



## Stage Invasion at Leeds

Extract from an interview of  
Gillian Hanna [GH] and Mary McCusker [MM] conducted by Jessica Higgs  
[JH] for *Unfinished Histories* with Katrina Duncan [KD] for *Monstrous  
Regiment* on 25 May 2016

The topics discussed in this extract relate mainly to the 1978-1980 section  
of the History pages on this website, titled **A Challenging Time**.

The extract is taken from a near-verbatim transcript of the interview  
produced by First Class Secretarial Services, with some parenthetical  
[additions] and {comments} by the editor. Text removed is indicated by a  
series of ..... .

A digital recording of the interview, in two Parts, each lasting about 2  
hours, is lodged with the Monstrous Regiment archive in the V&A's  
Theatre and Performance Archives.

Copies of the recording are also available in other locations, including the  
British Library Sound Archive. Further details at  
<http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/interviews/viewing-interviews/>

Time intervals (in minutes) in the recording are indicated by [5.00], [10.00]  
and so on in the text.

[Part Two, pp 24-26]

**The discussion moves on to the company's second cabaret, *Time Gentlemen Please* (1978)**

MM: ..... You {Gillie} didn't do the second cabaret, *Time Gentlemen Please* (1978).

GH: No, I went to Italy.

MM: Lily Sue [Todd] directed that. Bryony [Lavery] wrote it. And that was the one where people stormed the stage {at a performance in Leeds}. You mentioned an extreme reaction. It wasn't so much extreme as unbelievable. ....

KD: I think it was a one-off, yes?

MM: It was a one-off, I mean... But what it was, it's very funny {i.e. odd} because Russell [my partner] was asking me about it [recently], and when I recounted it he said oh, I didn't realise it was like that. And he seemed to think it was a gentler version of what it was.

KD: You have to tell us, what was it, Mary?

MM: It was violent. It was extremely violent. People stormed the stage and physically ripped the leads out of the speakers and took the microphones out of people's hands, apart from me, because I wouldn't give mine to anybody.

KD: And did they do this spontaneously or had they planned it?

MM: They did it after the interval. Now, Gillian [Hanna] and David [Bradford] had very mixed feelings about the cabaret when *they* saw it. This was the version *before* they saw it, which had also enflamed people. It had been going fine before that, and we had done a version of it {in open rehearsal}, people like Bea Campbell came in to look at it, because you need feedback for that kind of stuff.

The beginning of it {the show} was all of us talking about sex and sexual experiences. That had upset some people. But they'd lived with that. By the interval, evidently - I found out from someone who'd been there - in the interval, the various political groups, there was a bit of caucusing going on, particularly from the men. Saying to the women do you think it's right that this is what's being done, how it's being done? So there were murmurings. And by the time we went back after the interval there was tension.

And it simmered along, and then I think it was Chris [Bowler] comes out in a beautiful gown and was going to do something, and the first remark was ambiguous, and then they were up and they were on their feet. But they weren't just up on their feet protesting. They were up on their feet physically coming up, damaging equipment.

KD: Was it all men who invaded the stage?

MM: No no. Women, mixed. But mostly women. It was quite scary, but as my friend who I've lived with for many years says to me ... you go straight through fear to aggression, which is absolutely true. And it wasn't my usual aggression. I went to a very cold, calm place and I just stood there and I thought, I have earned the right to

this mic. And I don't care if these people, women or not, don't like this, I'm not letting somebody take this mic from me. And they didn't.

[80.00] And gradually we got people off the stage, by which time some of the equipment was damaged, [so] that we couldn't have gone on because the leads had been yanked out. And I took cries of 'arrogant bitch', had a show of hands with the audience, and said obviously we have upset people, but I would really like us to get to the end of the show because Bryony Lavery, the woman who wrote this, I feel you haven't let her finish what she was saying.

And the show had a song and a poem. The poem {'Thirty One'} was the one that ended with Bryony's [being] thirty-one. I mean it started from her being twelve, taking her through her romantic and otherwise attachments. And ended with: 'thirty-one, only just begun to think of this, who I'd really like to kiss, who I want to be with me'.

And I can still remember it because it was where Bryony was sexually at the time. She hadn't yet absolutely come out, but was obviously...

GH: On the turn.

MM: Yeah.

GH: As was I.

MM: So I said okay, well let's have a show of hands. Who here...? And there were more people wanted us to go on. So lovely Keith [Morris], who's also gone {has now died}, saxophonist, he was in a terrible state, and he had to play the saxophone for me singing the last bit. And so he could only do it behind the silk curtain, because well, his bottle had gone. I was fine then, I mean I was sick afterwards, but absolutely then, I'd been into what is a place I don't like to be, but it was where... And so I did the song and did the poem. At which point they stormed back on stage again.

KD: Gee.

GH: Years later Libby Morris apologised to me.

MM: They stormed back on stage and they stormed up into the dressing rooms and Chris was sitting sobbing...

KD: Chris Bowler?

MM: Yeah. Everybody was very shaken. I was still in my icy... And these people who had been screaming for blood, were going to Chris oh, don't cry. Oh, we're sorry, we're sorry, didn't mean to make you cry. And then I got... I said okay, I've got a notebook. I want you to tell me what it is that upset you.

JH: Wow.

MM: I'm so awful {ironic}. And these women were going to me, *you* didn't cry. And I said no, you're right, I didn't bloody cry. And I'm not crying. Now tell me. But I just wanted to kill. And that's a dreadful thing to feel. But I felt it was one thing to object, it was another thing that they physically intimidated us. I hate verbal bullies and I hate physical bullies. Chris was absolutely...sobbing.

And that night when we all got back to the hotel, I mean I threw up. I was shaking then, I didn't sleep, I was still shaking because, I could deal with it at the time, but afterwards it was like... And Chris went to brush her teeth that night and her back went, because of the absolute tension. And when we toured the show after that, everywhere we went we had photographs and my photograph would always have the big sticker over its face saying 'this show offends women'.

GH: This show is?

MM: 'This show offends women', and the sticker would always be on my face.

GH: This show offends radical lesbians is what it should say.

MM: Bryony got upset because after it happened there were some bits people didn't feel they could do anymore. And so the show changed because people... It was scary. I mean...Yes, I must have looked like an arrogant bitch but it was me going into how I deal with violence if I don't go into defending myself. It was...

KD: But it's so interesting you describe it that way, whereas if a male actor had held the stage like that and asked that question of the audience we would think that appropriate.

GH: Yes.

MM: Oh, the question is probably... But I mean...

KD: But it is I think interesting, Mary.

MM: Yeah.

GH: It was an extreme, wildly extreme example of a mismatch between audience and performance. Because one of the things that I thought was so wonderful about it was... I think I was there at the very beginning, before I went to Italy. And a lot of it...

[85.00] They decided it was going to be about sex. Now, at that point there was nobody involved in that piece who wasn't heterosexual. So I can remember a discussion where somebody said well look, we can't talk about gay stuff. A lot of this is based on personal experience. None of us has it. It would be inappropriate. And that's what they couldn't see. They couldn't see that it was a piece dealing with sexuality and sex by a group of people who were heterosexual.

MM: But you see, one of the other things that people had objected to, which I don't think would have occurred to me... At the beginning [of the show] I had this whole bit which was absolutely truthful, having been brought up strict Catholic, always imagining that my mother's going to fling open the door or there's going to be an Irish priest behind her going 'ya whore!' And that was...

And one of their objections was this was all so *slick*. It was as if they didn't... The objections that I did write down, they didn't think it was personal. Because I said no, what I'm talking about at the beginning of the show, it's strictly personal. Nobody else could say what I say because that's my absolute...my worst moments. Having a good time, thinking oh god, this is the bit where my mother will throw open the door, it's much too enjoyable.

But we set up a meeting - that nobody came to.