

Name: Rima Scott
Date of Birth: 1938
Place of Birth: New York
Date of Interview: 15th March, 2018
Interviewed by: Victoria Holton
Duration: 00:25:34

00:00:03

Today's date is the 15th March, 2018. It's Victoria Holton and I'm interviewing..?

Rima Scott. I'm Rima Scott and I was born in 1938.

Thank you. Would you like to tell us when you came to Milton Keynes, please, and where you came from?

Right, well I was born in Panama – sorry, I was born in New York – and my mother was from Panama and my father was from Spain and, after living in New York until I was about ten, we moved to Panama, where I was brought up. And I met my husband in Chicago and then we came to...we got married in Panama and came to England and arrived just outside Buckingham in 1964. So we've been around for fifty-four years.

That's lovely. So you've never actually lived in Milton Keynes but nearby?

Not within Milton Keynes, no, but I've done a tremendous amount of work in Milton Keynes.

So what was your first impression, when you first saw Milton Keynes, or heard of Milton Keynes?

Well, it's only about ten minutes' drive from Buckingham to Milton Keynes and I was there before there was a Milton Keynes, in 1964, and I started working in the Citizens Advice Bureau in Wolverton – which is still there, I...no, it's moved to Central Milton Keynes – and I also became a magistrate in Milton Keynes. So Milton Keynes sort of grew up around me. I remember when the A5 was being built and I was told that this amazing dual carriageway was going to take us very quickly from A to B and I

simply couldn't believe it and little did I know I was going to spend hours and hours driving up and down that A5, yes.

So would you like to talk about your cultural development experiences in Milton Keynes, or things that you have been working on with all the groups?

Yes. So, as I say, apart from having...being a magistrate for thirty years in Milton Keynes – and just to mention, I was there when the new magistrate building was opened and I remember we used to go...there were three separate Milton Keynes magistrates setups, one in Newport Pagnell, one in Fenny Stratford and one in Stony Stratford, and we used to have to go from one to the other. So when the new building was opened it was a tremendous excitement. The Queen came and opened it.

So, as far as cultural activities, I've always been very interested in dance – my mother was a dancer, so it sort of was in the bloodstream, so to speak – and I first started teaching dance to children with special needs – I took a postgraduate course in that – and in fact I worked at what was then the Oliver Wells School, which is now Redway, I believe, and the Walnuts School, which is a school for children with autism. So we had...it was a lot of fun actually. I got everybody out of their wheelchairs, we were on the floor doing various crazy things, and I remember Roger Kitchen actually came in and filmed one of our shows – we put on shows for the parents and that – so that was my first introduction, if you like.

Then I noticed there was a lot of dance activity going on in other parts of the country – they had formed, like, regional dance councils – and I thought, 'Oh, why don't we have one in Milton Keynes?' – well, in fact, in the whole of Buckinghamshire, 'cause we covered the whole of Buckinghamshire – and so I started this up at about 1987 and the whole thing really took off and it was tremendous fun. I worked quite closely with somebody from Stony Stratford called Sue Westell and Sue and I organised various things. One of them was a thing called 'Dance Zone' where we had all these folk dancers and I remember, 'cause I'm from Panama, I had all these Panamanian costumes and we got a little group and we performed at Woughton. At the time Woughton had... – well, it's still there, the sports centre – but it used to have a lot of dance performances and shows that came to Woughton, including a very famous one called 'Candoco', which is the one...a company that has disabled and able-bodied dancers – which is still going, actually – and Candoco came, with the help of Sue, and we organised a whole week residence at the Sir Frank Markham School and then a performance at the Woughton Centre, for parents and people. So that was the beginning of our work with Candoco which, I must say, then expanded. We got

quite a substantial grant from the Arts Council and we were able to do workshops in four or five different schools in Milton Keynes; and then we had an amazing international summer school at the Guttman Centre, in Aylesbury, where people from all over the county came, including from Milton Keynes, so that was a tremendous treat.

Also there was a folk dance festival which was organised by somebody called Don Allison and it was completely voluntary. And all these folk groups would come from, you know, maybe Eastern Europe and Israel and they would all be housed and it was local volunteers within Milton Keynes. And then there was a big marquee – I can't remember exactly where – but it was, sort of, in what is now Central Milton Keynes, 'cause it wasn't built then. And this would go on for about a week, with all these people, who didn't speak any English, staying with families in Milton Keynes and that went on for quite a while. In fact, the treasurer, I remember, is...was Peter Kara, who is now, of course, the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, which is quite a coincidence, I think.

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Then the next thing that happened was the theatre. That was tremendously exciting. For many years we'd been trying to get a proper theatre in Milton Keynes. Obviously there was Stantonbury but not a main theatre – Roy Nevitt was very involved in that – and eventually we got a very large grant from the Arts Council and the Development Corporation gave us the land, which is where the theatre is now built. And I was on the board of the theatre for many years, even before it was built, and the whole excitement of getting a...you know, the drawings, the architect's drawings and the topping out ceremony. And we decided that we were going to have a management company and so we interviewed management companies all over the country and we chose what was then a very small group called the Ambassador Theatre Group, which had, I think, six or seven regional theatres and then, of course, nowadays, they have over thirty theatres all over the country, they have two theatres in New York and one in Sydney; they've just grown exponentially. But it was a very happy relationship and I remember they had...one of main...the first things they did was to have an all-day performance of three Greek tragedies, called 'The Oresteia' and when this was proposed by the chief executive – Michael Lynas, as he was then – we all thought, 'He's completely mad. Nobody is going to come to the theatre on a Saturday for three...well, starting at ten thirty and finishing at eleven in the evening, to watch these Greek plays.' And I remember driving up to the car park and it was completely full. The whole show, all three of them, were a complete sell-out, so it was terrifically exciting.

And then, of course, the gallery, when that was opened, we had the... (Oh, now I can't remember their names)...two famous artists

– Gilbert and George. Gilbert and George put an exhibition in. They're very eccentric people and they went into the shopping centre and talked to the shoppers. So that was terrifically exciting. And also, for the opening week, there was a community week so that each...drama presented an evening, music presented an evening and dance presented an evening. And we organised various local dance groups. One of them was an able-bodied and disabled group called, 'Chance to Dance', with Sue Cox who was the teacher at Stantonbury School at the time – the dance teacher – and we also had a youth dance group from Milton Keynes and the leader was called Helen Parlor.

So Helen organised...we had a youth dance group and Helen did a fantastic number and the reason I mention it is because Helen is actually from Newport Pagnell. She then went off and danced for many years with a very well-known company called Motionhouse and now she's come back to Milton Keynes and she's running her own dance company called MÓTUS Dance, so I like the sort of circularity of that.

Another really exciting thing we did was for the millennium, for the year 2000. We had a project called 'Crossing Borders' and it was choreographed by Motionhouse with eighty local performers in it, including people in wheelchairs and things like that. And it was to do with – it was during the time of Sarajevo – so it was to do with a bridge crossing from one border to the other and Kevin from Motionhouse, his idea was to have I don't know how many gallons of water to actually show that this was a river with a real little bridge going over it and I remember the...Michael Lynas from the theatre being very worried that the weight of the water was actually going to damage his stage floor. But it didn't and it was...really, I think that was one of the most beautiful things that we did at Bucks Dance. We got a lot of money from the Arts Council...

Okay. Well, coming back – sort of slightly backtracking – in 1997 I think it was, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Milton Keynes, and we organised a dance performance in the newly-built Church of Christ the Cornerstone. It was a whole week of different types of performances. And one of the exciting things was that our young choreographer called Tim Major, who used to live in Milton Keynes – I don't think he does anymore – he made a piece based on the sculpture that's in Campbell Park. It's one that has arms...a sort of non-representational figure, like that, and so we had the kids sort of climbing on top of each other and I think that's probably the only time we've had a dance performance inside the church – I may be wrong about that, but yes.

And we also used to have...the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet used to come and perform in a big top in Campbell Park – they came for two or three years – and that was, you know, terrific. That was before the theatre was built and so that was a huge excitement. I think people forget the cultural activities that took place at the beginning of Milton Keynes, in the seventies and eighties, and concentrating more, perhaps, once the theatre was built, which was obviously a focus for... Stantonbury Campus and Stantonbury Theatre, again, they used to bring all sorts of dance companies, as indeed did Woughton Campus.

Yes, so... Because Bucks Dance covered the whole of Buckinghamshire I eventually was on...this was before Milton Keynes was a unitary authority so there was six local authorities to deal with and I was, for a while, on a county council panel for the arts, sport and recreation. And then, when Milton Keynes became a unitary authority, for some reason I found myself sitting on one of the arts and sports committees. I remember meeting people like Euan Henderson, who's still very prominent, (do you know Euan Henderson?). Anyhow, so, because I was on that and there was a group called the Arts Association – Milton Keynes Arts Association – which was sort of different types of art forms lodged together and we suddenly realised that we had sort of like a network of arts groups in Milton Keynes, which is something that didn't exist in the rest of Buckinghamshire. And eventually we formed ourselves into the Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance, which is still now going really strong. I chaired it for quite a few years, to start out with. I think it has over thirty of the arts and heritage organisations and artists in Milton Keynes represented on it and we meet four times a year and there...we have invited speakers from all over the country to tell us about various aspects of art policy or art development or examples of work that they have, which is...I do believe it is one of the strongest arts and heritage alliances, 'cause usually arts groups are a little bit in competition with each other, and this has worked really well. We managed to get some funding and have a lovely person who organises it – Lallie Davis – and of course we were supported very much by the council, especially Lucy Bedford and the heritage officer (whose name I forget)... *[Laughs]*. So I thought I'd mention that because I think that's a real strength. Although Bucks Dance, regrettably, doesn't exist anymore, the sort of activities and the co-operation I think is quite unique to Milton Keynes.

Yes, coming on to the International Festival, then. I was on the board of The Stables and Monica Ferguson had the idea of having this mammoth international festival, which was a pretty scary thing to start out with because the costs involved of bringing these companies to Milton Keynes, very professional, from abroad – most of them, actually, from abroad. We managed to get some

funding from the Arts Council and the council also contributed – and I must say, all credit to Monica Ferguson because it was a very far-sighted thing to do and, as I say, quite scary. The board of The Stables was a little bit anxious to start out with, not only because of the financial implications but because it was something outside what The Stables did as a bread and butter living, if you like. It's been fantastically successful. There've been some really ground-breaking companies that have come and a lot of the performances are free and you can see the numbers that attend these performances. There've been incredible things like, in the shopping centre, there was this sort of 'Imaginarium' I think it's called. You walk in and there are various spaces lit with different colours: great experience.

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And then, of course, from my point of view – from the dance point of view – we had Rosemary Lee, who was a very famous choreographer, she came and did a most beautiful piece in the Cathedral of Trees, which is just round by Gulliver's World in Milton Keynes. And, before that, not many people knew about the Cathedral of Trees – I don't know if you've ever been there but...you have been, yes. Good – it is a beautiful place and the piece was really quite stunning. It was performed...it had local dancers and local people of all ages. I think the oldest person was well into their eighties and the youngest was two or three. So that was a real highlight. And of course we've got it coming this year – 'cause it's bi-annual; it happens every two years – so that is tremendously exciting. So we're going to go along and the veil will be lifted and we will know what's in store for us this year.

So, is there anything else that you want to talk about in terms of organisations or associations, or..?

Oh well, I was on the board of lots of different organisations in Milton Keynes. I was on the board for Arts for Health until fairly recently and I mentioned the theatre; I was there for a very long time. I was an advisor – dance advisor, not surprisingly – to the Milton Keynes Community Foundation for a long time. It was Julia Upton, who I have great admiration for. So, apart from that, I have been on various national boards. I was on the board of the Council for Dance Education and Training, which is a regulatory organisation for dance. I was also on the board of NACRO, which is the National Organisation for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, because that's the other strand of interest in my life – justice. Currently I'm on the board of MÓTUS, which is Helen Parlor's dance company, and also on the board of Pagrav, which is an Indian dance company, run...well, it's a board but the artistic director is Urja Desai who lives in Bletchley and she's very well known, nationally, for her Kathak dancers. So that's where I'm at, at the moment.

Maybe we'll get her in and interview her.

Yeah, you should.

So I was going to ask you about any special memories you have of Milton Keynes. You've told us about some very special theatre performances...

Yes.

...would that..?

Well certainly the theatre is tremendous. Every time I go there I get a real thrill because I think it's a very beautiful building, apart from anything. And I think that, well, opening the magistrates' court, again, that was a great memory. I think I've mentioned most of the memories, yes.

Would you...looking at Milton Keynes today, after fifty years, what do you...if you had created Milton Keynes yourself, is there anything that you would have changed?

Well, the car parks... *[Laughs]*. You know, when the shopping centre was open – I know everybody says, "Oh, the good old days. Everything was much better then." – I remember you'd drive up, you'd park your car, you'd run into John Lewis... But now it's a real struggle, isn't it? I mean, you have to find your parking place, it's quite expensive if you're going to...I mean, there are the other shopping areas that have opened up, so one can avoid that.

What else? I would...we really should have had the original idea of a monorail. That would have been fantastic. Because, even with the...when you look at the ads for Milton Keynes when it first started, in the sixties, and it was all to do with no traffic jams, you know, come to Milton Keynes, it will take you ten minutes to get to work, as opposed to being stuck in a traffic jam in London, and now, well we do have traffic jams, don't we? The other day I was in Milton Keynes – we came to see a screening at the Cineworld – and it was about five o'clock when we came out and it was snowing a little bit but I mean it wasn't snowing particularly hard. The trip that usually takes me twenty minutes, from the theatre to my house, took one hour and forty-five minutes. The whole of Central Milton Keynes was gridlocked; I mean, literally. Every single roundabout, you got to it, it was jam-packed. You couldn't get round the roundabout. When you did it was just...it was incredible. And so I feel...I mean, I know traffic jams and the population of Milton Keynes is two hundred and fifty thousand or whatever it is, so you have to accept that but it's a shame that it is a city for cars, especially now that we're all so conscious about the environment and pollution, etc.

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You're not the first person to mention the traffic and the cars. And a few people are mentioning the lack of artistic outlets for theatres and, you know, performance spaces and things, for them.

Yes, I mean obviously I would love it if there was a dedicated dance space, you know. There are all sorts of places, Swindon, for example and Norwich, they have...and of course Eastbourne – Eastbourne, yeah – and down in the south where everything seems to happen, the south coast. 'Cause we are part of South East Arts, which is based at Brighton, which really is rather a long way away from Milton Keynes. And they have this wonderful dance facility with the studios for rehearsing, with little performance spaces, with constant classes that you can take, in all sorts of different dance styles. And, as I say, there are plenty of other smaller cities than Milton Keynes that have this facility, so that would be my dream, dream place, yeah. But of course, now we have, apart from Stantonbury, which I think is a lovely venue, and it's got a new director now and she is actually bringing two dance companies within the next few months so that's a nice little signal of hope for the future. And there's The Venue, which is part of Walton High School, which is another very lovely space. So, yeah, we have medium-size spaces for performances. It's just a pity, from my point of view, that we don't have a little bit more concentration on dance, which is, you know, it's a very health-making activity and you don't have to be a dancer to enjoy dancing. And there's all sorts of different types of dance, isn't there? And as far as girls are concerned, at school, on the whole they're not too keen on PE, whereas a lot of them are very keen on dancing; and boys as well, of course. *[Laughs]*

We have a day of dance in Stony Stratford, you probably know about, which is lovely: dancing in the street...

Yes, yes, it's called folk...

...and Morris dancing, with children. And then on the market square we have a dance in the evening. It's a really good day actually.

Yes, it's wonderful.

As you say, it's a celebration of all different types of dance. So how do you visualise the next fifty years of Milton Keynes? What do you think the future will bring here?

Oh gosh, well it's bound to grow, isn't it? And we're already seeing the development of new housing estates so that is going to put a pressure, I think, on the...even more pressure on the existing facilities and I hope that the idea of the founders of Milton Keynes,

which was to have public art in all sorts of places and wonderful open spaces for people to enjoy, I hope that that will continue to be one of the guiding principles of the city design.

Fifty years' time: well I imagine we'll have more high-rise buildings because there's a limit to the amount of houses that can be built in any given space. And I don't think that that's such a bad thing. I mean, originally, I know that there was a limit on the height of the buildings for Milton Keynes, which is slightly expanded lately, but if you think about it in big cities like Madrid and Paris, everybody lives in an apartment or a flat and I think, you know, in fifty years' time in Britain, we're going to start thinking about that; we will. And if a place like Milton Keynes has a lot of green spaces, then perhaps people won't mind not having their little gardens, which we are all so attached to, aren't we, in this country? Yeah, so that would be another thing.

Yes, possibly more music of a greater variety. And I would like to see a theatre that programmes a greater variety of things than the theatre programming at the moment, which is a lot of musicals, which you can understand why because I mean, you know, they are a business and they have to cover their costs. Running theatres is a very expensive proposition. But it would be nice to have, for example, the Theatre Royal in Northampton has wonderful productions and they are producing theatre, so they have their own artistic director and they have a professional company. And that would be wonderful, to have that in Milton Keynes. Roy Nevitt always wanted to have that and that's a disappointment. So maybe we'll have that in fifty years' time. *[Laughs]* I'm thinking...

Rosemary Hill was saying that we needed more...

Yes, yeah.

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And if you wanted...if you'd like to just give us some, if you fancy, a little short phrase of what Milton Keynes means to you. Is there something that would sum it up?

Oh gosh, you should have warned me about that... *[Laughs]*

No, you don't have to, it's just a, you know, what comes into your mind, or you don't have to if you don't...if you have nothing there don't worry about it. It's just sometimes we ask people that question...

Milton Keynes is just a really buzzy place with lots of wonderful things going on. I love it. *[Laughs]*

That's a great phrase, thank you very much.

Okay.

That was lovely, thank you.

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END OF INTERVIEW