

Q1-Did you come from a musical family?

JS : Yes, my mum was our church organist and she encouraged my brothers and me to take piano lessons. She was an excellent pianist and accompanist with a lovely mezzo soprano voice and she was keen that we should all take an interest in music as well. Both my parents loved music, and there was always music in the house, lots of records, you know, the radio always turned on. They both loved live theatre and were also great concert goers. I started to learn to play the Piano as an eight year old, but I was not really interested as all I ever wanted to play was the violin, so after the obligatory eighteen months at piano I began to learn violin. My piano teacher was a wonderful violinist and she also taught violin. She loaned me a three quarter size violin to get me started and eventually Mum and Dad bought me my own full size one which I still have and still play occasionally.

I was the leader of our school orchestra and also played in the Victorian Junior Symphony Orchestra graduating from the back desk of the Second Violins up to the second desk to the Firsts over the years. It was a great introduction to Popular Classical Music which ended each year with a full concert programme before an audience of parents and friends which was also great fun. Mum was the Music Director of a Ladies Choir which was associated with our church and the choir used to do little concert parties for any organisation who would use them. I became the resident guest soloist on my violin and of course Mum was my accompanist. I suppose I was very lucky to have my own accompanist 'in house' and many times when everyone else in the family had gone to bed Mum would be playing the piano for me.

OF : So, obviously my question on family support.....

JS : Yes there was plenty of it, which my Mum also experienced as a child from her family. There appears to have been a great tradition of amateur music making on my Mum's side of the family who were farmers on the north coast of Tasmania. Her mother had a lovely voice I am told, and her Dad and his seven brothers all sang together in an ad hoc double quartette with Mum as accompanist on a little old pedal harmonium.

Q2-Did you show any aptitude for voice at a young age?

JS : Yes I was a boy soprano and Mum always wanted me to join a choir but I didn't really go any further than singing the occasional solo at church, and singing around the piano at home. Once my voice had broken Mum said that she would find me a singing teacher once it had settled down.

OF : Out of interest did your voice break quite late?

JS : No, it was quite early, about eleven or twelve..

OF : So you had started to grow at that point?

JS : Yes, I was an early starter...I was the first in my class at school to wear long pants, and that was a real status symbol in those days. Long pants.... that meant something. It doesn't mean anything these days because kids wear jeans and track suits from an early age, but in those days kids wore shorts.

OF : So you're playing Violin around eighteen and that's about the same time you started voice lessons.....

JS : I stopped taking violin lessons when I was about fifteen or sixteen but I continued to play with the JSO because I loved it so much. When my voice had settled down, at around about eighteen years old, Mum found a singing teacher for me and that's where everything began...

OF : So your Mum found Bettine?

JS : Yes, she did. Bettine (McCaughan) was recommended by some friends and another friend was also taking lessons with her and said that Mum ought to take me to sing for her.

OF : So in those early days of voice was there any question that you may have been anything other than a baritone? Was there any uncertainty?

JS : I had a good top register, but I was always considered to be a baritone. I always had a good A flat, it was really the bottom end which needed to be extended...that came with time.

Q3-Between the ages of 26-28 you had been very successful in singing competitions, had you not gone into competitions earlier?

JS :. In my first year of taking singing lessons as an eighteen year old I began to enter competitions and started to win prizes straight away. The first competition was the City of Dandenong Eisteddfod in Melbourne where I won a couple of sections. Each year I was a regular competitor in local Melbourne singing competitions and I also entered the prestigious Melbourne Sun Aria although I was never really successful until much later on.

You ask about my successes between the ages of 26 and 28.... these did not happen as if from out of nowhere. In the ten year period leading up to this time my musical experience was developing in three quite distinct musical areas, three areas which I see now complemented each other but at the time they seemed to be separate developments.

I was learning to sing, learning the classical repertoire from Lieder through English Art Songs and Ballads, through Oratorio and Opera, and in all the various languages, singing in competitions, performing at small music club concerts in Melbourne and throughout Victoria.

At the same time, I was part of a youth group at our local church which formed a choir whose sound you can only describe as 'black gospel'. I'm talking about a choir of around about 40 with a rock band and a Hammond organ! We called the group "The Proclaimers" and we had huge success on TV, recordings, and in performing concerts all over Australia. I was the conductor and one of the soloists, and an old school mate was Band Leader and Music Director.

And almost at the same time, I was working part time two nights a week as a “bouncer” at the Heidelberg Town Hall dance. Billy Glennon the manager heard that I could sing so he asked me to sing a number at the dance one night. I sang, and he offered me a job to join the resident group of three singers. This all happened during my final year at High School! These “in between years” were packed full of a great variety of musical experiences from the Classical to Pop to Black Gospel. At that time I didn't really think there was a future for me as an Opera or Concert singer because I was having too much fun with all the other music. At the Heidelberg Town Hall I was a bit like the resident Tom Jones, and with “The Proclaimers” it was hot gospel.

I was married in 1969 and soon afterwards I joined the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a technical operator and I gave up singing at Heidelberg Town Hall, kept on with 'The Proclaimers', and the more serious side of music with Bettine, but much to her disappointment I didn't want to pursue a career in Opera. She thought I had the potential and the encouragement was certainly there from my family, but I didn't really have the burning desire. It took a number of years before I finally decided to try to discover if there really could possibly be a career in Opera for me, and it was this need to know which made me decide to enter all the major singing competitions in Australia.

It was 1972 and it was too late to enter all but the Adelaide Eisteddfod where I won the main vocal section, the Eisteddfod Championship. In the next year 1973, I won everything.

**OF : So in a sense the winning of the competitions and Bettine's encouragement was a real wake up call that there could be a chance to go overseas...**

JS : Yes, absolutely you don't win on that kind of level...and nobody had done it before, I don't know whether anyone has done it since.... but I won every serious singing competition in Australia over that period...if it was going, I won it.

**Q4-So you would have been financial when you left the country?**

JS : Not only that but there were also scholarships attached to some of the prizes which required a course of overseas study for full payment. There was encouragement for you to go overseas to gain wider experience. So, my wife and I decided that we'd go for a couple of years and support ourselves however we could, using prize money, scholarships, and money we had saved. My Dad, bless his heart, became our business manager to look after general finances at home in Australia and liaise with the scholarship trustees. There were quite strict controls on the scholarship money and I had to send back regular progress reports. Well that's how it all began.

**OF : So had you auditioned for any Australian companies, such as they were back then?**

JS : I went to sing for Bill Reid and Cillario (Carlo Felice Cillario) when the the Australian Opera was in Melbourne at the Princess Theatre. Moffatt (Oxenbould) had heard about me and had contacted Bettine and asked if I would I like to come and sing for them. At that stage I was still working at the Heidelberg Town Hall, I was still singing with 'The Proclaimers', so I wasn't at all sure about a career in opera. I think I was offered a position with the chorus which I didn't accept.

OF : Was going overseas a difficult transition back in the 70's from Australia to London for you and your wife?

JS : Yes, it was really. Although we were cushioned to a certain extent against the difficult situation which existed in the UK in the mid 70's. It was just after the terrible debacle of all of the strikes which had caused blackouts, short working days, and the collapse of the conservative government. Inflation was in double figures and a Labour Government under Jim Callaghan had come into office to try and sort out the mess. A strong Australian dollar and the fact that we were paying ourselves an Australian wage gave us a degree of security which most people in the country did not have.

Before leaving Australia had worked with Joan Hammond in a TV Masterclass on Tosca for the ABC, and she told me afterwards that if I was in London I should try to take some singing lessons with Otakar Kraus. She said that he had just retired from a very successful career as an Opera Singer and had started to teach. She said she couldn't recommend anyone better. So in October 1974 I began to study vocal technique with Otakar; one lesson a week and no singing allowed between lessons to allow me to "tune in" to his ideas about technique and to a particular "sound" that he wanted me to find with him. After studying with Otakar for about six months, I auditioned and was accepted by my first and only Agent. She sent me to audition for Kent Opera because they were looking for a 'Rigoletto'. This was quite unexpected really as the reason for being in the UK was to study, and I hadn't really thought about the possibility of working as well.

OF : So with the 'Rigoletto' was that a real shock to be offered a role of that nature....

JS : Yes it was, particularly as I was still only 29, but my agent told me that she wouldn't normally recommend someone so young to sing such a role for a debut, but Kent Opera was a small company, working in small regional theatres, who employed young singers at the beginnings of their careers mainly. As it turned out Kent were having difficulty finding someone suitable to sing the role and my agent said that she believed that I had the ability to do it. Her confidence in me was shared by the producer Jonathan Miller, the music director Roger Norrington, and the General Director Norman Platt and they offered me the job. This was to be Jonathan Miller's first attempt at Rigoletto, but not his now famous Chicago gangster 'Rigoletto' which he did for English National Opera a number of years later. However it wasn't all plain sailing for me because I didn't have patrial status which meant that I couldn't get a permit to work. To be a patrial you needed to have either a father or grand father who was born in the UK. The rules had just changed for Australians going to the UK and we were not free to come to the UK and work as had been the case in the past. Britain had recently joined the European Common Market as it was then called, and had changed immigration rules for all members of Commonwealth countries. As a fifth generation Australian I was definitely not a patrial so Kent Opera had to apply for a permit to work from the Department of Employment. The permit was refused because I had no reputation, no standing as an Opera singer. Kent Opera really had their work cut out to convince....

OF : The Immigration.....?

JS : ...Well actually to convince the Opera Committee of Actors Equity who advised the Department of Employment, that I was really the only person able to sing the role. To cut a long and very involved story

short, they finally succeeded but it was a very near thing. I still have the work permit in my file. It has the date of the start of rehearsals and the end date of the last performance. At the time we felt that this engagement would definitely be just a "one-off", but nevertheless, all good experience to take home to Australia when it came time to leave. But it wasn't to be like that at all because, as it turned out, I had the best reviews of my career for my debut as Rigoletto, and then I was offered more work to follow on. I can't remember exactly who it was, but one of the reviewers said that I should have half the managements in Britain queuing up outside my dressing room door after the performance.

OF : So the press helped a lot...

JS : Yes, the press was great.

Q5-It must have been good working with Jonathan Miller on 'Rigoletto'

JS : He was marvelous. I was virtually untutored in acting and stage skills having done a one year crash course at the National Theatre Opera School with Blair Edgar, Robert Rosen and many other talented people like that...I suppose I had a natural talent as an actor. I was always in productions at school and of course I'd had the experience of dealing with a great crowd from the stage at the Heidelberg Town Hall and also with 'The Proclaimers', so I certainly wasn't a beginner as a stage performer by any means. The craft of acting was something which sort of came naturally to me I suppose, but I'd had no actual formal training, apart from that one year at the National Theatre Opera School. I had a fair idea of what was required but Jonathan was able to help me along and use my natural ability. As I look back I consider myself to be extremely lucky to have made my debut with Jonathan as my Stage Director and Roger as my Musical Director.

OF : How did you find within yourself to do a 'Rigoletto', the fatherly type role...where you a father at this point?

JS : Just.....our daughter was two years old.... but you know you have to start somewhere with all roles regardless of the experiences of life. I've done it now many times since, and it's the sort of thing which grows with you. There has to be a starting off point and there's no reason; with the help of others, and with the help of the score; that you can't imagine what it would be like. Now as an old Dad I understand and appreciate it even more, and with my experience in Opera I understand and appreciate it even more, and my I hope my 'Rigoletto' has grown a little over the years.

OF : So these performances were in smaller houses, which is why it wasn't an issue vocally, but it obviously didn't cause you any grief vocally....

JS : No

OF : So the role fitted quite well even then?

JS : In fact I used to bound off the stage and say to Roger that I feel so good I could go and do it again. 'Let's do it again'.....Madness! Absolute madness!

OF : And also I remember reading you were singing 'Macbeth' at the University College?

JS : That's another one of those strange things that happen...it came on account of the 'Rigoletto'. I'd been noticed and engaged to sing 'Macbeth' in a semi-professional production with University College London Opera. John Moody, who had been production director at Welsh National Opera, and had just retired, was to be the director and it was to be in English. Not only was it to be in English but it was to be in Shakespearean English. So that was more exposure in London which was also reviewed by all of the main critics with very good reviews once again. One interesting side issue with the 'Macbeth' production was that there was no Work Permit required as it was classed as an amateur engagement.

Q6-So was it apparent to you before these Operas that Verdi was the type of composer your voice enjoyed?

JS : Not really, they just sort of happened...it just kind of happened like that really. They were just the things which happened to be offered, and that I did.

OF : You joined the Royal Opera Covent Garden in 1976 you were around 29-30 so I'm guessing 'Rigoletto' lead to 'Macbeth' and 'Macbeth' lead to the engagement with Covent Garden?

JS : No, 'Macbeth' lead onto 'Falstaff' at Glyndebourne. Now that sounds rather grand but what happened at Glyndebourne was quite unique. They were looking for an understudy for the role of 'Falstaff' in a new production to be staged at the 1976 Glyndebourne Festival, who would then go on and sing it with the Glyndebourne Touring Opera after the main season had ended. The music director was going to be John Pritchard and the stage director was to be Jean Pierre Ponnelle who was having a fantastic success right throughout the whole of the world at this time. Traditionally all understudies at Glyndebourne come from the chorus, but this year there was no one in the chorus with the right voice type to understudy Falstaff, so the Glyndebourne Festival had to look outside of the company to find someone. The good part was that I didn't have to join the chorus, they just wanted me to understudy 'Falstaff'. I didn't know anything much about 'Falstaff' except that I'd seen the Opera once in Melbourne when Tito Gobbi came out and sang it in the 60's. At the time it was just a bit of good fun and never in my wildest dreams would I have believed that one day I would be actually learning and performing the role myself! My debut as Falstaff later in the year with Glyndebourne Touring Opera was greeted with more very favourable reviews, and also the offer of a three year contract to join the Royal Opera House Covent Garden as a principal baritone. So first there was 'Rigoletto', then 'Macbeth' then 'Falstaff' and then the Royal Opera came along and offered me a three year contract. That's when the hard work really began!

OF : So the 'Rigoletto', the 'Macbeth' and 'Falstaff' all happened within the framework of two years?

JH : Yes, In fact it was less then two years, it was probably more like 18 months.

OF : And had you had any experience with knowing these roles, just hearing them?

JH : I went to England with one role in 'La Boheme', I knew 'Marcello'...that was the only Opera I had in my repertoire at that stage. ...

OF : And then they didn't ask you to sing that for about three years!

JS : No that came later and I didn't sing 'Marcello' first I sang 'Schaunard'!

Q7-So after the three main roles you went into Covent Garden as a junior principal these years were rather intense I guess?

JS: Yes they were because that's where I really learned stagecraft; through working with coaches and colleagues; through working with good directors; and watching what people did on the stage. It was in the days when the Royal Opera House Covent Garden still was what you would call a full company with a full complement of principals who they cast in the minor roles and also to cover/understudy the major singers. I covered many major singers. Swedish baritone Ingvar Wixell singing 'Rigoletto', also Norman Bailey when he was singing 'Balstrode' in 'Peter Grimes'. I covered Tom Allen when he was singing 'Marcello', but apart from 'Bohème' there was never the pressure that made you think you'd have to go on. The Royal Opera was then probably at the height of its powers in the Opera world, and people were paying high prices for their tickets, so they didn't want to see the covers. The art of the Artistic/Casting Directors in the big international Opera Houses is knowing where the big name singers are in the World, what they are doing, what their telephone numbers were, when they were available, how long it would have taken them to get to London in an emergency, so for example, if Wixell had cancelled a 'Rigoletto' I would never have had to go on in his place. The company would have pulled in somebody from Europe or wherever, and they would have had them standing by waiting to get on a plane in the morning to be ready for the show that night.

OF: So there was a sense of being nurtured in those early years?

JS: Yes it was terrific. And I learned virtually a whole repertoire using the best coaches that were available at the time. Watching the best people sing their roles. When Ingvar sang 'Rigoletto' I was singing 'Marullo' so I was able to watch what he was doing and was also able to watch Alfredo Kraus at close range singing the 'Duke'. It was just amazing being there and watching the great Maestros and the great singers through the mid seventies and mid eighties. Apart from the early successes that's where I really learned how to be an Opera singer.

Q8-Are there any particular productions that stand out in your mind, that you are proud to have been a part of?

JS : Yes, two come to mind. The first one was the production of 'The Girl of the Golden West', 'La Fanciulla del West' at the Royal Opera which was also recorded with Zubin Meta conducting. Zubin was

music director, Piero Fagioni was stage director and the production was like a who's who of all the top male singers in the UK at that time. Carol Neblett was 'Minnie' and it was to have been Wixell singing 'Jack Rance'. He had to cancel at the last minute so they had to find a replacement, and it was Placido Domingo singing 'Dick Johnson'. The set was designed by Ken Adams of 007 James Bond fame. Simply amazing! I'll never forget the recording sessions afterwards and it's still a fantastic recording worth listening to today.

When Wixell cancelled a week or so before rehearsals began, The Royal Opera went out and found a little known Italian baritone Silvano Corolli who could sing it, and sing it extremely well. There were already signed contracts to make a record with Deutsche Gramophon, and as Silvano Corolli wasn't known internationally he wasn't engaged for the recording. An opportunity missed for the world to discover a new talent. Such a pity. It was great to work with Placido for the first time too. I'd never seen him in the flesh and to work with the guy, back in the early days; we're talking about 77-78; was just terrific.

The second is the Royal Opera's production of 'Peter Grimes'. The role of 'Balstrode' was one of the early roles that I had to understudy and it was also my first Benjamin Britten; A bit unusual really because baritones usually start with 'Ned Keene' and then graduate to 'Balstrode' but they needed a cover for 'Balstrode'. I learned it with one of the senior coaches who had actually worked on the initial production of 'Peter Grimes' with Ben Britten. His name was Robert Keys, known among his friends as 'Fingers Keys' because he was such a wonderful pianist. No problems the first time that I covered the role. I sat and watched the rehearsals but never had to go on as Balstrode. There were no stage rehearsals for covers in those days or very minimal so I used to make copious notes, pictures, little diagrams, that sort of thing. The production was repeated the following year, and then again in 1979, but this time I found myself rehearsing for Norman (Bailey) because he was ill. It just so happened that this time around there was to be a recording made concurrently with the performances. It was thought that Norman would be over his illness in time for both the opening night and also the recording. I did most of the stage rehearsals and every time we got to a bit where I was on my own Elijah (Moshinsky) would say: 'Oh we won't need to rehearse that bit because Norman will be on'. I wasn't concerned because I knew that in an emergency I had all my notes and I also knew all the cast members well by this stage. The cast was almost like a who's who of who was in the company at that time. There was John Dobson as Bob Boles, Forbes Robinson as Swallow the Lawyer, Australian John Lanigan as 'The Rector'. And also Tom Allen performing his terrific 'Ned Keene', and 'Bessie Bainbridge' (Elizabeth Bainbridge) singing 'Auntie', which she'd been doing for yonks. They were all fantastic artists and I knew them all well, and so they just pushed me around into the right places during rehearsals if I wasn't sure of anything, so there wasn't a problem.

I came in a little bit late to the dress rehearsal and somebody was waiting for me at the door to let me know to stand by to go on as 'Norman isn't very well, he's going to try to do the rehearsal'. He did the first half, then went home, and I ended up doing the second half of the dress rehearsal. Then he cancelled the first night, so I was on for the first night, but didn't cancel the recording. After the first night Norman then he pulled out of the recording and I was engaged to do the recording because there was no one else available or sufficiently prepared. It was either, I do their recording for them or they lose the recording completely. So I became their 'Balstrode' by default!

I remember going to that first recording session....it was on a Sunday afternoon....Forbes Robertson who was near the end of his career, and had had a fantastic career in England....he came over to me and said: 'Well there you are lad, here's your big chance and we're all rooting for you, I hope it's a great



success', and that was the general attitude that I got from everybody....fantastic, really marvelous. And of course that Peter Grimes recording with the cast, chorus and orchestra of The Royal Opera House received a Grammy Award for the best Opera Recording of 1979.

**Q9-You've worked with some of the great singers, is there in your experience a common thread amongst them..a quality?**

JS : Its born in them I think, the ones that I've worked with, but with all of them there's a tremendous humanity and quite often humility which goes with it. A case in point is Mirella Freni. She is a great star but she's really just a girl at heart I think. I did some performances of 'La Bohème' with her in Florence and after the second act, the 'Café Momus' scene, she couldn't get off the stage, and do you know why, because she was surrounded by all the kids. All the children that had been in the scene.... they just loved her, and she had her arms around them, and they were passing up their autograph books.... and she didn't leave the stage until she'd signed an autograph for each one of them. That's the sort of person she was ..... she was just so lovely.

And Placido, he's another one too. I mean he's a phenomenon for goodness sake. You know he's anywhere and everywhere.... works like a Trojan, but still manages to deliver the goods, and he was always such a generous person, and he has this fantastic gift for remembering people's names. I was in Chicago working for the Lyric Opera doing 'Fedora' with Placido and Mirella and it was going to be Placido's birthday and he took over an Italian restaurant for the night over on the north side of Chicago and invited everyone to come after a performance... I mean, but everyone! Chorus, orchestra, actors, stage hands ..... anybody that wanted to come so this took place after the performance so it didn't start till around midnight then went on till the wee small hours of the morning. And he danced with all of girls, was absolutely charming went around to everybody. He even remembered my wife's name after only meeting her once or twice, but this is the type of chap he is...absolutely incredible. And Jose Carreras as well .... there was the World Cup Football on when he was doing something at the Garden (The Royal Opera House). England and Spain were playing, and all of the chaps, the dressers, wigs, the makeup.... they'd set up a television in one of our dressing rooms to watch the match during the show. And that's where Jose was when not on stage....in the middle of all the gang watching football. There's a tremendous sense of humanity and even humility which runs through these terrific singers.

**Q10-Regarding the role of 'Wozzeck' are there any prior roles you draw upon?**

JS : Probably 'Rigoletto' is the one, 'Macbeth' as well to a certain extent but I think 'Rigoletto' would be the main one that I draw on.....just the experiences of 'Rigoletto', whilst he's not quite as paranoid as 'Wozzeck', he's pretty twisted and obsessed. I think really, to be fair to everything that I've done, 'Wozzeck' draws strands from virtually everything that I've done so far.....the portrayal of the character.... and a lot of it I think is probably unconscious. I don't know quite where some of it comes from, but somehow or other, I can perform this role and people believe that what I'm doing is authentic. Yet I'm concentrating extremely hard just to remember and reproduce the words and the music as Büchner and Berg wrote them , and the staging and motivation that we all agreed with Barrie (Kosky) and the interpretation of the music in the way that was also agreed with the conductor. That's enough on it's own, and then I guess somehow or other my own experience and imagination fills in a few of the gaps in

between. I can't really put my finger on any one thing that's helped me with it other than all of these things together with a lot of damned hard work. It is the most difficult role that I've ever had to learn, and energetically the most taxing role to perform. The only thing that I ever did in the past which comes anywhere near to this level of musical difficulty and complexity was 'Faninal' in 'Der Rosenkavalier' and I had just as much trouble learning that music, but much more trouble with Wozzeck...

OF : From a rhythmic point of view?

JS : Everything.... the whole sound picture at the time seemed worlds away from anything I'd ever done before. It was like going into outer space and trying to breathe a rarified atmosphere. You could breath it, but there didn't seem to be enough oxygen to make it possible to live .... that sort of thing .... incredible!

For the whole of the first week when I started to prepare the work with my coach I felt as if I was all at sea. Everyday he'd say something like: 'remember we spoke about this yesterday', but I didn't remember. There just seemed to be too much of it, and it seemed as if it was running like water off a duck's back without letting me get wet. At each rehearsal session it was like trying to pound, pound, pound away at something..... like trying to bend my faltering abilities and my stubborn body to make it do something which it found extremely difficult and which it rebelled against. My coach and I were always absolutely shattered at the end of each session and we could only manage an hour each time because that was far as out concentration would stretch.

OF: And so having lived with the role and done a few shows do you find that the musical language is becoming easier and a part of you?

JS : It's a part of me now! I'm enjoying it this time.... like revisiting an old friend. After all the hard slog I can't believe that it would be possible. It's still very difficult and I'm still pretty paranoid about getting it musically right and remembering every last little detail, so you're always aiming at the target and hitting slightly wide of the bulls eye but not as wide as the last time hopefully.

I can only thank my coaches for helping me with 'Wozzeck' because they made it possible for me to see patterns, and they made it possible for me to see the bigger picture, of how things fitted together, pointing out little details which help to jog the memory. Berg was quite often paying a little tribute to composers that had gone before, and when those are pointed out, I can recognize and remember. Now I can even hear other things myself, where other composers have tried to pay little complements to Berg.

OF : Like the Carl Orff moments.....

JS : Like the Gershwin moments too..... there's some wonderful Gershwin moments in it which almost sound like they're out of 'Porgy and Bess', but of course you know it was the other way around, because we know that there was great admiration of Gershwin for Berg. And Berg of course had great admiration for the composers of his own day such as Mahler for instance and Strauss. All these wonderful moments in Berg are there waiting to be discovered and it makes it so interesting to find them. I'm discovering that the music and the expression of the drama is so rich that there's probably a lifetime's work to try to get to grips with it all, which just increases the enjoyment of it.

OF : Are you glad you waited?

JS : I certainly am and it was by choice rather than by chance. I'd been asked to consider it in the early eighties and I listened to a recording of a live broadcast to get the general flavour when I was at the beginning of starting to sing Verdi and Puccini. I knew how musically complex it was and I was doubtful about my own stamina and general ability to be able to cope with it just then. I listened to the way the singer handled the sprechgesang and it didn't make sense to me. It just sounded like a great big rough shout and I thought that there possibly might be vocal damage done. I didn't really want to think about doing something like that before I'd had a chance to get my teeth into some big juicy Verdi legato phrases.

Q11-Having done all those larger lyrical, legato roles do you regard 'Wozzeck' as the evolution of say 'Rigoletto' for example

JS : I'm not sure about that because I don't regard 'Wozzeck' now as vocally taxing in the same way that 'Rigoletto' or 'Boccanegra' is vocally taxing. Vocally you really know you've done something difficult, particularly with 'Rigoletto'. As I said earlier, in my stupidity and youthful exuberance back in 1975 I was saying to Roger Norrington: 'wow that was great, lets do it again' , but now I know the role better I have much more respect for it, and I've learned much more about the way to sing it best, and the things that have to be done to make it even more honest. I think I sing it differently now because of all these things. It is incredibly taxing vocally and the same goes for 'Boccanegra'. In Boccanegra, once you've climbed that vocal and emotional mountain up to the council chamber scene, boy, you know that you are in the middle of something extremely big which is going to take all of your courage and endurance. It's not quite the same mountain with 'Wozzeck'. It's more a long slow climb with many tricky bends, steep cliff faces and ravines. To put it another way completely 'Wozzeck' is one hell of a physical, mental and emotional rollercoaster!

OF : Do you have a personal view of contemporary productions VS traditional?

JS : I'm really quite wide open to any production and I hope I'm not stuck in any particular rut. As performers we're not given the choice, we're not given right of veto. When you sign a contract quite often a management wont even tell you who the director will be, so you sign the contract hoping that the production is going to work in your favor. If we do find out who the producer is and then say we wont do it because we don't agree with that particular director's ideas then it's possible that you just wont work at all! It's as simple as that, so you have to go with it, and then you have to give yourself to the production, give yourself to the producer, and leave the patrons and the critics to make their own judgment. All you can do is give yourself in all honesty to producers and collaborate with them and not fight with them. I think this is where some of my colleagues make a mistake. They feel as if they're going to compromise themselves and their art by collaborating with somebody who might be doing something which is outlandish. I don't agree with that approach at all. I think we compromise ourselves as artists if we don't give ourselves to whatever we've got and make the best of it knowing full well that quite often if the production really isn't up to much, the music of the particular opera will quite often transcend that anyway

and make it work. I've seen that happen a few times. Fortunately virtually all of the modern updated productions that I've worked on; and I've done quite a few; have had a special virtue all of their own which has bought some new revelation from the piece. I'd say 'Wozzeck' is one of those, and also Barrie's (Kosky) 'Nabucco' is also one of those, Jonathan Millers' two 'Rigoletto's that I've done. As far as 'Wozzeck' is concerned, it is a startling revelation for the public to be given the rare opportunity at very close range to look out through the eyes of someone who is very mentally unstable, there's no doubt about that. Seeing the world through 'Wozzeck's eyes you can't be a spectator in the way that can in 'Peter Grimes' for instance. You tend to stand back in judgement of 'Peter Grimes' from the outset. As a spectator and you can say 'yep, he's going to fall foul of them, he's going to make a muck up', its there virtually from the first words in first scene which is the inquest into the death of Grimes's apprentice. You know how its all going to end and you are constantly sitting in judgement and saying: 'Now why didn't he do this? or, Why didn't he marry Ellen? or Why was he so paranoid about making money to try and win Ellen?' But with "Wozzeck", by complete contrast, we are there with Wozzeck, we experience his pain, the pain of his mental illness and growing paranoia about everything, and ultimately we're devastated by the end of it all because we've all done it with him.

#### Q12-Do you have a favourite role or Opera?

That's really difficult because I love everything I do and whenever I do something its always a great favourite. I reckon probably my all time favourites if I could pick four would have to be 'The Marriage of Figaro'..

#### OF : The 'Count'?...

JS : No, 'Figaro'. I've done them both and I prefer the 'Figaro'. 'La Bohème', 'Boccanegra' and 'Wozzeck'. I think that would have to be the four. They're all very different and they all do things differently musically. I've had so many wonderful experiences with the 'Bohème', some fabulous experiences with the 'Figaro', and also 'Boccanegra' . I cut my teeth at Covent Garden watching Bruson singing Boccanegra, watching Sherrill Milnes singing it, and I was singing 'Paolo' to their 'Boccanegra'. I did it for the first time myself in English with Mark Elder in David Alden's production at the English National Opera, and then here in Australia with Simone's (Young) fantastically musical 'Boccanegra' in Moffatt's (Oxenbould) production, and then the 'Wozzeck' in Barrie's (Kosky) production. I love performing 'Wozzeck' and quite honestly I think I'm probably spoiled now for whatever 'Wozzeck' will come afterwards because I feel that Barrie's 'Wozzeck' shines a searchlight onto what 'Wozzeck' is all about. The traditionalists may not like it because it doesn't observe absolutely everything that Berg intended. For example, he wrote the curtains at the end of scenes and other stage directions that we don't do, but I think if Berg could see it, he'd love it.