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* Prestwich, Manchester, 29 May 1996: Valentina Bold interviews Tessa Amelan

* Transcribed by Claire McGann / Standardised by Annette Kuhn

* TA = Tessa Amelan/ VB = Valentina Bold

* Notes: First of one solo interview with Tessa Amelan; Sound Quality: Fair; this interview was originally transcribed in a phonetic manner; the original phonetic version can be accessed through our physical collection - please contact Lancaster University Library for details.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

VB: No, no this is-- this is great.

TA: Okay.

VB: This is fine. Erm, I mean the first thing I really wanted to ask you about, was uh some of the... the stars that you were telling me about. That you, that you liked.

TA: Oh, film stars?

VB: Yeah. Uh, I mean you mentioned people like Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy.

TA: Yeah, I saw quite a few of his films. They were all silent ones. Mind you, they've all gone now, those, those three have gone.

VB: Yes. Was, I mean, you mentioned a whole list of stars, really. I mean did you have any--

TA: Did I--?

VB: You did, I mean, people like erm Deanna Durbin and--

TA: Oh yes, I loved her singing.

VB: What was it about her?

TA: Pardon?

VB: What was it about Deanna Durbin that appealed to you?

TA: Well her freshness, her youth, and uh her singing. That's. She's married to a Frenchman now, and she lives in France.

VB: Is that right?

TA: Mhm.

VB: Because she didn't have a very long career did she?

TA: No, she married quite young, got a family.

VB: Right.

TA: Now, Deanna-- not Deanna. Judy Garland had a stressful time. They made her do things that she didn't want to do. And she ended up taking drugs. And in the end it killed her.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Is it on now?

VB: Yes I've just erm--

TA: Oh.

VB: Put it on just now.

TA: Okay.

VB: So, I'll just check everything you've said. I actually I brought along a, a book of stars of the thirties that I thought you might uh be interested in seeing.

TA: Oh, do you mean for me?

VB: Well just, just to look at. [laughter]

TA: Oh no. Oh I liked her. She was beautiful.

VB: Oh that's Greta, Greta Garbo, isn't it?

TA: Yeah. And Jeanette MacDonald. I loved her in, Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy films. Oh I loved them all.

VB: What was it about them?

TA: When they were sad, uh, some were in 'cause-- costume films, and there was one called 'Springtime' [referring to *Maytime*], and uh she and erm Nelson Eddy uh were lovers. This man was jealous. Was it Basil Rathbone? [Note: the jealous lover was played by John Barrymore] It was somebody who was the villain. And he ends up shooting um Nelson Eddy. And of course, it's very weepy at the end, very weepy.

VB: I think I've seen that one actually.

TA: Have you? Oh.

VB: Is that the one where erm you think it's, it's, it starts off with erm Jeanette MacDonald uh older? And she sort of--

TA: Oh that's right, yeah.

VB: And she goes back and tells the story.

TA: It's a flashback.

VB: Yeah.

TA: Yes, that's right.

VB: Yeah.

TA: Uh, yes.

VB: That's a good one that.

TA: Yes, those films were very-- that film were very sad. And there was another one with Nelson Eddy. He was a soldier, and she was erm... was she a princess? [possibly referring to *Naughty Marietta*] Oh I can't really remember. Uh. I'm trying to think of the one. And do you know, offscreen they were bitter enemies.

VB: Really?

TA: Bitter enemies.

VB: You'd never have known that?

TA: No you wouldn't. They were good actors. Good actor and actress.

VB: It, it seems to be the way sometimes doesn't it?

TA: Mhm.

VB: 'Cause they say that like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire didn't get on too well either.

TA: Didn't they? Oh, I don't know about that.

VB: Or-- or at least I think, his wife didn't like them--

TA: Oh, maybe.

VB: Being together.

TA: Whose wife? You mean--

VB: Uh Fred Astaire's.

TA: Fred Astaire's. Yes, he was married.

VB: Yeah.

TA: He had a sister in London, and they had-- they were an act. Adele Astaire. But with Ginger Rogers, she was different. She really was wonderful. They both were.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Marvellous dancers.

VB: Did you like musicals in--

TA: Oh yes.

VB: Particular?

TA: Yes, I did. Erm, I mean I can remember one with Dick Powell. He's dead now. And Ruby Keeler. In the *Lullaby of Broadway* [possibly referring to *42nd Street*]. That was in the thirties. I think. Or maybe. Yes, I think it was. Black and white. I used to go to the films a lot. Twice a week. If I could. Uh, who else was there? Oh there's the child stars. Shirley Temple. Oh, I loved her. Now she's an ambassador. An ambassador from America to, I don't know where she is now. And uh, she had erm a good career as a child star. But when she got older, and she was in erm, films as a teenager, she got quite over the top. She was uh she was more appealing as a child star. I thought so... She was very good. Of course she hogged the limelight. More than did uh all the grown up stars. [laughter] Oh, she did. She was lovely with those two dimples. Oh I thought she was gorgeous.

VB: 'Cause you mentioned I think, erm, sometimes going with your parents to films. Was that right?

TA: I only went once. And it was a film, a silent film, about the sea. And these waves were uh making this ship roll, it was a sailing ship, and I was so frightened I got on the floor, and I was hiding my face in my mother's lap. I was scared stiff. I don't know why. It wasn't really frightening, but I was frightened.

VB: Were you-- were you quite small at that time?

TA: I was only a youngster.

VB: Right. Did your parents go much themselves?

TA: I don't think so. We hadn't got much money. And I suppose it was a bit of a treat for them. But I didn't like it. [laughter] Not at the time! Uh, what else was there? I liked all the Clark Gable films. And he was only fifty-nine when he died. Marilyn Monroe was younger, she was thirty-six. It's a bit of a mystery about her death. They don't know whether she was bumped off, or whether she took uh drugs.

VB: 'Cause I remember you telling me about um Clark Gable and Jean Harlow and *Red Dust*.

TA: That's right. That was a very old film. It was a talkie. I remember that film, mhm.

VB: Did you think much of Jean Harlow? Did you like her as an actress?

TA: Well, no not really... She died young too. Twenty-six. Don't know what she died of? Something obviously went wrong. I tell you who loved her. William Powell. He used to be in those *Thin Man* films.

VB: Oh yes!

TA: With Myrna Loy.

VB: With the little dog as well.

TA: Yeah, Astra [referring to Asta]. Mhm.

VB: Did you like the sort of um mystery sort of films, or..?

TA: Yes, I erm, I sometimes liked films that uh other people didn't, you know. Some of these films that are frightening. I like science fiction films. I saw one the other night, with erm, what's his name? Paul-- Paul McGann. And it was on a long time. It was really... very good, but uh I don't know. I like the 'Doctor Who' programmes, when they're only half an hour long. And there's been a string of actors that have done that role. A string of actors. Can't quite remember the names. [pause 3 seconds]

VB: Did you-- do you still enjoy watching films as much as you did in the thirties, or..?

TA: I don't go to pictures now.

VB: Right.

TA: I watch films on television. And they're not all that old. Latest one I've seen are in 1993, and that's not so far back.

VB: No.

TA: Erm, yeah so there's some films on the telly, the TV. I always look for the films, and see what they're like. I like the Clint Eastwood films, I like westerns too. Uh...

VB: There's one on today actually.

TA: Oh is there?

VB: I noticed coming down. And it's *Rembrandt* with Charles Laughton. And I was thinking--

TA: Oh yes I've seen it!

VB: I bet that's good.

TA: I've seen it.

VB: Yeah.

TA: I tell you what else I like. Yul Brynner. He's dead now. In *The Magnificent Seven*. I like-- some westerns I like. But I didn't like them all. It gets a bit boring.

VB: Mhm.

TA: I prefer to watch something different...

VB: Do you-- do you think your, your tastes in films have changed much over the years?

TA: No, not really. Now, you see, this is really where I go to this paper and see what films are on.

VB: Mhm.

TA: See, 27th to... [pause and inaudible mumbling under her breath as turning pages] These are the films, and what not. That's it all for the week.

VB: Oh. [pause 3 seconds] Oh *Rasputin and the Empress!* That's quite an old one.

TA: Yes I've seen it. Sometimes if I've enjoyed it, I'll watch it again. And then, I see a film, and when it's towards the end, I remember that I've seen it before. I watch the whole thing right, almost right through, and uh, I realise, oh I've seen that before! [laughter] Have a biscuit.

VB: I will do thanks.

TA: Have your cup of tea and your biscuit.

VB: I will. That's lovely, thanks.

TA: You'll be gone before you know it.

VB: Mhm. [pause 5 seconds]

TA: Are you going back to Glasgow?

VB: Mhm mhm.

TA: Would you like to take something with you?

VB: Oh no.

TA: No?

VB: I'll be fine really. I'll get something on the train probably.

TA: How long is the journey?

VB: It's about um three and a half, four hours.

TA: Oh.

VB: [laughter]

TA: Would you like some fruit? An apple?

VB: Oh no really, really. I'll be, I'll be fine. But I was, was wondering, when you were saying that, about watching them again, if you ever, went to films, erm, more than once? When you were going to the cinema did you..?

TA: I tell you what I, I used to go, and erm. No, I don't think I went to the cinema to watch a film over again. I'd watch something new.

VB: Mhm.

TA: But here, if I fancy something that's been on before, I'll watch it again. I've no bus journey to make. And I've no uh money to pay at the cinema. Mind you, I loved, I used to love to go, but I can't go so much here. And it's a bit, it's a bit dangerous really for a woman to travel alone into town.

VB: Yep. Of course, later on.

TA: Yeah, yeah.

VB: Yeah.

TA: So, I'm happy with the television. There's other things to do here, besides watching television. Tonight I'm going to a cryptic crossword.

VB: Oh.

TA: I went last night. I find it quite interesting. Not sure I'm that marvellous, but I enjoy it. Uh, what else... There's other things, uh a quiz, a general knowledge quiz in the winter time. And we have uh, shows on a Sunday afternoon. Entertaining. You know, singing, and what not. I don't do so bad here. Now tomorrow morning, in the uh tea room, uh I did, we had exercises. And tomorrow morning I'm doing uh. .. Did I say tomorrow morning? This morning, I did exercises. And we have a little bit of a quiz. And refreshments. And uh tomorrow morning, uh, what am I doing tomorrow? Uh I'm baking a cake. Well, uh, I'm having help. One of the staff's baking a cake. Oh they keep you busy here!

VB: Well it sounds--

TA: Well you see, you don't have to do it, but I like to do things. Otherwise you can just-- I could sit here for hours and hours. And be miserable.

VB: Mhm.

TA: But sometimes I am in here for hours. And I'm not miserable. Do me tapestry.

VB: As I say, they really are lovely.

TA: And I've got another one, that's kind of on the halfway mark.

VB: Erm.

TA: Dunno what I'm gonna do after that, 'cause uh I don't really want to be idle.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Have a biscuit!

VB: I've got one! That'll be three. That's... I mean, when you were growing up, erm were you as busy as you are now? Did you do other things as well?

TA: Oh I was busy. I went to work. And erm come home and mother would have a meal ready for us. And as the years wore on she couldn't do anything. So I took over. Uh, not much. I did the shopping. Did the housework. She did the meals. And then when we moved to a new house. Well it was new to us, it was up awhile. And uh, in Downham Crescent, it's not so far from here.

VB: Mhm.

TA: It was very nice when we moved in, the neighbourhood's gone a bit down. And uh, of course, when she got older, she went senile. Couldn't remember anything. So I had to take over. I had to finish work. And I took over completely. My brother used to come into the kitchen, whenever I'd

made anything new, he'd say, "We've got more variety now, than when mother was the... in charge."

VB: Mhm.

TA: So of course, he had to say, he had the uh sense to come and say it to me so she never heard, but she wouldn't have understood what we said. What he said. Because um of being senile. She was all right. She used to lie, sit in a chair, and uh a rug round her knees. And she'd sleep a lot. You know. As they do when they're getting on, in their eighties. So uh that was that. When she died, I didn't know what to do with myself. My sister had me for two weeks. This is nothing to do with films is it?

VB: Mhm.

TA: And uh, I stayed there for two weeks, and she taught me how to do tapestry. That windmill one, is the first one I did. And from then on, I was hooked.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Anyway, we'll get back to films now.

VB: [laughter] You reminded me actually, when you were telling me there about, erm, you know, going into the town. You mentioned a number of the cinemas in town.

TA: Oh yes, there used to be a lot! But not now. They're either turned to bingo-- bingo halls erm and other things. People never used to go. Now there's television. They didn't want to be bothered. Coming out in, especially in the winter time, in bad weather. But I liked the cinema.

VB: What were the cinemas like in your own area? Were there bigger ones?

TA: Oh, not bad. A bit a, not as posh as town but they were not bad. And I used to go quite a bit to see a decent film. And then erm they weren't getting the attendance, they closed down, and that was it. There was how many near home? There was the Odeon. There was the Temple. Uh... The Shakespeare. The Premier. How many have I said? The Odeon, the Temple, the uh Shakespeare.

VB: The Pre-- Premier did you say?

TA: Yes so about five. Afterwards they all closed down. I don't know what's there now. Probably nothing.

VB: Did you have any favourites among these yourself, or...?

TA: No. I only went where they had a decent film showing. It didn't bother me about the place.

VB: That's interesting.

TA: I only went where they had a decent film.

VB: Who was it... it was always the film that attracted you?

TA: Oh I had to go to town. For two and six, that's old money. Now it's ten, I don't know, about fifteen pence. I went. I paid that money because I wanted a back seat. [laughter] A bit too far back. Not right up near back, in the back seats.

VB: Did y--

TA: Oh I like the big screen. CinemaScope. Yeah.

VB: Did you go much with your friends or more on your own?

TA: Sometimes I went with uh my sister, or an aunt. And sometimes I went alone, 'cause it's something that I wanted to see. And you can please yourself if you're on your own. Didn't bother me being--

VB: No, I agree. I like going to a film on my own.

TA: Do you?

VB: You almost enjoy it more sometimes. [laughter]

TA: You don't have anyone asking you questions. If they don't understand, they ask you questions. Although, I will say, if I did go with anybody. And I'll tell you what my pet dislikes were. People eating toffees with wrappers on. Crunching away. And then they'd have nuts. And then somebody else'd have crisps. Oh I used to go mad. And I didn't like anybody pushing their knees on the back of my seat. No I didn't. So, in a way, I'm glad I've got the television. I can sit on there, and I take one cushion off, and put it on there. Can't-, I've uh, washed them yesterday. Took ages to dry. And I sit uh, I lie along, so you see I'm resting my feet as well. I get swollen ankles a bit so, it's good for them. And I like doing that. Now, anything else about films?

VB: Well, what you're saying just now. Erm do you find when-- or did you find then when you were watching a film that you got quite absorbed in it? 'Cause it sounds like--

TA: Oh yes. Yes.

VB: From what you were saying, that you were quite--

TA: I did. I could take in everything. I can remember from years ago, others wouldn't, but I have got a fairly decent memory. Things I've uh-- things that have happened two or three months ago, I couldn't tell you a thing.

VB: Mhm. I know, because when you were giving me the, telling me all the stars before, and people like Gracie Fields and George Formby and--

TA: Mhm. Oh yes I've watched all their films too. I quite like George Formby. He was a uh real comic.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Gracie Fields had a good voice. I tell you who else were-- who I liked. Jessie-- Jessie Matthews.

VB: Oh yes.

TA: She was offered uh, they wanted her to go to America, the American people. She wouldn't. She was a marvellous dancer. Ooh she had marvellous legs. Ooh I can't. And they showed this film of

hers, *Evergreen*. Oh I think, "I'm watching that." But she was a bit of a madam you know. She stole Sonnie, Sonnie um ... Sonnie Hale.

VB: Was it Sonnie Hale?

TA: She stole erm him from his wife. He was married already. Yeah she was a--

VB: I didn't realise that.

TA: A bit of a madam. But, I liked her for her acting and her singing. That's all. Her private life wasn't anything to do with me.

VB: Of course. [laughter] I mean, were you interested in the lives of the stars, or ..?

TA: Uh, I suppose I was a bit. But, on the screen that's where they appealed to me most... Do you find it interesting what I'm telling you?

VB: Oh absolutely, yeah.

TA: I'm glad. I've not wasted your journey then?

VB: Far from it, far from it.

TA: Yeah, tell me what did your train journey cost you?

VB: Erm I think it's about uh twenty-six pounds, twenty-five, twenty-six pounds.

TA: Do you have to pay that out of your own pocket?

VB: No, no.

TA: Oh you get it back? You keep your ticket.

VB: I get it back, so it's not so bad.

TA: Oh that's not so bad.

VB: Yeah.

TA: I'm not really nosey, but I just wondered what it cost--

VB: **No. It's not bad really, when you consider the distance.**

TA: Yeah.

VB: I suppose, and--

TA: Yes, yes.

VB: **Erm, it's not, not too bad.**

TA: Yeah. Now what else can I tell you? There's a lot I've not told you. Now. It's hard to cram it all into an hour.

VB: **That's right. But, I mean, one thing also that, from what you were saying just now, erm, did you find that, when you were watching the stars, did you-- did you feel that they were people that you got to know? Or did they seem more distant or ..?**

TA: Yeah, to me they were figures on a screen. To me, they kind of erm, were in a different world. Everyday people don't have that kind of life. They had everything. Luxury, money, travel.

VB: **Did they ever make you want the things they have, or ..?**

TA: Do you know, I've never thought about it. Good job I didn't. [laughter] I don't like being jealous.

VB: **So you didn't--**

TA: I don't like being jealous. I think it spoils your outlook.

VB: Yeah.

TA: Uh, oh I loved going to the pictures. Tapestry in those days, to me, was unheard of. [laughter]
Now I do it, to while away the time. Uh.

VB: Wh- what was it about going to the pictures that you liked so much?

TA: Well, I'll tell you what it was. It's like being in another world. Which it is. And I enjoyed it. And then when I come out, I'm a bit, you know, kind of "ooh!" A bit uh, carried away. [laughter] And uh, then I come down to earth, eventually. That's why I like the pictures. Take you out of this world. It can be very humdrum at times.

VB: Mhm.

VB: Did you find that you erm talked about the pictures with your friends a lot or did--?

TA: I didn't have a lot of friends. I didn't talk about the films with anybody really.

VB: That's interesting.

TA: I don't, I don't think I was being selfish, but uh, I liked to keep it to myself and think over certain parts of the film that I enjoyed. The romantic parts. You know. [laughter and then sigh]

VB: Did you think about it a lot then, or ..?

TA: Oh yes, until the next time I went, and then uh the films kinda you know went by and uh. Of course, you have to get on with your own life. Which I did. I didn't get married. But I wasn't bothered. I had doters [pronounced 'dotters'] but I didn't want to get married. Are you single?

VB: Uh, I'm married.

TA: Oh are you married? Oh!

VB: Yeah.

TA: Children?

VB: Not yet anyway.

TA: No. How long have you been married?

VB: Um, just a couple of years. Two years.

TA: Oh you're young. How old are you?

VB: I'm thirty-two, so.

TA: Oh you don't look it!

VB: Thanks.

TA: I suppose with you being slim, you look younger. How old do you think I am? I'll tell you, but have a guess.

VB: Um, I'm not-- not very good, but--

TA: No, but go on have a try.

VB: [pause] Uh. [laughs]

TA: You won't, you don't know anyone round here, and you won't, you'll be leaving here. So I'm not bothered.

VB: Uh, oh I'd say you're sort of mid, mid to late, sixties? Something like that?

TA: Mid to late sixties. I'm seventy-seven.

VB: Really?

TA: Yeah, honest.

VB: Huh, well that does surprise me!

TA: I'll be seventy-eight next month. I've always... I've never looked my age. Never.

VB: You've got a very fresh face I think, it's--

TA: Oh thank you.

VB: That's um. I'm surprised.

TA: Yeah, I'm seventy-seven. Can't believe it myself. I'm not frightened of growing old, because I keep active. I do the exercises. I go, oh we have bus tr- coach trips to the different places. St. Anne's. Blackpool. Morecambe. There's a trip to Morecambe tomorrow, but I'm not going. Don't want to. I've been there umpteen times.

VB: Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] Yeah, did you-- did you go away on trips a lot when you were--

TA: Uhuh.

VB: Younger, with your family?

TA: No, no, no. When I was younger my life was uh, not like that at all. Erm, when I was fifty-three, I had to finish work. Mother couldn't cope, and uh father was also getting uh difficult to manage, he had Parkinson's. Hardening of the arteries. She wasn't so bad. Oh he used to get terrible tempers. Blood couldn't get to his brain, so he used to kind of carry on a bit. Well I had to stay home and kind of watch them and give them their meal. My brother went to work and uh. I cooked all his meals. And uh, well eventually uh father died first. In hospital. I'm glad it wasn't in the house, 'cause that would have given me the creeps a bit.

VB: Mhm.

TA: And then the three of us were left, and uh then it was very quiet, and I managed quite well. And uh, oh wait a minute, father was still alive. I woke up in bed and uh there was blood on the sheets. This part isn't very nice. But I'll soon--

VB: Mhm.

TA: Have it. Erm, so I went to see the doctor. And he said, I was taking these HRT pills, and I was taking them too long. So that caused the bleeding.

VB: Mhm.

TA: I didn't have any pain. But he said, "I've given you a note to see Doctor Mills." She was a, you know, a lady doctor. And uh I went to see her on the Wednesday, by then I'd finished. All weekend I was running up and down the stairs. My pants! I was losing all my blood. In thick clots down the toilet. I was so weak. Oh. Oh finally in the end I had to go in hospital, and have uh my womb removed. They said that erm I'd got fibroids on it, and I'd have to have it removed. Well I signed my form didn't I? And when I was under the anaesthetic they took the lot out. And now I've got a bit of a tummy. But I don't care. They said, "If you don't-- don't, in sixth months it could turn into cancer." So, when you sign the forms, that gives them permission to do anything.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Chop off your head and it'd be alright. [laughter]

VB: Oh dear.

TA: So, it took about eighteen months to get right. 'Cause I mean I wasn't so young then. But after I got over it I was fine.

VB: Mhm.

TA: So, in a way, I'm still living. I might not have been if I hadn't have had it.

VB: Mhm.

TA: And um, my brother had to do all the hard work. Um, hoovering, uh, changing curtains, doing the lawn. And uh eventually I got better, and I had a go at the hoovering, I said, you know, "I can do it I'm alright now." And uh I've been alright ever since. I've got a big tummy. But, never mind.

VB: Oh.

TA: I'm okay.

VB: That sounds like quite a serious um --

TA: Oh it was, it was a major operation.

VB: Yeah.

TA: I was under three hours. I slept until the next day. I had it Friday afternoon. I didn't wake up 'til Saturday afternoon. One of the patients said, "Oh". She said, "You've been asleep for ages." She was a jolly person. And you know what? She was telling us a joke. And I couldn't stop laughing. I said, "Don't tell me anymore- I've got stomach ache!" Anyway that's not--

VB: Oh dear.

TA: That's beside the point. But uh I got over it alright. You see, I got over it quicker because I didn't smoke or drink. There was two women there who did smoke. And uh, of course they came off worse. They were sick. I was in convalescence for a while. For twelve days. I was okay, after a while. But that's getting away from... Oh this is on the tape isn't it?

VB: It's all on tape. [laughter]

TA: Oh crumbs. I shouldn't really be talking about that.

VB: Oh dear, not at all... Uh.

TA: So what else do you want to know?

VB: Well one or two of the other people you mentioned that we haven't erm touched on yet. Uh George Raft was another one you ..?

TA: Oh yes. Uh, in real life he was a gangster. He was. Oh yes. But I liked him. Sometimes he played parts, you know, good parts. I liked him. I tell you who else I liked, Carole Lombard.

VB: Oh yes.

TA: There wasn't much of her. Now, she was married to Geo- to uh, uh Clark Gable.

VB: Clark Gable, yeah.

TA: And when she died in a plane crash, his world fell apart. I can understand that. He tried marrying other women, but it was no good.

VB: Mhm, she was lovely wasn't she?

TA: Oh yes. She was, lovely. Very fragile looking.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause you were saying that you particularly liked Clark Gable as well?

TA: Yeah.

VB: Yeah.

TA: Uh, there's Franchot Tone I liked. Who else was there? ... Oh, my memory's going now.

VB: You-- you were talking about *Gone with the Wind*, which makes me think of--

TA: Oh yeah.

VB: Clark Gable, Leslie Howard, and did you like Leslie Howard, is he?

TA: Yes I did. He was killed in a plane crash. They think that the Germans shot him down. In the war. Second World War.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Oh dear.

VB: When you say, it sounds like a lot of film stars um died, died quite young? It's--

TA: Yes, I'm afraid so. Well that's. There's a lot of singing stars that died. That Buddy Holly was killed in a plane crash I think.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Anyway, you're not here to talk about singing stars. No, we're not, 'cause they weren't on film.

VB: Mhm.

TA: But they've done films of them, you know, kind of people imitating the singers.

VB: Cher.

TA: Elvis Presley. I liked him, but I wouldn't say I was all that gone. He wasn't a very, he was very good at his job. Singing. But not as an actor. I thought.

VB: Mhm. Is music something you've always enjoyed? Apart from films?

TA: Oh yes. Oh yes. Erm, especially when it's uh singing a duo. You know, two.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Like Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald, oh I loved their singing.

VB: Yeah it's lovely that film.

TA: Yes. And, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. I liked that. Howard Keel. I liked him. Uh, who else is there? We've got some time. Uh. [pause 4 seconds]

VB: You mentioned Norma Shearer there.

TA: Oh yes.

VB: Yeah.

TA: I can't remember the film that she was in. Oh wait a minute. I do. *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*.

VB: Oh yes.

TA: Oh, her father was a horror! Charles Laughton.

VB: Charles Laughton.

TA: Oh he threatened to kill her dog. If she didn't do as, as he, as she, as he said.

VB: Was it-- it wasn't Fredric March that was in that? As well, was it?

TA: Might have been. He was--

VB: As the, as the--

TA: As the one who wanted to marry and he didn't in the end. [Note: Fredric March played Robert Browning]

VB: Yeah.

TA: We'll have a quick look shall we.

VB: Yeah, sure. I'll just put this over--[tape switched off]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

VB: Okay.

TA: Oh no!

VB: Single them out.

TA: There's lots of them that I like, but there are some... Ooh who's that? [pause 7 seconds] Can't remember her. [looking through book]

TA: [inaudible] Can't remember her at all. [inaudible]. Have you finished now recording?

VB: Well, I was just changing it over actually.

TA: Oh.

VB: Erm, putting it on the other side.

TA: Who's this? Oh Robert Taylor! Oh I loved him. Ooh I thought he was marvellous. I used to go real gooey about him, but he died young too.

VB: Mhm.

[pause 6 seconds]

TA: Oh yes, I liked him all right.

VB: What was it about--?

TA: Anna Neagle, Anna Neagle, I liked her. What was that programme she-- film she did? There was the um, Queen uh-- Queen uh Victoria uh, film. [referring to *Sixty Glorious Years*]

VB: Oh yes.

TA: And she did uh... she did that one uh, in the war, she was erm, a spy. Oh what's the name? [probably referring to *Odette*] No, it wasn't her. [pause 5 seconds]

VB: Is it-- is that-- there's-- there's one. Was it Anna Neagle in that film where she gets-- she gets caught and the--

TA: And tortured.

VB: They torture her, or ..?

TA: Yeah. Oh yes, it might have been.

VB: I can't remember what it's called either. It's very good.

[pause 8 seconds]

TA: *Nell Gwynn* I liked her in, she was in that. [pause 8 seconds] Can't think of any other films she was in. Oh, this is an old book.

VB: Mhm.

TA: You've looked at-- you must have had it a good while. Anton Walbrook, he was good. Joan Blondell she was what I call a 'breezy blonde'. [laughter] [pause 3 seconds] Merle Oberon. I was rather sad when she died. Liked her. Vivien Leigh. I liked her in *Gone with the Wind*.

VB: Ah.

TA: That was on television last week! I'd seen it four times, I wasn't gonna see it again. [laughter]

VB: It's difficult though. I felt the same, and then I-- I turned it on and couldn't uh-- couldn't stop watching it, so.

TA: Dietrich, yeah. She was good. She died, didn't she? Not long ago.

VB: Not long ago no, no.

TA: They all go sometime. [sounds of TA reading the book under her breath, and turning pages] Errol; Flynn! Now he's what I call a real 'playboy type'.

VB: Mhm. Did you like his films?

TA: Yeah, they were alright. [laughter] But I don't think he was a very serious actor.

VB: No.

TA: He was convincing, but. Ooh here you are, Deanna Durbin. Who's this? Ray Milland, I liked him. [pause 2 seconds] Oh yes, I loved her. She's got a lovely face. [pause 6 seconds] Oh here's Shirley Temple. [pause 4 seconds] Is it? Oh no it's Judy Garland, oh. [pause 3 seconds] Erm, Bette Davis. Thought she was a wonderful actress. She's dead. Oh they're all going. [pause 8 seconds] You've not started it up have you? 'Cause it's wasting...

VB: I-- it's alright, no, no problem. [pause 4 seconds]

TA: Oh Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor in *Camille*. Oh I liked that. A real weepy film. She was a consumptive in that. [pause 6 seconds] Carole Lombard.

VB: Oh, Carole Lombard. [pause 5 seconds] Do you think there were certain qualities you liked in film stars?

TA: Yes, I suspect so. It's the way they put themselves over. I mean they have a, they have, must have an awful lot of coaching to kind of come out over the uh, as a finished, as a finished actress, or actor.

VB: Mhm.

TA: I liked Spencer Tracy too. He was in a film with erm, I think it was Clark Gable in *Boom Town*. About oil. I can't think who the woman was. [pause 4 seconds] Oh they should say. [pause 2 seconds] There were lots of actors and actresses--

VB: Mhm.

TA: But there's only a few that really appealed to me. Jean Arthur was quite good. I liked her. She used to do news, be a news woman. For a newspaper. She was always out for a story. [referring to *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*]

VB: Mhm.

TA: Oh dear. Oh that's Janet Gaynor. She's nice. She was nice. I think she had a dimple in her chin.

VB: Ah.

TA: You can just about see it. [pause 3 seconds] Vivien Leigh. I don't think that flatters her really.

VB: No.

TA: I don't think so... These pages are very thick aren't they?

VB: They are.

TA: Fredric March, oh I liked him. [inaudible]. Rochelle Hudson. I liked her. Do you remember her at all?

VB: I, I don't no.

TA: It's well before your time. [inaudible] I liked him.

VB: Did you ever read the film magazines? Um, 'Picturegoer' or 'Film Weekly', or..?

TA: No, no. Oh I'll tell you another actor I liked! Tyrone Power. .. He was too good to be true. Don Ameche. He was in a film about erm. It was called *Cocoon*. It was a sci-fi film.

VB: Oh yes.

TA: And uh, they go into this pool. And they come out rejuvenated. It's these uh things in the water. Cocoons. And there's beings in them. And they come [from another?] planet. There were two films of that name.

VB: That's right.

TA: I liked it, it was very good.

VB: 'Cause he, he had a very long career didn't he, I mean?

TA: Yeah he did.

VB: Yeah. [pause 3 seconds]

TA: Oh. Yeah. Oh, here's George Formby. Nova Pilbeam - I remember her, she was also a child star, and then she disappeared. [pause 3 seconds] Oh she's nice. French. Simone Simon. Seen her in a few films. [pause 3 seconds] *Seventh Heaven*. That's a lovely film. Made me cry quite a bit. [laughter]
Mhm.

VB: I'm-- I'm the same, enjoy a good cry. [laughter]

TA: Do you-- do you go to the cinema much?

VB: I do, I do, yes, yeah.

TA: You do? What have you seen lately?

VB: Ooh. Erm. Actually, I haven't been for a while when I say that. I think I, what was the last one I saw? [pause 8 seconds]

TA: 'Sailing Away' ... *Sailing Along*. That's Jessie Matthews. Just at eleven she was. And then she was in that programme, erm, on television, erm, a weekly series, she was in that. And she was... lost her figure, she was a lot plumper.

VB: Mhm.

TA: Oh dear, Judy Garland, didn't see much of her. James Cagney! He was good. I saw him in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. He did his own dancing. Thought it was marvellous really. [pause; 2 seconds] All these are films that are long gone. [pause 2 seconds]

VB: Did you go dancing yourself at all?

TA: I did. Not much. Yes, I went a fair bit. Twice a week. And then uh, I uh, I never bothered going. I didn't have time. My parents to see to, I couldn't manage it all. But if my brother stayed in, I would go. I would go to erm, what's that tower block in town? Erm, the CIS [referring to the Co-operative Insurance Society Building]. I went there and they had a lovely ballroom.

VB: Oh.

TA: I went a few times, and then that kind of petered off. I got quite used to staying at home and making meals, and baking. Didn't bother me. You know, when one part of your life goes, another one starts. You can't always uh, kind of, rely on the same ways all the time. There's got to be change. [pause 5 seconds] I don't think I'll bother looking through it all. It's nearly time anyway. Oops. You'd better put that away, before you leave it behind.

VB: Oh.

TA: Would you like to take those two biscuits? To nibble on the train.

VB: Erm. [pause 2 seconds] I might do actually, if you don't mind, that would be nice. [pause 2 seconds] Save-- save me having to get the horrible train things.

TA: You can have an apple as well if you want?

VB: Um the bis-- the biscuits'll do me. That'll be lovely.

TA: Are you sure?

VB: Yes, that'll be great, thanks.

TA: Will you have a meal when you get home?

VB: Uh, yes. I'll have something when I get in.

TA: Will your husband give you anything?

VB: He'll probably have something waiting.

TA: Oh, that's nice.

VB: He's quite good. [laughter] [pause 3 seconds] It's very good of you to let me come and see you.

TA: Oh it's no problem.

VB: Enjoyed that.

TA: I like a visit now and then. 'Cause I don't get many... [pause 5 seconds]

VB: Well it's been very interesting for me to find out a bit more about your--

TA: Oh thank you.

VB: Filmgoing.

TA: I was wondering why you'd picked me out of all the others. 'Cause I know there's one lady here who once she starts talking, she can't stop. [laughter] Don't mean to be rude.

VB: I think it's not-- not so much how much you say, but what you say. Erm.

TA: Oh yes, are you satisfied with what I've said?

VB: Very much so. Yeah.

TA: Oh I'm glad.

VB: That's really interesting. [pause 4 seconds] It's funny 'cause when you're talking about erm going to the cinema there, it sounds very different to the, the way it is now.

TA: Yeah. Sometimes we had to queue for ages. I remember going with my sister and my aunt and uh we had to wait ages to go in like this, and I was crossing my foot, 'cause I was wearing heels at the time, you know. Not these flatties. I wear these because uh I feel safer in them. And I don't really like high heels anymore now. I'll give you that.

VB: That's lovely, thanks.

TA: That's okay.

VB: Thanks a lot.

TA: Put those on one side.

VB: Can I give you a-- a hand? Clearing these away?

TA: No, you'll do no such thing. [laughter] I'm glad of your company.

VB: No it's been great.

TA: Yeah. I don't suppose I'll see you again.

VB: Probably not actually, no.

TA: Yeah. It's alright, I understand.

VB: Yeah.

TA: But it's been very nice to have you.

VB: Well I've, I've thoroughly enjoyed it, as I say, and uh--

TA: Ah dear, I hope I haven't spoken a lot of rubbish!

VB: No, far from it, far from it.

TA: I'll show you my tapestry before I go.

VB: That'll be great, yes. I'll just turn this off.

[End of Interview]