

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 31, 1950 and November 8, 1950

Description: This recording contains two interview segments from two different episodes. In the first interview segment, ER discusses moving from small towns to large cities and the importance of foreign language education with novelist Emily Kimbrough. In the following interview segment, ER discusses recent trends in American theater with actor and director Blanche Yurka.

Participants: ER, Elliott, Emily Kimbrough, Blanche Yurka

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[ER:] Being able to meet change, upset and sudden moves with humorous understanding and good grace, is indeed an admirable trait. And today, my guest is a living example of how to do it. Here with me is the well-known authoress, Miss Emily Kimbrough [1899-1989].

[Emily Kimbrough:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. It's a great pleasure to me to be on your program with you.

[ER:] Well I'm very happy to have you, Miss Kimbrough. You've told me about your new book, which deals with the problems of moving from a small town in Indiana to the large city of Chicago. Won't you tell our listeners some of the problems caused by this move?

[Emily Kimbrough:] I was quite a small child when we moved from the small town in Indiana where I was born, to the large city of Chicago. And yet I remember it very vividly. I was eleven years old at the time and I remember what an upheaval it was for all of us. I think it took me some years to realize actually what an upheaval it was for my parents as well as for my young brother and me and to understand that my parents were very young then too, and bewildered by this cataclysmic change.

[ER:] Well I think that is true. There is a tremendous um element of personal an-adjustment to a different way of life. Um it's not just uh physical adjustment, but it's an emotional adjustment to the differences between the surroundings of a small town and a very large city. What were the things that you found most difficult?

[Emily Kimbrough:] [Emily Kimbrough laughs] Well I think that I was aware the most of all perhaps of a sense of great isolation. Uh perhaps it's a curious thing to say, uh and yet my awareness was primarily of the fact that people in the large city didn't know me [Emily Kimbrough laughs]. I-I think a child—[ER and Emily Kimbrough overlap]—

[ER:] That's-that's something a great many people have experienced in large cities. They're lonelier than they are uh anywhere else.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, but curiously enough, what I'm trying to say is that I think a child never knows a great many adults. They pass by more or less in a kind of blur, and yet that child has a great sense of security in the small world of the little town because almost every inhabitant of that community either knows her by name, or knows who she is. And she expects that recognition. And I was so conscious of the fact when I walked along in the streets of Chicago. Not that I didn't know those people, but that they didn't know me [Emily Kimbrough laughs]. (2:59)

[ER:] Well that-that is the reaction of-of a child. [Emily Kimbrough: Yes.] Every time I've seen that over and over again. Um But I think too that there is a reverse to the picture. Persons who have been brought up in the city often have a terrible time adjusting themselves to the peace and quiet of the country.

[Emily Kimbrough:] I think that's quite true. I think there is such a change of pace that occurs that it is often very difficult for individuals to become geared down to the tempo of the country.

[ER:] Course, it always seems to me, strange, because I spent so much of my young life in the country and country has a natural-- it's a natural environment for me. And I remember my utter astonishment once when one of my friends, a young married woman like myself, told me that she could not bear to be left alone a night in the country because the night noises frightened her so. [Emily Kimbrough laughs]

[Emily Kimbrough:] How extraordinary!

[ER:] I never could-I never could understand it. And I think that uh one just has to realize that getting accustomed to the country is just as hard as getting accustomed to the city.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, I think that's quite true, though it does seem strange.

[ER:] I started my life living in New York City and in the country half of every year. [Emily Kimbrough: Yes.] Um so I had probably as big a city as we had in those days [both laugh], and adjusted to both with comparative ease. But I know how hard it-how hard it can be by watching other people [Emily Kimbrough: Yes, yes I'm sure it is.] do it. And um I-I think that's one of the interesting things and I'm really uh glad that you've made a study of it. [Emily Kimbrough laughs] And now I think we've got to let Elliott say a few words.

[Break 5:02-5:10]

[ER:] Well, now I want to come back for one minute to um your early move and move on a little bit. I believe that since your move from Indiana, you've had a good many other changes, haven't you?

[Emily Kimbrough:] [Emily Kimbrough laughs] Not any that were quite so cataclysmic as that one. The others seem to, such as they are, to have come um more or less as a natural course of events. But I feel very um, reticent and shy to talk to you, Mrs. Roosevelt, about moves [Emily Kimbrough laughs].

[ER:] Well as a matter of fact, I haven't-- uh I haven't moved actually so very much. Washington, New York and the country so you do—

[Emily Kimbrough:] And the world [Emily Kimbrough laughs].

[ER:] But I haven't moved--I've moved around the world but-but not-- [Emily Kimbrough: Yes.][ER and Emily Kimbrough laugh] But I feel fairly-fairly at home most places that I—

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes I'm quite sure you do.

[ER:] Tell me, when is your book--your new book going to be published, because I don't want to miss it.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Well that's very kind of you. It's just-just out this week. [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] It's just come out.

[ER:] Just out?

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, just out.

[ER:] Oh, now I won't be able to read it right away, because at the moment I have to tell everybody who sends me a book, "all I can do is read documents." I'm on the United Nations and I get nothing [Emily Kimbrough, laughing: yes] but official documents that have to be read every night. So I'll have to wait awhile, but I'll be reading it before long. (6:43)

[Emily Kimbrough:] Well that's very kind of you.

[ER:] Now, looking back over the years, it seems to me that people move much more often today. Not only from one house or apartment to another, but to different cities. Of course, the war and the widespread defense factories were responsible for much of this. But it still seems to be going on. Don't you think, Miss Kimbrough, that this is really common occurrence in America more than anywhere else? Of course, I'm not taking into consideration the poor people in Europe who have been forced to move.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Oh yes, I know. Well as a matter of fact, that is really the reason for my writing this book because as I have tried to say in the preface, the fact that the Kimbrough family moved from Indiana to Chicago is certainly not of the slightest interest to anyone. But during the last few years on the lecture tour, I have read in the local newspapers of almost every small town I've visited, a little item to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So and family have moved to a city. And it has sort of--each time brought back to me how it-how it was for us and it has occurred to me increasingly that that is a typically American inci-incident. That elsewhere in the world, people, unless as you say they've been forced to move, stay in one spot for generations. But i-it is a characteristic of the American people to move and primarily from the small community to the large.

[ER:] And yet as I went through Europe this year, it struck me that a good many people, a good many times, had uh through war in Europe, been forcibly moved. (8:37)

[Emily Kimbrough:] Oh yes, of course.

[ER:] And in spite of that, there is a sense of among them that they stay in one spot, they come back when you don't think the house is possible to live in.

[Emily Kimbrough:] But they always come back. [ER: Isn't it extraordinary.] They almost always--or try, to come back. And yet I-I think that is not an American characteristic. I think once the family in America has moved out of the small community, it very seldom goes back.

[ER:] They very seldom move back.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes.

[ER:] Is there a trend, do you think today, to move from the cities to the country?

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, I think-I think that is taking place now—

[ER:] You think that is taking place?

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, I do.

[ER:] Not to actual farming, but to um, to sort of suburban living isn't it?

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes and also to farming [ER: You do?] oh yes, within the last ten to fifteen years, people are having a sense of urgency to get away from cities and move out into the country.

[ER:] Do you think that it's a real urge to live in the country, or rather foolish uh-um urge which they try to satisfy to find safety.

[Emily Kimbrough:] I think that that rather hysterical um motive occurs in-in very small numbers. I think that in-in far--in far greater number of people it is a very deep-seeded desire to-to return to the country to go back to an easier way of living, easier in the sense of less nervous drain, less pressure of living.

[ER:] Well that's-that's true I think, I agree with you there. And now, our sponsors.

[Break 10:22-10:34]

[ER:] I wonder if you think, Miss Kimbrough, that this restlessness of ours has um any advantages. Does it make us more flexible, or is it just uh rather bad for us?

[Emily Kimbrough:] I think on the whole perhaps it's-it's a good thing. I think it has--it does tend to make us more flexible, more adaptable. On the other hand of course, don't move into a-an enormously strange environment as always, uh um a-a basic sameness of language and custom and habits, so that though I think we do become as a people rather uh easily capable of settling in, we don't experience very uh fundamental changes.

[ER:] Mm. I think that's true. Well now I'd like to um come away from migrations for a moment, because I understand that you have a great interest in our school systems and in the teaching of modern languages. And I'd like to ask you whether you feel that our present school system is adequate. Because this is a subject that really concerns me a great deal. (11:55)

[Emily Kimbrough:] Well it's a subject about which I care very deeply too as a-as a mother of young daughters. I do feel that the present school system is uh an excellent one, of course, of extremely high standard indeed, and of extraordinary accomplishment. But I do feel that there is one very great flaw in the system. And that is in our teaching of modern languages. And I think that prevails both in our public and our private schools, and in our colleges. I think modern languages are taught as something to be translated, and not to be spoken. And I think that in these days of such enormous urgency of our understanding of peoples of the world, we are pitifully inadequate in being able to express ourselves when we go abroad and that it is so-so enormously important for our young people to go abroad and once having got there, to be able to exchange ideas. And it is to me, little short of shocking that even our college graduates, who can translate very difficult passages, are unable to engage in the simplest form of conversation. I sometimes wish that we knew a great deal less about the literature of other countries, and more about how to ask for bread and butter. [ER and Emily Kimbrough laugh] (13:23)

[ER:] Well I am perfectly delighted to hear you say that, because for years I've been saying that this habit of um teaching a language as though you never had to talk it, [Emily Kimbrough: Exactly!] which seems to be the habit in our universities and in our schools [Emily Kimbrough: it is], uh was just simply idiotic, [Emily Kimbrough: Well I think it is.] because you can't even really enjoy literature if you can only read it, eh but never hear it.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Never hear it, exactly.

[ER:] And um I remember very well, a young cousin of mine who came to go to school um in Washington and stayed with us in the White House while she was going to school. And she got very bad marks in French. And so one evening I thought I'd find out what was the matter. And I asked her to come in and read me some passages in French, and I could not understand what she was reading! So I knew then completely what was the matter with her French! [ER and Emily Kimbrough laugh]

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes, precisely. Furthermore, I think another thing prevails that-that-that is-is to me, quite shocking. If a child comes into a school who has come from another country, or who has had some advantage of learning the language as it ought to be spoken, that child is immediately made to feel so an outcast, out of the group, that nine times out of ten, that child will immediately, or as soon as possible, adopt an American accent in order to conform to the group. (14:53)

[ER:] Yes, [Emily Kimbrough laughs] I think that's very apt to happen.

[Emily Kimbrough:] It's appalling.

[ER:] And um it takes a little while to persuade a young American that to learn languages is worthwhile.

[Emily Kimbrough:] But last summer ah-ah-abroad, I talked to a great many young people in Holland and learned from them. And these were people, these were young chambermaids, they were bellboys in the hotels, and I learned from each of these, that the--that English is not only compulsory in the very early grades of their schools, but it is compulsory as a language to be spoken.

[ER:] I know that. We found that in every one of the Scandinavian countries.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Yes.

[Break 15:38-15:49]

[ER:] You know, Miss Kimbrough, out at the United Nations, one is made extremely conscious of the value of really being familiar with one or two or three foreign languages. It makes such a difference in the friendliness with which you can um talk to people. If--they may be able to talk English, but if you can talk a little in their language their faces just light up. I've just been sorry I didn't-didn't learn Russian [Emily Kimbrough laughs] because I'm quite sure that I could at least now and then get a smile. [both laugh] But I--(16:30)

[Emily Kimbrough:] Wouldn't that be wonderful to be able to them to smile?

[ER:] Yes! The curious thing is, that we don't seem to want, at least I can't find any real interest, in a sort of universal, synthetic language. Have you found much interest?

[Emily Kimbrough:] No, very little interest. And I-I frankly do not see how that could come about. And I also see [Emily Kimbrough clears her throat] no reason why it should come about.

[ER:] Well that's the way I've come to feel, because I- I've found --as I say, no interest at all, but what I do find, and I find it out there among the delegates, perhaps because the United Nations is here, do you see? I find that English is becoming increasingly the language that everybody learns as a second language when it isn't their first.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Their own. Isn't that interesting? And yet, in a way I'm almost sorry that that should be so, because I'm afraid that will only increase our own complacency about learning only our own language, and I think that's a great pity indeed.(17:43)

[ER:] Well I would agree with you, because of course I think what we miss is something we get when we travel in another country [Emily Kimbrough: Exactly.] and can talk to all kinds of people about their country in their language.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Exactly, exactly.

[ER:] It makes an enormous difference.

[Emily Kimbrough:] And it's all very well to say that of course, with their closer proximity to one another, it is easier for them, because they hear other languages more frequently than we hear in this country. I think that that is in a sense, an evasion. I really think that it goes back to our system of education in which the stress is being laid always on our putting our own language as of paramount importance, that everything must be translated into English instead of our thinking, absorbing the actual manner of speech and way of thinking of, and in, another language.

[ER:] Course you've said something really that is very profoundly necessary today to have our people understand that if we are the leading democracy of the world, then we have a greater obligation than ever before to understand uh the people who are different from ourselves.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Of course, of course. And to get away from the sense of smugness.

[ER:] And we have, of course, too, many things to overcome because the mere fact that materially we have so much has made other people jealous of us. [Emily Kimbrough: Yes, of course.] And there's no question in my mind that one of the ways to get away from that is to make the effort to talk to people [Emily Kimbrough: I think so.] in the language they know.

[Emily Kimbrough:] Exactly, because I think it also gives an indication of a certain humility on our part, which I think--(19:39)

[ER:] Well I found knowing French well helped a great deal [Emily Kimbrough: Oh I'm sure that's true.] I've found that that uh would give them a feeling of uh my effort to talk something else-- [Emily Kimbrough:] And you're reaching out toward them.

[ER:] Now, in the short time we have left, I'd like to ask you a purely personal question? Do you still, Miss Kimbrough, have those beautiful French poodle dogs you used to show? [Emily Kimbrough laughs] [Emily Kimbrough:] How very surprising! I don't show them anymore, and I've only two poodles left. I'd like, in turn if I may, to ask about Fala.

[ER:] Oh, Fala is very well. He's still--he's getting old, but he still is very spry and I have his grandson. And uh between them they keep themselves company [Emily Kimbrough laughs] while I'm away a great deal of the time. Now I'm afraid that we really must go on to another part of the program. So I want to thank you very much, Miss Kimbrough for being with me today. Elliott, have you something to tell us?

[Break 20:45-20:56]

[ER:] On previous programs, we have had several outstanding persons. From radio, television, the stage, and screen who have told us many interesting and amusing things. This afternoon, my guest is another well-known and respected member of the theatrical profession who is working behind the scenes in the interest of good theater. She is Miss Blanche Yurka.

[Blanche Yurka:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, thank you for all those kind words. [Blanche Yurka laughs]

[ER:] Well, as many of our listeners know, Miss Yurka, you are probably the foremost interpreter of the plays of Henrik Ibsen [1828-1906] as well, of course, as many other diversified roles. Also, you are one

person who has had the fun of playing with a great many notable people before they were so well known. Can you tell us of any of those dark horses, so to speak? [Blanche Yurka laughs]

[Blanche Yurka:] Yes, I--that is a subject that I love to talk about because I think it is very exciting to uh sense a talent in a young person before eh the general public has caught up with them. Uh just to go to the first part of your suggestion about the Ibsen plays, I think it's extremely interesting, it is to me at least, because I was somewhat a pioneer in-in bringing his plays into active Broadway production, uh not doing them off in a little corner somewhere in a small off-Broadway theater, but really throwing the plays into competition with other Broadway successes--that we are going to have this year a revival of one of his very finest plays, *The Enemy of the People*. Which is going to be done with a magnificent cast of Fredrick March [1897-1975] and-and Florence Eldridge [1901-1988]. In other words, giving the- giving poor Mr. Ibsen the benefit of a magnificent, first class production, which sometimes he is forced to do without. So I think we've really caught up with Mr. Ibsen, and ceased to regard him as a classic, and are beginning to think of him as a good, important box office playwright.

But, as to the second subject you've touched on, the persons that I've had the fun of playing with before they were known, I think one of the outstanding and really interesting ones was a little girl who also made her debut on Broadway in Ibsen. We were doing *The Wild Duck* at the 49<sup>th</sup> Street Theater uh as one of a series of Ibsen plays; I did the entire season of Ibsen. And uh we had to make a change in the character of Little Hedwig; the girl who was playing it didn't want to leave her family. She had just been married and she wanted to stay in New York. And uh my stage manager came to me and said, "There's a little girl playing down at The Cherry Lane Theater, and she's just a youngster, but I have a hunch that she could play this part." And in any case, as you know, the play has a great deal to do with this little girl's eyes. She's going blind and-and uh straining them a great deal. He said "She has some-- a pair of the most extraordinary uh individual kind of eyes that I've ever seen." He said, "They're not just beautiful eyes, but they're--they have--they have a quality about them that is unique, and why don't we see if she can play the part?" So he brought this youngster up, she--tiny little slip of a thing looked about fourteen years old, she was actually I believe sixteen. And uh she read a few lines, and in less than a moment, you realized that she--you always can tell, within the first three lines someone speaks whether they can act or not, you don't have to do the whole scene. And I said, "Well that's enough, you don't need to worry about that, you're it." And it happened to be a girl named Bette Davis. [Elliott Roosevelt: Oh wow!] [All laugh] [ER: that's interesting] Which I think is rather fun. It gave her tremendous success, and incidentally, she has just done, I think, what's been one of her greatest performances. I saw a preview the other day of a play called *All About Eve* in which she really does a most courageous performance. She makes herself look completely uh unglamorous. She shows herself in the dressing room, she's an actress with her face slathered with cold cream, and her hair slicked back and tied back as we all--of course we all-all of us look horrible when we're in that state. And she makes no compromise, she makes the not the slightest effort to-to soften it as so many people do to glamorize themselves so that you don't believe what you're seeing. And I remember one actress playing a scene in which she was in the midst of a blitz, and uh hiding in a cellar. And uh the close up showed these eyelashes that practically scraped her eyebrows, you know, and I instantly you stopped believing it, you just didn't believe it. But Bette was having no such nonsense in this performance. She really, really goes to town in showing us an honest performance of uh a woman who quite frankly is very worried about the fact that she is aging. And uh that is the whole theme of the play. This-this well-known actress who uh is-is uh-uh haunted by the fact that she is uh not going to be a glamor girl much longer. I think it's very exciting that actresses are beginning to be allowed to play adult parts, having to do with really interesting aspects of human development. I mean they're not all being shoved into these uh cellophane, be-glamoured parts that uh sometimes have very little relation to real life. [ER: Mhm.] I think Miss [Gloria] Swanson, I think it was Miss Swanson's successes, [ER: yes] and perhaps they've been the precedent to this. And now I'm-I'm sure we'll have them all willing to uh admit to being over twenty.[Laughter.]

[ER:] In a way, I think it's because we're growing up in the theater, because um I-I believe that there have been many actors and actresses abroad who, as they grew older, did almost um uh become more uh endeared to the public, because in the roles which they took um they-they really uh matured and-and did a better job. (27:41)

[Blanche Yurka:] I quite agree with you, and I've always deplored the fact that on our stage. There has been a kind of fetish of worshipping youth. Because after all, you cannot uh-you cannot learn to act in twenty minutes. It takes uh easily eight or ten years at the least before you have a co-command of your craft. And then there is, as we know, beauty in every stage of uh development. There's the beauty of character and of understanding. I think it has been of great pity, and we have sh--the public has been uh misguided in its uh clamor for extreme youth and the adolescent love story. And I'm very happy to see some of that uh obsession giving way to a greater interest in the development of human nature, every aspect of-of any human being's development is interesting if it's interestingly presented, isn't it?

[ER:] Of course, I remember a-a b-novel-el and uh I don't know whether it was ever made into a play, I don't remember it as a play. It was a novel called *If Winter Comes*. And um I was interested because the heroine-ine uh was an old lady, eh.

[Blanche Yurka:] Really?

[ER:] And it was the story of a woman who had um uh--it went back and told the story of her life. But as an old woman uh she had so much to give. [Blanche Yurka: Yes, of course.] And she then gave it [Blanche Yurka: Yes] and again really lived on-on even though she was alone, practically. And—

[Blanche Yurka:] Yes. Well there is another phase of it too. I'm hoping will all my heart that through the efforts of-uh a very wonderful organization which I should like to speak in a moment, though I believe you're going to give it a great deal more attention a little later on. That is the uh American National Theater and Academy. I believe we will eventually uh create a theater in which there is some measure of security, some measure of continuity for the activity of players. And that too will build up this interest and affection for people of more adult and matured talent. Because people will grow fond of them through seeing them repeatedly through the years, and constantly.

[ER:] It seems to me there are two things that uh we have to try to do. One is to ensure [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] continuity, and where there is an ability to go on, the appreciation uh of talent, which can go on, and also the opportunity for young talent to break in. Those are the two—

[Blanche Yurka:] And to benefit by the knowledge that can be shared with them through their familiarity with the work of more mature artists.

[ER:] It's the-it's the two things one has to bring together. [Blanche Yurka: yes] Well now I think Elliott looks as though he wanted to talk for a minute. [Blanche Yurka laughs]

[Break 30:54-31:04]

[ER:] It seems to me, Miss Yurka, that perhaps its only because I've had the chance in the last few years to go to the theater more often, but it does seem to me that in the past few years there have been more hit plays on Broadway which are of a serious nature, uh which are what I believe is called "good theater." Are there more of these plays today do you think than there used to be? And if there are, what trend do you think has caused this? (31:40)

[Blanche Yurka:] Well that is a very interesting uh aspect of the theater today, and I presume it could be explained in a good many ways. One that I--one explanation that my instinct tells me might have to do with it, is that I think the-the emphasis has shifted to plays, rather than to players. I think the star worship, the personality worship that uh used to dominate our theater perhaps ten or twenty years ago when--when uh great stars would become the favorites of the public and then managers would try to find "vehicles" they called them I believe, in which they could continue to exploit the particular quality of that uh--that had made that player successful. Uh I think that interest has shifted to the movies. I think it's in the motion picture field that that kind of hero worship is now finding its expression. And uh the legitimate theater, as we call it, is perhaps uh shifting to--to plays, rather than players in sheer self-defense. Also, I think people have had a chance to learn a great deal more about the craft of the of--of playwriting so that uh standards are perhaps a little more exacting. Certainly, if one reads, as I sometimes do, the plays of say thirty years ago in which well-known players whom we all loved, I know when I first came to New York at the age of twelve I went to the theater day and night and uh adored some of the popular players, and I--and I read now some of the plays they appeared in which they had long runs, and I am simply appalled by the naivete of those scripts. If you were to compare them with the plays, well not even compare them to anything--they were simply--simply amazingly naive and uh thin. Uh thinking of a play for instance that Miss [Ethel] Barrymore [1895-1957] had a great success in called *The Country Mouse*, well that play never could--could never be done today and yet she was utterly enchanting in it, and had some personal magic that made it seem important. But when you compare it with the plays, for instance of Mr. Robert Sherwood [1896-1955], or Mr.[Arthur] Miller [1915-2005] or uh Mr. [S.N.] Behrman, the-the meatiness of these plays and the adult quality of the dialogue is so noticeable and so impressive. I heard uh the radio broadcast of *There Shall Be No Night* a few Sundays ago, and I sat there absolutely uh enchanted with the beautiful truthfulness and humanity of the dialogue. No wasted--no cliches, and no wasted uh romanticizing of the subject, just honest human speech of a most uh--uh distinguished and uh delightful group of people played by Miss Lunt--Mr. [Alfred] Lunt and Miss [Lynn] Fontanne. I believe that--also that the printing of plays, the circularizing of them through the channels of play, uh well the French people [Samuel French Inc.] or Samuel French [1821-1898]. I mean the fact that people can read plays, and study them, has made uh audiences perhaps more critical and consequently raised the standards. Certainly the successful plays, the serious plays that we're speaking of, uh show a very noticeable uh increase in value. (35:28)

[ER:] Another case of growing up.

[Blanche Yurka:] Yes, yes! Wouldn't it be delightful if we really were becoming adults in the theater?

[ER:] Well it's always seemed to me a pity that people throughout the country can't have the opportunity of seeing uh some of the really uh best plays which are really often only seen in the big cities. That means that out um in the country areas uh there is almost exclusively the movie and nothing else. And I have always felt sad about that and I wondered if you thought we'd ever overcome that. (36:13)

[Blanche Yurka:] Yes, I think something is happening which will create not a s--repetition of the old touring companies uh where actors went out and toured for a whole year on a same play. Uh I believe that we are facing a completely revolutionary uh development in the theater. And I'm very happy to say that--that I was a part of its initial effort. Uh it was when a group of women uh whom I happened to know extremely well uh decided that we needed in this country something that would correspond to the National Theaters abroad. And consequently, uh an effort was made to interest people in key positions uh to see if we couldn't arouse a certain understanding on the part of the government in this thing because we felt very strongly, and do, that this is a national uh asset that we are lacking; a cultural force that--that we are not taking advantage of. And uh So we dreamed up the idea of a federal charter and I know that you yourself were--were very sympathetic-- [ER: I remember it very well] very sympathetic. I know that my two dear friends Mrs. [Amory Hare] Hutchinson and Miss [Mary Stewart] French eh uh were allowed to

talk to you and had great help from your sympathetic re-uh reaction to it. So that when I had come home one year from Europe, with uh Senator Robert Wagner [1877-1953]--it was after I'd been going to a lot of uh uh--attending lot of festivals in Europe, theater festivals and I was full of the feeling that we should have something of that sort in this country, and poor man, I used to walk him around the deck for miles, and talk nothing but the national theater to him, so when the time came for um my two friends to go down to Washington, I was able to give them a letter to him and say "Well this is what it was all about." And he was simply wonderful as-as perhaps you know, he helped uh further the idea, and made contacts and-and- and went to work, all through a very hot summer and then I was in Hollywood at the time, doing *A Tale of Two Cities*, and I had a wire from Miss French saying, "Do wire Senator Wagner, the dear man has put through the charter." And of this federal charter which gives us the-the uh blessing of the government, I think we're going to be able to go out through the country and create an interest in, and the nucleus of, local regional theaters in which the finest plays will be played by the finest actors that our stage is blessed with. (39:01)

[ER:] And that will be simply a wonderful thing I think. Now I am going to ask you one more question, because I really hope that your activities behind the scenes will not mean that you are not going to give us the pleasure of seeing you on the stage again. Have you any plans for the future?

[Blanche Yurka:] Oh yes, Mrs. Roosevelt, I never stop eh having plans, I-I uh--someone asked me once, casually, a moving picture interviewer said "well when do you plan to retire?" and I looked at him in absolute astonishment because such an idea had never occurred to me as ever being anything that anyone would ever think about! Uh I-I--as a matter of fact I'm very, very excited about the prospect. Unfortunately I'm-I'm not free to-to tell you what it is, but it's going to be a most distinguished revival of a very great play. And uh when the news is published, I think you will agree with me that it's something every actress would love doing.

[ER:] Well that's wonderful news--[unclear]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You know I'd like to break in and explain uh what all this external noise is about, because there's a very good fire evidentially going on outside of our hotel. We have fire engines dashing up and down the street, and making an awful racket. I hope our audience is able to hear you today, Miss Yurka. [Blanche Yurka laughs]

[ER:] Well I-I-I hope it isn't a real fire, but not so long ago, we had one in the cafeteria. Right here--  
[Blanche Yurka:] Really?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, we had one right here in the hotel.

[Blanche Yurka:] Oh dear! Oh dear! Well that should have added great excitement to your broadcast.

[ER:] Well I hope we're not really going to have one now, because I'm more interested in um talking about um the possibilities of uh this national theater actually reaching out into all parts of the country, because I remember very well that during the war, that a great many of our soldiers told me that they had seen theater, real theater, for the first time in their lives [Blanche Yurka: Isn't--I think it's shocking! Don't you, Mrs. Roosevelt?] and were excited. Oh shocking! [Blanche Yurka: I think it's shocking that that should be true.] But they were excited over Shakespeare [Blanche Yurka: Exactly!] and simply thrilled so that I uh-I think it would be wonderful if we could really get it done.

[Blanche Yurka:] Yes I believe if we can just make it easy for people in their own states, I-well I-I'd settle for forty-eight theaters first. And then we must have forty-eight hundred after that.

[ER:] That's grand! [Blanche Yurka laughs] Now it was good of you to come this afternoon, Miss Yurka. And I know that all of our listeners, as well as myself, think it splendid of you to make such an effort to have good theater. Thank you very much.

[Blanche Yurka:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] And now, Elliott has a message for you.

(41:59)

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