

Transcript of interview conducted 27 October 2017

Interviewees: MARCEL STELLMAN, (MS), JEAN STELLMAN (JS), DAVID STARK (DS)
Interviewer: CLAIRE COOKE (CC)
Marylebone, London, England

Transcription: CLAIRE COOKE

[0:00:00] CC: Can you tell me about yourself and your connection to Decca Records?

MS: To the business or just in general?

CC: To Decca Records.

MS: Well yes sir I love music and I always wanted to be in the record business so I did everything possible to get to meet somebody connected with Decca. On the whole there was one of two companies but the biggest one was EMI and EMI was the company. When Decca developed we had one opposition to EMI and we worked in a way together. EMI have The Beatles and our opposite number to The Beatles were The Rolling Stones so we have something to counteract because The Rolling Stones for the rock band and EMI was a posh office so that was it but the point is I knew that they existed but that didn't know where so I had to go off searching and then I found out that the Decca Record company was run by a banker called Edward Lewis but we didn't know where he was so eventually I found that he was in a place called Brixton

JS: South of the river

MS: And I thought: 'What was a man of that standing do in Brixton?' and I have to do anything to eventually I found out that the fact that he was a cricket lover and there was a cricket ground near Brixton and why he didn't have a EMI around there he had an office near the cricket ground so everybody was interviewed [and mused?] had to go to Brixton. And its very strange when you think such a posh company as EMI with offices all over the world and yet have to deal with the man who founded Decca but he wasn't a real man there the other companies were smaller but the only big one was the one with The Beatles and the only good advantage for us that he says one contract for them. They had The Beatles - bigger thing ever and we had The Rolling Stones and that was the only connection we have until such time as I got to know it was a wish and then the whole thing opens up . Don't forget we weren't always at the Albert embankment. That was a big office new office which was rented and I was offered an office there I have that office but then I needed help so I went looking and I found a young man and I said: 'Have you got a job?' He said: 'No' I said: 'Would you like one?' He said: 'Yes' and as far as I was concerned: 'You could start if you like.'

DS: You were a Decca quite a few years before The Beatles, you were there earlier, much earlier.

MS: Oh yeah but that was the big...

DS: I mean I meant The Rolling Stones.

CC: When did you start at Decca?

MS: Do you remember when I started at Decca?

DS: You were about 19...

MS: 30s...

DS: No, no 50s, 1958

MS: In the 50s you say?

JS: In the early 50s.

MS: Will you tell me?

DS: 1956

MS: When did you start Decca Records? Must have been in the 50s, in the 50s I started and the only reason I found needed of that kind of thing because I love music I love the record industry and that's was a bit of a part yet so eventually when we moved from Brixton to the Albert embankment and become very posh I was offered an office and to share my office with another gentleman a Canadian. What was his name? The classic man.

DS: I've forgotten.

MS: We had to share the office at the Albert embankment. In the other office was a secretary and then I found I needed help so eventually I got the young man who I think liked music or something and we engaged a conversation and he joined me ever since. He's never left me.

CC: What were you doing before you worked for Decca Records?

MS: Hoping for a job I suppose... Well I was listening to music I was beginning to write the lyrics because a lot of artists mostly foreign want to sing in English and I thought to myself I speak a good number of languages if they want a job he's stepping in the right direction so I had David and he never left me somehow but he always helped me where I was a bit stuck because he also liked music. I don't know how far we're going or old digging into the stuff that's what happened.

DS: But you were on the television, before that you were on the television, weren't you?

MS: Before that I tell you....

JS: He was from top to toe yeah every day

MS: Do you know the Thank You book? There are two books I think and all you do is just read now you just read that on the right .

CC: To Marcel, forwarding father of the channel , thank you, many thanks....

DS: Vera Lynn...

CC: Vera Lyn, wow. Thank you book from Channel 4.

MS: There was a second book by another man who would decided to say something the fact is whatever he said was a waste of time

DS: That was later

MS: Because he's never met me. The second book, you have to look for the for the bit about me in there and then in there and then I realised I never met him and he never met me.

DS: Well that was a bit later with Channel 4 but before that you were on television in Scotland

MS: I was on radio

DS: Radio yeah radio

MS: Radio in Scotland. My mother was Scottish. Born in Glasgow and we had the house in Glasgow and I used to listen to the radio and I didn't like it so I started to moan about who is in charge eventually met the lady called Ena Quade she was one of the bosses of Scottish Decca and we started to talk and she said: 'What do you want to do?' I said: 'I don't know.' and yeah they know it was a radio show but somebody or a children's game show anything to keep me busy and this is how I started Decca in Scotland and then eventually they decided to come to London and open offices from then on you know this particular it's very hard to say how I found it, I found it by wanting to write. The first show I ever wanted to write was a very beautiful French song by a man called Henri Salvadore and Salvadore was a beautiful piano player he came from Guadeloupe and he had a song he always sang which I adored. And I got to meet him and we started to talk and eventually when Lewis gave me a job at the shared office with this man and he was a Canadian classically trained who could sing an opera backwards and who also used a lot of artists which he found. His career almost as good as mine except unfortunately Terry isn't here any more. It's all very sad and very nice but the only thing I can tell you I was taken to a restaurant by some friends of ours some weeks ago if they find us off somewhere north of London and they have pictures of everybody on the wall but on the way out there was a big big set of **[0:09:48]** of Mick Jagger, just his head at the door to, the door to the loo. I mean it shows you the connection. The other connection is that one day when I was employed at Decca, my wife got a phone call from Dirk Bogarde at 8.30 in the morning.

JS: Shall we say, knowing exactly, anyway, besides going with Marcel. And that was to me... it was very very. I was at home and I thought: 'Oh my god, who do you talk to?' And I didn't know if Marcel was in or out in town and that was, that was my, shall we say, start of knowing I've got to know what's, who's who

MS: And when we moved to the big office by the river, the boss was Edward Lewis and employees could only use one lift or park the car somewhere if you had the lift to go up.

DS: That was it, there were two lifts. I don't know if you heard about this...?

CC: Ros mentioned it yeah

DS: One for the Directors and Sir Edward, the others for the staff but of course we all went in the Directors' lift

MS: I was allowed to go into the Directors ... I was sort of next to the boss' office

CC: One of the other people I've interviewed is called Ros who also worked at the Albert embankment and she mentioned that Edward Lewis was around. What was it like having your boss he was such a big important person around when you worked at Decca?

MS: Well there was a man in between us how to use and he was called 'The Gopher' I used to go for my hat go for my go for my car so we called him 'The Gopher' a very should we say I think you must have worked at the factory somewhere before because I wouldn't say that I would pick him. I didn't any way but the fact is Lewis was number one then the secretary and then the office that I was given to the Canadian boy would do classical records and then when I was employed and agreed to come I had to share the office with him and we both spoke French because he was Canadian so I know the other man The Gopher used to come in and say: 'What you're talking about?'

DS: Townsley

MS: Townsley, that's now I try something I've told you before. It's that kind of story .

CC: And so you met Edward Lewis, you met Edward Lewis several times...?

JS: Same building.

CC: What was he like? What was Edward Lewis like?

MS: Edward Lewis was very good shrewd banker he had a big bank, a bank that exist anymore. It was a beautiful building he's he rented with two lifts and those with that opposition or with position which is worth using the lift or the bus there were about two or three oh yes and I was fortunate I was allowed to use where to park my car please

DS: You got on very well with him ?

MS: With Edward Lewis? I got a so well with Lewis that there was a time when I worked there that he had the call from an American company called Dot Records who also had a very good orchestra who record the music and was released by London and it was just a very nice atmosphere. Occasionally you got an idiot to come to talk to you or you had somebody like Stanley Lockwood come and talk to you or Almando Russell talk to you. Anyway when I got the job the boss then Frank Lee was the head of the music right he was the man who decided they had a but and he said to me: 'We've just lost the producer would you like to take the job on?' I said: 'May I ask who it is?' And they said: 'Well two very good artists one is Stanley Black and his orchestra and the other one was the Latino Orchestra Almando Ross.' So my eyes went like this, until eventually I was sure you got the job and that developed the whole story. I knew the point that I could say I haven't taken .

DS: Marcel had a very unique role because Marcel was the international manager, and I was your assistant, head of international because he spoke languages and you knew everybody also he wrote wrote the lyrics and the translations from any foreign songs which is very unusual and it was producer of many records

JS: How did he do that?

DS: I don't know! How did he do it? Including The Goons, the Ying Tong Song

MS: You know The Goons?

CC: Just about

DS: Very famous

MS: It was a Goony company based on that fact that I watched it in France. There's a paper called Le Canard aux Genie which is ' The Same Duck' and every week they wrote a new episode and it was broadcast and I like the obviously so I got the paper about the paper and so much so that I met the rules the boss and they go from the boss of The Goons to Peter Sellers and the big artists who were with them and you can't tell you how excited I was without even knowing if you know already it hits you

DS: And Spike

MS: Huh?

DS: And Spike Milligan

MS: As you say it hit me but I had to share the office with Terry McQuenan that was funny because there was the boss, the secretary, The Gopher and Terry McQuenen who shared an office with me, the classical man and all you could do is hope for the best because with this Gopher man who was actually a nice worker but he had no personality so you have to be polite to him so as not to be told by the most everything

DS: Yeah cos he signed the cheques

CC: Stan Goodall who was the man in the photograph, who was studio engineer at Decca

DS: Was he in New Malden?

CC: No, he was in Broadhurst Gardens. This guy, so this was Edward Lewis. I'm just showing a photograph of Stan winning a life time achievement award...

MS: Who's that?

CC: That's Stan Goddall from the 1970s

MS: He was a producer?

CC: Yeah, he was a studio engineer, and obviously he's there will Sir Edward Lewis.

MS: Did he work with Haddy?

CC: Yes, he did he was under Arthur Haddy.

MS: That makes it clear.

CC: He said how great a boss Arthur Haddy was. He really brought him up really trained him up to do lots of different things he worked internationally as well because of Arthur Haddy, He said that Decca was quite like a family. That Decca felt like a family. Would you agree with that?

MS: Yes it was a family which was disordered and organized you could park your car if you've got one at the right level of the ground floor not in the cellar. You can use the lift because you were connected at that level it was all connected with who you were what you did how pleased the boss was with you. And the day as I said came when for a year or two an American label opened in America called Dot. D O T Have you heard of it? The Dot label and they have a very good orchestra and we we used Dot label and release their records and he gave us a few goodies instrumental like Sail Along Silvery Moon and lovely things that went all over the world in fact it became very big in Holland **[0:19:38]** I wondered why did I do that because I was told by the boss you use him and then Dot, the boss from Dot came to London and said to the boss: 'I'd like to start an individual company and perhaps I could have him to run it.' He said: 'You'll have to ask him.' So he came to the office and sat there with Lewis and the secretary said: 'Please come up.' So I had to come up to the fifth, sixth floor and I said; ' Yes yes Sir Edward ?' He said: 'This is [inaudible] of Dot.' And I said : 'Thank you. ' He'd like to know what you like to do in the future they're interested in opening in office what would you like to do?' I said: 'Would you want me to leave you?' He said: 'I don't think so , have a think about it.' If I don't mind I don't have to think don't want to leave Decca' and that was Decca and Sail Along Silvery Moon would be Holland went mad, Germany went mad for the records by the [inaudible] so they have a label which we distributed. I can't tell you what they were.

DS There were quite a few labels. There was London Records and other ones.

CC: There was a prog rock one wasn't there?

DS: Yeah later on.

MS: There was a label as well for [inaudible] orchestra can't remember the name

DS: Now that was I can't remember

MS: Was there Rex records?

DS: It was, it begins with a...

CC: Can I ask you, when you were asked if you wanted to go to Dot Records and you said: 'No I want to stay with Decca.' Why was that? Why did you want to stay with Decca?

MS: I want to stay I was already with Decca. It was just a question we do know what does he leave Decca?

CC: Why did you want to stay?

MS: I've thought it over I think not very long when I went back to the research 'I don't really want to leave if you unless you want to ...' and the boss from lot was there that office so the notion of self if that's your answer, you can work for you if you like but he's not gonna for you he have to be distributed through us so we have a distribution company then came a lot of big problem. Lewis has lunch regularly with the man in the newspaper they meet in a restaurant one day , a terrible man. He he was a publisher he was the one with Lewis had the biggest argument ever. He had lunch him and one day I said to Lewis: 'You should open a publishing company.' So he said: 'Well he won't like it .'So I said: 'It's a question of his recording songs that are not published.' ' Let me see.' And eventually he said: 'He doesn't want to go with you he'll work with you but Decca stays with us' So that was how Dot records carry Harbor...

DS: But that's Burlington music

MS: Burlington Music were the publishers

DS: Yeah exactly.

{{interrupted for tea}}

DS: Burlington that was in the next next door office

MS: Yeah then they open an office in town

DS: Yeah that's right

MS: Behind the Palladium

DS: Oh yes

MS: There was an office there was staff.

DS: That was great Marlborough Street

MS: Yes that's right

DS: The promotion's office

MS: So the promotion of it and then there were a couple of men who run it and then if we really worked with them you might get some help from them. They were of their own thing.

DS: But Burlington was, but publishing that was very important , made a lot of money didn't it ?

CC: What was the best thing about working for Decca Records?

MS: The best thing was Edward Lewis, the man had ideas he was a banker he knew everybody and he's a man with great foresight. He had a , we had a company that have airplanes fly in the dark.... anything personal ... so he was not only a record man he was a publishing man he was a Burlington was another of the company. He developed a big empire.

DS: Electronics yeah... radar

JS: Still there.....

[0:24:23]CC: Decca Records had a factory in New Malden

MS: Yes New Malden.

CC: Did you work, did you have any connection there?

MS: Yeah some of the staff there used to go once every month just to say hello and then I got a buddy come up and so they nice but they were the workers and then I went back and had a sandwich and then the bosses were you all right yep but it's part to do it I wasn't a number because I don't know much about the factory but I have two pictures in the dining room that we brought back from San Francisco he says special for the dining room so we brought them who brought them back. I find what it sounds like and this is what annoys me than I have a big head and I like to spout about it and the fact is the least to spot the better because were away in Paris and they brought this he went out of the Light Programme and then we all had to get back here for something else it was it was a concert and a concert like that one he's like the best classical concert.

DS: Yeah, I'm just thinking though about the factory that one the main connections was we were working in the Albert embankment and every record that was released they had to make it's called a test pressing and every single record and album we we get them every day samplers before the release and they were special you know white labels with just a number on so we used to get them all the time. All the albums came from the factory and if you didn't you said if it wasn't good you said: 'Do it again.' and all that you know about that?

CC: Yeah

DS: I still got a couple of those actually....

MS: I remember whether we had released a special thing and this helped as well to a new picture for the.... and one of the boys from the factory said got a new picture coming 'For what ?' I said 'For the new album.' I said , 'I don't know what.' I said. 'Maybe a duck on water with records? Yeah it was a publishing firm and they wanted a published music that was published. The music was published by Burlington. Burlington was not liked by Jimmy Phillips, the publisher with whom Lewis lunch every day, but he never stopped it because he said to me they won't (()) I'm sure they'll take the money and they think money is so well I don't know what the world is I knew a lot of Americans. I remember I went to New York with my wife on a ship once that stopped at islands, and we were to left the others own. There was a problem on the deck there was a blue shirt with a white collar on the deck, and every Irish when they came up would say: 'Good morning, Father' at me.

JS: Cos Marcel had navy blue and a white

MS: You took a lot of that stuff with humour, because it was done in such way that you can't help it you know and obviously if they say: 'Good morning, Father,' you know, 'Bless you my friend,' No the one thing I've never wanted to happen is that I have a big head or that I knew I was not approachable. I had an office I have a lot of people who help with David first and a lot of other people worked in Europe and because I spoke the languages I was able to do it . As a matter of fact I was in Holland one day a company said to me: 'Yeah you should take this.' [0:34:41] I said: 'What is that ?' It's very funny you should like it.' I said : 'What is it?' 'That's called The Smurfs!' The Smurfs!

JS Out of the blue

MS: There a thing somewhere about The Smurfs

DS: I think that's the one. The golden disc

JS: In the corner

DS: The Smurfs

MS: The Smurfs with Father Abraham

DS: Of course

MS: Abraham couldn't sing now he's been back again he seems in tune. The Smurfs with Father Abraham

DS: They've got movies and the films for the kids, The Smurfs Movie

MS: Jeanie could have been Jane of The Smurfs

DS: Yeah you brought them into the UK.

CC: Oh wow, were they Belgian, originally or French?

DS: Dutch, or French or Belgian - The Smurfs? Where were they from? The Smurfs?

MS: Holland

CC: Oh ok

MS: But they've been taken over by America. It's a big thing now in America but I have nothing to do with it but then Lewis said to me: 'We very happy to have a big (()) as well.

DS: They were enormous at the time.

MS: You know we'd like to measure this of that the other one. I have my favourites obviously Jeanie likes her favourite. Jeanie loves the records but she particularly likes Dean Martin

JS: Well who wouldn't?

CC: Exactly.

JS: Oh yes.

MS: So would you believe, two years ago Columbia released a new Dean Martin record and it was called Cha Cha Cha D'Amour and there was the melody that was my song with this much and not this much The Smurfs.

DS: No not The Smurfs

MS: Dean Martin, Dean Martin [inaudible] I seem to think of I believe such a brilliant man I'm not. I am if you tune is like and I like it there's nothing other people may like it too but just anything I tried to work out I had to write songs in English for foreign artists who wanted to speak in here and I finished up at the moment the performing rights story with I think 368 songs with my name on with them, with the lyric. And Kathy Kirby recorded a song, of the British artists recorded a song and I know some records I just found by Humperdinck

CC: Oh yeah, he's from Leicester like me Humperdinck

JS: Do you know him?

CC: No! If only.... now there's this connection, maybe

DS: I saw him a couple of years ago, I saw Humperdinck a couple of years ago and the restaurant, so I said hello, told him I worked with you and he sent his...

MS: Who was it?

DS: Humperdinck! He sent his best regards... I think I told you. What's the next question?

CC: Well very quickly just the question rather than a [inaudible] question is : Can I take a picture of your golden records? Is that ok?

MS: A picture of ?

CC: The golden records?

DS: She wants a picture of the gold record , yeah of course!

CC: Is that ok, later when we've finished the interview? The second last question is that Decca Records was sold in 1980 to Polygram. How did you feel about that?

DS: ' 89 I think.

CC: Oh the factory closed in 1980.

DS: Really?

MS: Was it Polydor who took over?

CC: Well again I've had these different stories so again Stan from the photo said that they were concerned because they thought their jobs are going to go but actually Polygram turned out be a good employer because they saw that they can make a lot of money from the back catalogue and the recordings.

DS: Sure

CC: Ros was upset because that kind of at the end of her job there and the factory workers it meant the end of all of their jobs because the factory closed in Malden, in 1980

DS & JS: {reaction}

CC: But I wondering if it affected did you have any feelings about it because depending on where you would have been in the company , it might not have,,,,?

MS: Which one?

CC: In 1980 when Decca was sold how did you feel?

MS: How did that feel? I didn't know who bought it

CC: Oh okay

MS: It was all done and then we were told but I do remember Dot Records who wanted me to run them on their behalf and Dot came and Lewis call me up and said: 'So and so, would you like to go there? and that's it to me frankly if you want me to stay I'd rather stay so I stayed with them but it makes me feel there's so many people would like things to do I found myself very fortunate to have a connection with all these artists all these lovely people talk to you I mean once when father of Jean take him to America and as and there were many American companies and we went to listen to a band to hear new artists at Columbia. So I have a lady who would guest sing it with a very big band in New York and would I go and meet the lady would you like to take her to lunch? I said, 'Delighted.' Okay so I said well 10:15 she feels just she comes out of the band the bad stage and you will meet her for lunch so I go to the building where they were and the 10:15 came out of there. She said: 'Are you Mr Stellman?' 'And you are?' and she said: 'Well I've just finished a session with the Benny Goodman Orchestra,' 'Lovely,' I said, 'And you are?' 'Rosemary Clooney.'

CC: Wow! Yeah. So that was going to be my final question was what impact has working for Decca had on you?

MS: On me?

CC: On your life?

MS: Big head!

CC: It's a big question....

MS: No not big head very thrilled to know, very thrilled to know that Lewis trusted me , they had been at a lot of companies trust me they had beans and all those companies in Italy or Switzerland or anybody, allowed me to see them and talk to them but I always kept my mouth shut when it didn't concern me so Lewis always [inaudible]. He always looked after, didn't he Jeanie?

JS: Well I wasn't there...

MS: Always. I mean I know he was a great man and I had nothing but great admiration for a man who was a banker, editor, publisher who can develop things like that and they all happen so please don't think I'm a big head cos it's very embarrassing if you think you are. That was the problem in Paris when Tom Jones was there and the French artists were supposed to be the number one and Tom Jones before where Tom Jones came on they wouldn't let it go and the boss from the French person: 'You arranged that!' Yeah you can't tell you how in one way I have very pleased but that I met some artists for whom I wrote one of them you must know **[0:43:08]**

CC: Charles A---- ?

DS Asnavier

CC: There you go, no I don't.

MS: The great, the greatest French singer of all

CC: Okay , I'll look him up.

MS: Who can sing in any language who goes to record and it's here and you get all of those...

DS Right good friend. Still going. That was a great answer.

CC: Is there anything else you wanted to mention or talk about?

MS: Jeanie, is there anything else?

JS: No I think where he was doing things...

MS: I'd like to know if I'm going on living like this, a few more years probably, I hope.

DS: Hope so

MS: I hope so I'd like this just not because of what's happening but because strangely enough that restaurant we went to last year with some friends of ours had pictures all over the place and then the Mick Jagger person outside of the loo. I know it's a silly thing. I am also extremely fond of Vera Lynn. Dame Vera Lynn. Brilliant performer. She is now a big American star in Germany.

JS: Very marvelous lady

MS: And the big song I had at the time was Tulips from Amsterdam and the man who was joining us from EMI was Max Bygraves. He's there and I gave him a copy of the record because he wrote a song called [inaudible] and I wrote the other one Tulips from Amsterdam, that became the biggest song ever. It's still rolling around. But I don't know how long I'll be touching wood in the hopes to be around, gently quietly maybe without a stick maybe with my wife walking gently easy don't want to start running something I've done it . I know it will happen again with other people which will be very nice. I hope I haven't bored you

CC: Not in the slightest

MS: Because it's very embarrassing when they say: 'Oh he's that clever man, oh he's that clever dick.' And you could do nothing about people talk to derogatory way. I didn't ask him to say anything. I remember a very big song we have here [inaudible] - enormous right? And it was always called Johnny...

JS: ... is the boy for me.

MS: Johnny Is the Boy For Me. Big very big wonderful books or anything but then a lot of the French people were furious so he remembered they did Carnival of Love and the factories... I am now allowed to take the private lift, or was allowed to take the private lift but you kept your mouth shut.

DS Back to the lift

JS Back to the lift

DS: Well that was very good Marcel

CC: Yes, thank you very very much for your time

MS: I hope I haven't overdone it .

CC: No not at all.

MS: Don't make it, go big big with my head

CC: No

DS: It was excellent

CC: No it won't at all.