yes. Yes, one of the poetry readers at the time was Geoff Sirmai who was a student of mine at Sydney University, but he was also a very good reader as well. And having him in the group – he was probably the only Jewish person in the group, but it did mean that we'd have an entrée into the concerts we did at Temple Emmanuel. They were very willing to have us. In fact, the cantor invited me to come with a group of Sydney University students to a Saturday religious ceremony, because they worship on Saturdays. And when we came, they welcomed us to the congregation and they explained everything that they did while the service was happening. So, they were teaching the students, and me, how to read the Torah with this silver thing that they – well, they wouldn't touch the Torah. They have this metal thing that they would, you know, read along, following the text. And the drinking of the wine. We all had to drink the wine when we were welcomed at the door. It was non-alcoholic wine. So, they were, the Jewish community was very receptive to the concerts that we did. And in the end, in 2000 and, I think it was 2014 or '15, I suddenly got this message saying, could I come to a ceremony where I had been given the Cantor Deutsch medal, Jewish medal? It's on the wall there, it's up on the wall, and there's a big plaque with it – which, there was a yearly award for people who made Jewish culture, who recognised Jewish culture and did something about it. So, that was a great surprise. I mean, I didn't think I'd deserved that, really, because . . .

Collyer: That's lovely.

Evans: Anyway.

Collyer: Clearly you were appreciated. There's actually an article written by Carol Williams in 1998 which mentions the Renaissance Players and yourself as being very open to absorbing living performance traditions, particularly those of the Middle East. And being a little out of the mainstream, or out of . . . sort of, more open-minded in that respect.

Evans: Yes. Have you listened to any of the Jewish recordings we made?

Collyer: I haven't; so I will make a point of doing that. I'm interested in the instruments. I mean, you mentioned at the beginning, you were learning an instrument every year and you were ordering them from Europe. But at some stage I understand that Australian instrument makers got involved in making instruments.

Evans: Yes, we, as far as possible, we tried to use Australian makers, where I thought their – what they were making was of good quality. So, for instance, the harpsichord that I played on was made by Alastair McAllister from Melbourne, and he made, I thought, wonderful instruments; and for the Bach recordings, they were perfect because they were modelled on this German maker from Bach's period and they had that sound, that special sound which would have been, might have been, the sound that Bach knew. And in that Bach, the notes for the violin and cello recordings that I made, they actually spend a lot of time talking about Alastair's instruments. There were a couple of string makers whose instruments we used, but I can't remember their names. Like violin, Baroque violins . . . the Baroque violin that was

used in the Sydney Baroque was made by a Canberra maker who recently passed away. It was a wonderful instrument. The hurdy-gurdy that we used was made by Bob Meadows, who specialised in making hurdy-gurdies.

[workmen use tools outside the window]

Collyer: So, he's an Australian maker?

Evans: Yes. Well, he's English extraction, but he lives in Australia. He lives in Canberra now. He also made a Baroque violin, but it was the hurdy-gurdy – and with the harp, the one harp I've kept, he – it was an antique, and he managed to restore it and look after it while I was playing it. Any instrument that was damaged, I would ring Bob. He just lived round the corner when I first knew him, and he actually helped me take all the paint off this staircase. It was painted bright blue when I came here.

Collyer: Oh, okay, so restoring wood was . . .

Evans: He taught me how to do it. So I actually, to do the skirting boards, I actually sanded them myself. Took them out into the garden and sanded them every weekend. So Bob Meadows was a . . .. And there was the recorder maker in Melbourne, can't remember his name. You probably know him. He died recently.

Collyer: Yes. Oh, sorry, the name . . .

Evans: Well, we also worked with him. And Peter and Ian . . . Watchorn. Ian Watchorn. He now lives in Melbourne, and he made our first lute.

Collyer: Okay. Yes. The recorder maker is Fred someone?

Evans: Yes, that's the one I'm trying to think.

Collyer: Yes. I'll look him up.

Evans: And Peter Watchorn of course was the harpsichord maker, as well as a player. He ended up in America.

Collyer: Oh, okay? So, there turned into a reasonable source of local instrument producers.

Evans: Yes. Where possible, I would use Australian makers, because I thought that was important. But some of these instruments were **not** being made in Australia. For instance, the rackett was not made in Australia. So I was Australia's first and worst rackett player.

Collyer: Right! But not the first and worst sackbut player. Okay. And how do you think that this early music that you were doing sat alongside what was happening in concert halls in other respects, in Australian – like, in Sydney? What was its place?

Evans: I think we catered to a different audience.

Collyer: So, not necessarily the same audience?

Evans: Well, in some cases I think we did. I mean, the people who were not university age tended to be those who went to many concerts in Sydney, you know, of different types. But

the younger ones, the undergraduates who came, I think they were into a different sort of music, and I think they were attracted by what they heard about this sexy woman in tights who plays these funny instruments.

[2:00:05]

Collyer: Right? Okay! (laughs)

Evans: Look, recently I was in Metro Rehab after my second stroke, and there was a new guy there and he kept staring at me when we were doing physio. Every day he would stare at me, and he'd say, you're not that sexy chick – in tights – that used to give concerts in the Great Hall? (laughs) and I thought, that was a certain element of people coming, university students, coming along, who were curious about what was going on and they'd heard about things happening in the Great Hall. So, I think **they** were a different audience, the young ones. I suspect. But, you know, you can't really generalise about things like that.

For instance, the reason I introduced **dance** into my concerts was, we were finishing up a concert in the Great Hall one night and we had the doors open, and this guy who'd been at Fisher Library – you could hear the bells going when Fisher Library was to shut down, to let people inside know that they had to get out – and he had come from Fisher Library, and he heard this music coming from the Great Hall. He was a bit of an eccentric person, and he came into the Great Hall with a – he had this wonderful cloak on. A magical cloak. Shiny cloak. And he danced all his way down, down the Great Hall to where we were playing. And he bowed at the end, as if he had been part of the thing. It was dance music that we were playing. And his name was Ronaldo. After the concert, he came and visited my office and I said, well, what about you doing more of this with us? Because it looks wonderful. You know, people actually doing the dance that – the music we were playing. And so he regularly appeared in Renaissance Players concerts. But he would be up on the stage, not always coming, parading up and down the Hall on the carpet in the middle. But he got some sort of wasting disease and died.

The other dancer that we had was someone called Philippa Cullen, who was an Italian – who was studying Italian, and she also came into the concerts with a sort of funny clowning group of people who danced on stilts. They were called the White Company. And they suddenly appeared at a concert. You see, we were attracting eccentrics. She was doing Italian at the time with Frederick May, and she allowed herself to be persuaded to come and dance, but she wasn't doing ancient historical dance, she was doing sort of free-for-all. But it was very interesting to have the theatrical side happening. She also passed away, in India. She did a lot of street dance in Sydney. She would spend the weekend with friends who would play instruments, and she would dance for a weekend through the streets of Sydney. Her name was Philippa Cullen. She became quite famous, because she was also doing a lot of dance using the theremin, and we had a theremin at Sydney University. So, she was friends with the people at Sydney University who ran the theremin, and she would duck in and see me when she came to do theremin exercises – because she uses it, the theremin, to make music with her body movements.

Collyer: Not just her hands?

Evans: No, because the theremin reacts to body movements, if you use it in certain ways. So, she did a lot of theremin experimentation. And she knew a lot of people in the Italian Department, as well, who . . . . The Italian Department was a department that, through Frederick May, that I used quite a lot in my concerts, attracting students and research people whom I could consult about translations.

Collyer: Yes. So, you were translating texts for English-speaking –

Evans: I mean, Frederick May started a group that was free – the University didn't know about it – he started a group called "Italian for Opera Singers" which was free for all the singers, professional singers, who had been in the opera groups that he'd directed, like *L'Amfiparnaso*. So that was how I got my training in Italian. Because, you know, Italian is quite easy to read . . . I mean, well, after doing French and German and Latin. That made translation a little bit easier than it would have been if I hadn't done it.

Collyer: How about the funding? All the concerts that you put on with the Renaissance Players, were they self-sustaining financially?

Evans: They were indeed. They were funded by the people who came to the previous concert. By the ticket sales. And then they were funded by my university salary.

Collyer: Oh! You were –

Evans: I always paid my performers. I would divide up what money was left over from the ticket sales and program sales; I would divide them up, and at the last concert in the series of concerts every player would find money in an envelope on their music stand. So I was able to pay all the Players; and if there wasn't enough money, then I would use my university salary. And I never paid myself. So I paid all the cost. I paid all the printing. The university salary paid for the existence of the Renaissance Players, I think, because my salary was keeping it going.

Collyer: What about the use of the Hall? Was it subsidised, at all?

Evans: Well, at the beginning it was. For many, many years, the Great Hall was entirely free. And then a new vice-chancellor came along, after Bruce Williams who was the previous chancellor – and he **loved** the Renaissance Players. And he loved me, as well. So, after him, suddenly things changed and suddenly we were charged a huge amount of money for the concerts, which I thought was really shocking because, in a way, we were the "Town and Gown" connection between the university and the people of Sydney. One year, we were – this was when Bruce Williams was vice-chancellor – he invited us to play at the ceremony to welcome freshers to Sydney University. He invited us to get up on the stage in our costumes, three of us, and play some music, which the freshers **loved**. Because it not only introduced them to some funny side of, quirky side of, Sydney University – because, you know, all the academics are sitting there in their gowns on the stage, and they were one audience; but there were these thousands of students in the hall, watching us dance and cavort during this welcoming session . . . which we did for a number of years. But then things changed when we got another vice-chancellor.

Collyer: So when would that have been?

Evans: It would have been in the ’80s.

Collyer: Oh, okay, still quite early. The Renaissance Players still had quite a long career after that, though.

[2:09:58]

Evans: Oh, yes. Eventually, it was a longer period when we were paying for the hall. I did get some government money for one of the CDs that we made, to pay the Players. So, with the sales of the CDs, what I used to do was – any money that came in to, say, Walsingham, and they would send me a cheque – I would divide it up exactly to the Players who’d been on that CD and pay them the royalties. Because they were giving their, I mean, virtually giving their rehearsal time free, because there was never enough money. Never enough money. And I never took anything from the sales. I never took anything.

Collyer: Okay, so it wasn’t a – none of it was a financial venture for you, really.

Evans: No. Not at all. Not at all. In fact, it was a misadventure.

Collyer: Right. But . . . a glorious misadventure.

Evans: Well, it was. It was such fun. But it was . . . eventually, I think having three careers and this house restoration, which is three storeys, I think I probably did too much. I think that’s why I got too sick. I mean, I was working every day of the week, including the weekends, you know, and going up – because the university’s only fifteen minutes away – I would be, late at night, round about one o’clock in the morning, I’d be practising on some instrument. Or writing some music, or doing some reading or something like that. Or marking . . . marking assignments, oh my god. When I was in the ACO, I would get on a plane after everyone else. Everyone else would go down to a certain city that we were performing in, they would go down in the morning and rehearse; and I would come up on the plane – later plane – in the afternoon, with a backpack full of students’ assignments, and I would spend the plane journey, to and fro, marking students’ books.

Collyer: Oh, that sounds a bit rough. Oh, dear. Well, if you would summarise, what would you say, what impact did the Renaissance Players have on Australian music?

Evans: Oh . . . . Well, I think for a time – I think we’re forgotten now – but I think for a time we were the main ensemble playing, constantly, early music – I mean medieval music, medieval and early Renaissance music – of anyone in Australia. I think. On a regular basis. And we played in all the capital cities except Hobart. We did many concerts in Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne – Melbourne we did a lot of concerts, because we played at . . . when Young Opera presented short operas for the opening of the Victoria State Opera Company, which was overseen by Dame Joan Hammond, they did a double program which was half Renaissance Players playing the, I think it was *The Son of Getron*, and the other half real opera, like modern opera, doing the – now, I’m going to get this wrong – *The Tits of Tiresias*. Which is *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. Do you know that short opera?

Collyer: I don't.

Evans: So, that was our introduction to Melbourne. And we did many street concerts in Melbourne, and we got invited back time and time again to the Melbourne Harpsichord, ah Keyboard Festival that they had every year, for a time.

Collyer: Oh, MIFOH? The Festival of Organ and Harpsichord?

Evans: Yes, that. And we were invited back to peripheral concerts on the side. So, yes, we were playing a lot. We did a lot of country concerts as well.

Collyer: Did you? So you did some touring?

Evans: Yes. But, you see, it's sort of all mixed up, the country concerts are all mixed up with ACO because in the early days of ACO, they did a **lot** of country concerts. There was one concert where I came down after all the others, and the plane – it was raining – and the plane had to be landed at the wrong airport; and then I had to come in a bus, which got me too late to the concert hall. Then, another concert, Albury-Wodonga, where I landed in Albury-Wodonga area but the harpsichord went to Newcastle.

Collyer: Oh, no!

Evans: It went the other way. So John Harding announced that Winsome Evans – Winsome is sitting in the back, will you stand up, Winsome? She was going to play you a harpsichord concerto, but the harpsichord went to Newcastle!

Collyer: Oh, my goodness!

Evans: Carrying harpsichords to Newcastle.

Collyer: Oh, dear. That's a new take on it. I'm curious, with such a long playing career with the Players, do you think the audience has changed over that time?

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: How would you describe that?

Evans: I think they were harder to please.

Collyer: Later on?

Evans: Yes, later on.

Collyer: That's interesting.

Evans: I think because, when we started in Sydney, it was a **new** thing. Completely new thing. And there was this sexy lot of people, young girls and boys, playing these weird instruments in these weird costumes – colourful costumes – with the Great Hall decked out in banners, and we changed the names of all the people on the portraits, we changed them to the wrong thing, and we dressed all the statues. So, it was, at the beginning, it was something which had never happened before. But then it became more, after a while, maybe fifteen, twenty years, it became more normal, and so therefore not so . . . the main people who came

were the ones who had been on the mailing list for the longest. They were the stalwarts. Stalwarts. And we were not getting so many new people to our concerts.

Collyer: Because it wasn't novel anymore.

Evans: Because suddenly . . . . Look, the thing was, I think university education became less rigorous. Certainly, it did in the Music Department.

Collyer: I don't remember doing a translation for my honours.

Evans: Even in the language departments, I think. Sydney University now has **axed** some of the language departments. And the history departments. The Celtic Studies. These are all departments that I worked with, because I would go to the language departments to check the translations, like the Latin translations, or the Celtic Studies for ideas for sources of stuff. History departments. And the Semitic Studies Department. One of the CDs in the Sephardic series, *Apples and Honey*, was dedicated to Rabbi Apple who was the head of Semitic Studies. And he was also at the Great Synagogue in the City of Sydney, he worked there. He helped me with a lot of Jewish sources of music; but that's all gone now. Suddenly, those things are not important anymore. It's all about, what are those students going to do when they graduate? How are they going to make lots of money?

[2:20:00]

Collyer: Yes.

Evans: So, do medicine, or science, or . . .

Collyer: The "workplace readiness," yes.

Evans: So, I think there's been a sort of dumbing down in the intellectual community. I mean, the loss of language teaching is shocking. (pauses) One of the people who was a director of a couple of the dramas that we put on came from the English Department, but he went off to Adelaide, David Lawton, and so that aspect of interest in other departments, working with other departments, went, when he went. And the staff changed, and I think their goals changed a great deal. Yes, I think David Lawton was probably responsible for me – I think he put my name up for getting a British Empire Medal.

Collyer: Yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. So, in 1985, was it?

Evans: No, no, it was earlier than that.

Collyer: Earlier than that, oh.

Evans: I was 39, so what year would that have been?

Collyer: Oh, sorry, that was something else. It was 1980. You got the New South Wales Jaycees Award for Services to Music and a British Empire Medal.

Evans: Yes. '86 I got the –

Collyer: Order of Australia.

Evans: The OAM.[9]

Collyer: Yes. And so – I mean, with your many careers, I presume that your work with the Renaissance Players was part of the consideration for those awards.

Evans: I think so, yes. Well, you see, I was in the public so often: also playing with the ACO and Sydney Baroque and all that sort of stuff. Playing for many of the professional choirs, like the Philharmonia, and Sydney Opera Company – I was a repetiteur for **some** of their productions. I was present actually when Richard Bonynge was conducting a Baroque opera, and I was at the rehearsal where I was teaching the keyboard player at the opera, the main repetiteur, to read figured bass, and I was at that – present at an occasion when Dame Joan was rehearsing and she forgot something, she forgot that you didn't go back, you didn't repeat something – no, no, she repeated something which shouldn't have been repeated. And he ticked her off in front of the whole company. It was so embarrassing. And I made these "hmm hmm hmm" noises . . . (laughs). And she was such a lovely lady, because, you know, after the rehearsal, she just joined the queue for a cup of coffee. She just . . .

Collyer: Oh. Not a prima donna.

Evans: No. She was wonderful. I met her again later, when I lived in International House for a couple of years, which was run by Graeme de Graaff who was married to Lauris Elms; and I got very friendly with Lauris and actually got – she sang the part of, she was one of the main singers in one of the liturgical dramas that we did. She sang, as a contralto, she sang in that. And when Frederick May died, they put on a funeral service in the Great Hall at Sydney University and she came along and sang at his funeral: she sang music from **that** liturgical drama at his funeral. And so, because of her connection, married to Graeme de Graaff, I got to know her further; and she organised social gatherings, with Dame Joan along. And I got to meet her again. So we had a bit of a giggle about, you know, Richard Bonynge.

Collyer: Oh, right! Can you tell me what would you say is the highlight of your time with the Players? If you had to pick.

Evans: Look, I think it was the first opera. Because *The Play of Daniel*, for me, was a total eye-opener. It was a music I'd **never** heard before. And I was completely hooked by it. Wrapped in it. I knew all the text by heart, even though I was not a singer. I was an instrumentalist. And it changed, for me, as a direction that I could go into. You know, with all my other musical connections, this was a new one, a completely new one, and it made music research more attractive, because I was pursuing something which I found totally, mind-blowingly gorgeous. Wonderful. Beautiful. That's . . . so silly, I mean, this is simple melody. And text!

Collyer: What was the hardest part of your time with the Players?

Evans: I think it was . . . dealing with people, dealing with . . . bureaucracy.

Collyer: Bureaucracy, yes.

[9] OAM = Medal of the Order of Australia

Evans: Yes, I actually wrote a poem about it, using the letters of "bureaucracy," using them one after the other, which I got my poetry reader to read in one of my concerts. And if anyone in the audience was perceptive enough, they could hear him saying (low voice) "bureaucracy" – because, you know, Bert, Used, Rigid, Eggs, At – you know, all the letters of bureaucracy. Look, bureaucracy is necessary but it doesn't need to be so mindless. So unthinking. So careless. I mean, the way I was treated at the Conservatorium of Music at the end, when they were trying to make a space for a younger person, was shocking. Shocking. And all the things that I had done previously – with the ACO, with the Renaissance Players, with the research particularly, of Sephardic music particularly – was just swept aside. I was nothing. I had no say in anything, no power. I would go down to the Conservatorium and I would feel sick going into the building, because some of the people who, at the top, like Kim, the one who got sacked, the director who got sacked, she pretended to be my friend when she first came to the Conservatorium as the Head, and she gradually, gradually tried to get rid of me. That was very horrible. And I took a union, eventually I took a union person with me to go to a meeting with her and her stand-in, to witness what she said, and eventually we both had to walk out, because he said, you can't stay in the room any longer, it's so horrible. And that was . . . because there was no recognition of what I'd been – of what I'd, years and years before that, what I had done. And they thought I was up myself, you know.

Collyer: Oh, dear. I'm sorry to hear it.

[2:30:00]

Evans: Well. It was not very pleasant.

Collyer: How do you hold on to the good memories, now?

Evans: Oh . . . well, I do – Ottoman Empire, I've just remembered!

Collyer: It was the Ottoman Empire, right.

Evans: Bayezid –

Collyer: Byzantine.

Evans: No, the name of the leader of the country –

Collyer: Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, yes.

Evans: He was the one who put out that edict about all the Jews coming. Sorry, I've just remembered it: Ottoman Empire.

Collyer: The invitation to the Jews.

Evans: So, what was your question?

Collyer: How do you hold on to the good memories? . . . I notice the Players have been quite active on Facebook over the years.

Evans: Oh, yes, I had a – there was one guy in the group who started this, with my permission, but I didn't have anything to do with it. He just started this Facebook thing by

himself with my permission. Andrew. Andrew Lambkin. He started it. And I can't go into it, because I absolutely refuse to use . . . I've got a phone, but I refuse to use Facebook, or to use my phone to do anything other than send messages or answer the telephone. But I will not go onto anything else. I hate technology, because I find it too unthinking, uncaring – unthinking, and if you make a mistake, you're lost. So, someone stole a lot of money from me, and I had to change – oh, that's right, I went to hospital with blood coming out of my bowel, and while I was in hospital, someone stole my credit card. I tried to get a new one, and I had to go through technology to get it, and I couldn't. I had to ring various people to run me through it, and I just thought, no, I don't want to do this. It's too . . . if you make a mistake, everything disappears. Everything's lost. So, when people try to contact me any other way, they won't. See, I didn't . . . I eventually saw your message because I was wiping things from that part of my phone – it was, you know, ads for blankets and stuff, and I saw your message, and I rang David May and I asked him to contact you through email; because I don't, I will **not** use email. And when I was teaching, that was one of the things that made me very unpopular with the bureaucracy, because I would not use email. If a student wanted to contact me, they had to come and see me; and I would be available for them any time of the day or night during the week, including Saturdays. So I would have students coming to see me on Saturdays as well as during the week. Because I just worried about cheating.

Collyer: Oh. It's a whole new order with artificial intelligence programs now.

Evans: I'm sort of – I worry about . . . knowledge.

Collyer: Yes, and perhaps it's quite justified.

Evans: You know, people having knowledge. So, I'm a medieval person, in that sense.

Collyer: And so productive with it.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Can you tell me, is there anything that I haven't asked, that you think is important to bring up?

Evans: I'm just wondering what we didn't mention. Did I mention that, years later, I put on my own production at Sydney University of *The Play of Daniel*? So I came full circle, with David May as the director – the son of Frederick May, who is now my chief carer, directing. It was done with students. And we also did . . . (pauses) ah, what was the other one we did? [paper rustles] (pauses) Some of the first things that we did were, not only the Machaut Mass, but a couple of years later we did Perotin's *Sederunt principes* with the Leonine Consort at the Sydney Proms. Then I did my own presentation of *Sederunt principes* at Sydney University. So, I got the students in the music department – I introduced them to medieval music, Perotin, which they had never heard of . Which, you know, no one had ever . . .

Collyer: So, you used performances to introduce them.

Evans: Yes. So . . . *The Beggar's Opera.* I talked about the research I did of English folk music.

Collyer: You did.

Evans: *L'Amfiparnaso* . . . . (pauses) Hm, so, in a way, we all started because of Dindy Vaughan who had been the Lion in *Daniel*, *The Play of Daniel*. She was directing SUMS, the Sydney University Musical Society. She got sick and she asked me if I could bring a group of players from *The Play of Daniel* along and I would direct SUMS for that concert. And that really, sort of, solidified what we might do. So, you know, I had Donald Peart playing the gamba in various concerts, getting dressed up in costume. I had Roger Covell playing various instruments for a while. This is all before that Norman Johnson request that we find a **name** so we could produce that – to be in that concert at the Town Hall, the Sydney Proms. A lot of people think that that's where the Renaissance Players started, which is wrong. Which is wrong. So that needs to be corrected. We actually started way before that.

Collyer: Right. It was actually a much more gradual build-up.

Evans: Certainly, the year before. Because we were doing so **many** concerts, in the previous year, that was **why** I was invited to be part of the Machaut Mass. Because Norman Johnson had heard me, or heard my group, playing in the Great Hall before that. So, I had a very long friendship with Norman Johnson, because I used to play for his choir after that. It was from the Oriana Singers that one of the singers came up to me after rehearsal and said, knowing that I had done concerts – she was a film critic, she had a job looking at all the films that came into Sydney – oh, sorry, not a critic, a censor, and she would censor films . . . dirty films or sexy films – and she came up to me, a very proud sort of solid lady, she came up to me after one of the Oriana rehearsals that I was playing for, and she said, if ever you need a castanet player, I'd be interested to come and play castanets. You know, she was maybe fifteen years older than me and all my Players. And that was Barbara Stackpool. So she became the Renaissance Players' castanet player. And she was a wonderful, wonderful castanet . . . and a singer as well.

[2:40:04]

Collyer: And you were able to incorporate that.

Evans: Yes. So, she eventually joined the group, after we'd played for Norman Johnson's choir.

Collyer: That's wonderful.

Evans: So that's how a lot of people joined the group, because . . . there's a photo upstairs showing a lot of the people who were in the group, who were from *The Play of Daniel*, or friends at university, or people that I'd met, like David Miller, who played percussion, who is now a very famous teacher down at the Conservatorium, piano accompanist. These were people that had something to do with the Music Department, and ended up in the Renaissance Players.

Collyer: And they would come to you and they would ask to be involved, wouldn't they? They were so keen.

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Thank you for this amazing history.

Evans: It's a bit of a muddle, I'm afraid.

Collyer: That's how it should be.

Evans: It's like a pudding.

Collyer: A Christmas pudding!

Evans: Yes.

Collyer: Well, let me finish by saying how happy I am to have been able to speak with you today. And how interesting it has been to hear this history and to capture this fascinating aspect. What you did was quite unique, I think. So, Winsome, thank you very much.

Evans: Thank you. Thank you for doing it. Because as David May said, it's about time someone did something like this.

Collyer: Good on him. He's been a very helpful friend.

END RECORDING