

# Lord Lew Grade (film/television producer)

## 25/12/1905 - 14/12/1998

by [admin](#) — last modified Aug 27, 2008 03:47 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** Lew Grade immigrated to London from the Ukraine in 1912 and gradually became one of the most influential figures in the history of British television. Leaving school at 14, he entered the entertainment industry as a dancer, before establishing a talent management company. The business grew after WWII, and in 1954 Grade moved into television by bidding for one of the new ITV network franchises. The resulting channel, ATV, was launched the following year and soon became associated with entertainment drama aimed at a transatlantic audience. Notable successes as a producer included *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955-59), *The Saint* (1962-69) and *The Muppet Show* (1976-81). Grade also worked, with occasional success, as a film producer. *The Return of the Pink Panther* (1975) remains his most popular credit. **SUMMARY:** In this interview, Lord Lew Grade talks to Alan Sapper about his career as a producer in the British film and television industry. After an early career as a dancer, Grade set up a theatrical agency in 1934. He talks about the growth of this business, and his move into commercial television during the 1950s. He briefly discusses the films and television productions he has been involved in making, including films such as *The Eagle Has Landed* (1976) and *Raise the Titanic* (1980). The main focus of this interview, however, is Grade's personal business style, his good relationship with the Trade Unions (including ACTT) and his thoughts on what kinds of qualities he looks for in good drama.

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Interviewer: Alan Sapper

Interviewee: (Lord) Lew Grade

Tape 1, Side 1

**Alan Sapper :** Well, I've got to mention your name Lord Lew Grade, and it's good to be speaking to you and interviewing you for the archive. What I would like to suggest is, could you in your own words, and not too extensively, talk about the beginning. The beginning of where ...

**Lew Grade :** Television.

**Alan Sapper :** ...you started from. Well, no, before television; your life performing.

**Lew Grade :** My life.

**Alan Sapper :** Your life, yes. But not...

**Lew Grade :** In short terms...

**Alan Sapper :** ...not like your book but...

**Lew Grade :** ...right.

**Alan Sapper :** Did you for instance first know that you had a talent for performing, even as a child, when you were young?

**Lew Grade :** No, I didn't. What happened was, when I came to England in 1912 I was five and a half, I came from Russia, place called Tokmak, which was on the Crimea, near the Black Sea. Couldn't speak English. I had to learn to speak Yiddish first because I lived in the East End... and when I learned English I went to school and I was eight. When I was at school I was hopeless at every subject except arithmetic. I was in my own words a genius at arithmetic and I won five scholarships and eventually ... because I was not a British subject I couldn't get the scholarships. But I went in for one when I was fourteen and a half called the Trade Scholarship because my school loved me to go in, and ...

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, was an honour...

**Lew Grade :** ... was prestigious for the school to get scholarships and I won that and my mother wanted me to be a doctor and of course that was hopeless for me and I wanted to go in for business training ... [indecipherable] A friend of mine came to my apartment and said "Why go to university or schools or colleges to get business training? Let him have actual business training." And he got me a job with a firm and I went through the all the various departments... I decided to leave and I started an embroidery manufacturing business with my father, and then came the craze of the Charleston, and I used to go to ballroom dancing every week with a very good friend of mine ... called Sydney Sal [?] and I was not a great ballroom dancer, but just a passable ballroom dancer, but then came the Charleston and I found that I was an expert at this [laughs]. And I went in for competitions non-stop and won them all. Eventually there was a competition at the Royal Albert Hall, December 15th, 1926, the World Charleston Championship. I went in for it, I won it and my prize was four weeks' engagement starting at Christmas that year, like two weeks after the competition.

**Alan Sapper :** Competition.

**Lew Grade :** At the Piccadilly Hotel in London, which is now the Meridian.

**Alan Sapper :** Meridian, yes.

**Lew Grade :** Fifty pounds a week...

**Alan Sapper :** in those days...

**Lew Grade :** ...dancing for three and a half to four minutes. I told myself "This is the life". And then I decided to turn professional and it was tough, very tough. I was on tour, with revues and everything and then went to Paris ... when I left the show and the [indecipherable] act which I found very tough to do, to dance for twelve minutes, but eventually I found little gags in between to give me a few seconds breather. And whilst I was working on tour on the Continent I saw lot of acts, and I recommended them to Joe Collins, who was my agent at that time in England . And he booked them just on my recommendation, he kept on saying "send more, send more". And eventually there came a period in 1934 when I felt that I can't continue as a dancer because I used to fall on my knees during my act, and my knees bled every night, so I thought I gotta stop this.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes.

**Lew Grade :** And I decided to set up my own agency. And eventually Joe Collins offered me a job, but I didn't want a job. And eventually I conquered the European market and controlled most of the circus acts and novelty acts and speciality acts. He then made me a partner, I was very happy with that. And then I went into the Army, foolishly, I did not have to go, it was a very trying experience the first three months, but afterwards I found my metier.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** And I enjoyed it and stayed there till I got married in 1942, because I had a blank discharge. That means a discharge without a date filled in. And I could fill in the date whenever I wanted to. And we decided to get married, my wife and I, on June 23rd 1942, and I got discharged. And by that time I'd left with Collins, because my brother Leslie was in the Air Force ...and he said I want somebody to take care of my business and I took care of his business, and we became Lew and Leslie Grade.

**Alan Sapper :** The famous Lew and Leslie Grade.

**Lew Grade :** And then... we persevered, and gradually - when he came out of the Air Force, he didn't come out until very late 1946. And we built up our agency into a very prominent agency. I would say we were the leading agency in Europe. Then in 1947 I went to America, and I represented MCA in Europe and brought all the talent here, and booked all the European talent in America. Numerous British stars, Norman Wisdom, Richard Hearn as Mr Pastry, Alma Cogan, you name it, I booked all the talent. And...I built up quite an important agency in America, because by that time I'd opened my own agency in America.

**Alan Sapper :** Who ran the agency in America for you?

**Lew Grade :** A fellow called Eddie Elcort[?], but I used to go every...

**Alan Sapper :** You used to - almost commute.

**Lew Grade :** Almost every week. I mean I'd go there for three or four weeks at a time. Then I opened up in California and we were a very prominent agency and I made lot of friends and then came the advertisements for television franchises.

**Alan Sapper :** That was in the early 50s, wasn't it?

**Lew Grade :** That was in 1954, the advert came out. And we applied, and by that time I had formed a consortium which I called ITC, which company is still in existence.

**Alan Sapper :** Tell me something about the interview. I mean, what was the atmosphere when you went to apply for the licence?

**Lew Grade :** Oh, we didn't get the licence.

**Alan Sapper :** You didn't?

**Lew Grade :** What happened was they said "you are too powerful", we would control all the talent. And all the theatres. Because I had Val Parnell and Prince Littler, Stewart Cruikshank from Howard and Wyndham, they felt that we controlled the business and they said "we should be the main suppliers of programmes to the other contractors". Norman Collins had tried to get his thing going, he got the licence for the London Weekend and five days in the Midlands. But they couldn't get the people to support him...

**Alan Sapper :** No.

**Lew Grade :** So the Independent Broadcasting Authority, as it were then IBA, called us and said "would you join them" and we joined them...

**Alan Sapper :** They invited you...

**Lew Grade :** So Val became the managing director, Val Parnell that is, I became the deputy managing director. And I suggested that Prince Littler, who owned the Moss Stoll group, become the chairman. And we went on from there ...

**Alan Sapper :** And it was called ATV...

**Lew Grade :** And then I started, what I did when we didn't have the licence ... We had a certain amount of capital. Hannah Weinstein came to me with an idea of making 39 half-hours of a series called 'Robin Hood'. I said "ok". And we went ahead and we sold it in America; that was my first sale in America. And we made a hundred and sixty-three episodes or something.

**Alan Sapper :** Did you really? God! That was incredible.

**Lew Grade :** So that was a tremendous success and we made a lot of money. And ITC was at that time a separate entity. ATV, as we were then known - originally we were ABC, became known as ATV - felt that it might be a conflict of interests and we did a deal and they took it

over. And then in 1962 Val was no longer managing director, I became the managing director. And I felt that there was a wide market for British product here, because I felt that we had top talent here in the creative area...

**Alan Sapper :** Lew... and I was alive and active in those days...you were one of the few people who had that confidence. It's incredible.

**Lew Grade :** I had confidence and I started making series non-stop, impossible to calculate how many series, but I do know that ITC have 9,800 hours of television programme that I was responsible for.

**Alan Sapper :** Incredible.

**Lew Grade :** They still have it. And I like the new people at ITC. And then I decided to go after I'd made, no - let me go back - RAI had a project called 'Moses'.

**Alan Sapper :** Oh, yes, the Italian company .

**Lew Grade :** And they wanted me involved with it. 'Moses, the Lawgiver'. So I then got Burt Lancaster to play Moses and it was a huge success and after that, with the suggestion made to me by Pope Paul that he hoped that one day I would do the story of Jesus, I said I would, and then two weeks later I announced that I was doing 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

**Alan Sapper :** Incredible.

**Lew Grade :** That became, and still is, probably the most wonderful series that has ever been produced. The amount of talent that I had in it was unbelievable. Everybody wanted to appear in it and I had about twenty stars: Robert Powell, I cast personally as Jesus of Nazareth.

**Alan Sapper :** Did you? Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** Although at first Zeffirelli was against it.

**Alan Sapper :** Who did he want?

**Lew Grade :** But I insisted ...and then he tested him and then he said: "You're right"... Then I realised that I had achieved everything that was possible in television. So I started with movies.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah. And that was the transition point. You were at the top of the tree in television in your programme mix that you were putting out in the UK, in American exports and production...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah, but it was suitable for here, like 'Edward VII' that I made...

**Alan Sapper :** Very good.

**Lew Grade :** When I made it I had no thought that I would ever be able to sell it in America... but when the programme was finished I said "This I am going to sell in America", and of course I did.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. And that was as ATV, wasn't it? Yes.

**Lew Grade :** ATV. Yes. I sold, you know, it didn't matter where the programme was, it was all one company. Although they were separate names.

**Alan Sapper :** Separate, yes.

**Lew Grade :** But we kept the name ITC. And I made numerous movies. Some not so successful... but I was very proud of some of the films that I made, I mean 'Capricorn One', 'The Eagle Has Landed'... Then I made 'On Golden Pond' which was a huge success...

**Alan Sapper :** Great film, yes.

**Lew Grade :** Phenomenal success, which paid for three 'Raise the Titanic's, although it's rather been exaggerated is what we lost on 'Raise the Titanic', because in those days we took eight million at the box office in America. If you count that in 1977 figures, it's like 30 million now. But there you go.

**Alan Sapper :** But you had knockers, didn't you? You had one...

**Lew Grade :** I had one or two that were not so successful. But 'Sophie's Choice' was a tremendous success, 'Voyage of the Damned', 'Movie, Movie', the Pink Panther pictures, and then 'The Muppets'. 'The Muppets' were probably my greatest financial success, I made 'The Muppets' when everybody in the network in America had turned it down. I said "we're gonna make it without the sale".

**Alan Sapper :** That was a risk.

**Lew Grade :** And I made it and we ran for five years, then I made two Muppet movies and then I made another movie with Jim Henson called 'Dark Crystal'. And that's how I carried on in my career.

**Alan Sapper :** And the films that were not so good, when you look back...

**Lew Grade :** They're not bad.

**Alan Sapper :** Can you understand why they didn't succeed?

**Lew Grade :** Now, the films that were not so good were only about ... three...now...one of them was with Charles Bronson. The reason I did it is because I was stuck for a film, I made a contract with him for three pictures. Therefore, I had to take anything that I could get.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes.

**Lew Grade :** And because I was so active in so many different spheres of ATV I had no time to personally supervise each picture. Now when I make a film I am at it all day long. I am virtually producing it.

**Alan Sapper :** You are a true producer. Yes.

**Lew Grade :** Go through the script word by word, change the words, put in an additional dialogue, and do all that much.

**Alan Sapper :** You do all that. Yes. And you have a much better, closer relationship with the director.

**Lew Grade :** Tremendous relationships with directors. I've had most of the good ones, Alan Pakula, Richard Donner, Stanley Kramer. 'Raise the Titanic' was shot in Malta. Now I could not keep going to Malta, I never even went to Malta, I do not know what Malta looks like. I had to leave it to other people. But as one always says, "the buck stops here". I was responsible for it, but... and actually I think it's a good film.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, I saw it and I didn't think it bad at all.

**Lew Grade :** It's a good film. But there was too much hype about it. About the cost and that. So, you know, the press ...

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, it really...and when anybody is successful, you know, there's always somebody who wants to put the mockers on it.

**Lew Grade :** There was only about three films with which I was disappointed. And otherwise I had carried on and I am still working...

**Alan Sapper :** Tell us something about the time you left ...

**Lew Grade :** When I left ATV?

**Alan Sapper :** Is that what it was...

**Lew Grade :** It was called afterwards Associate Communications Corporation.

**Alan Sapper :** ACC, yeah. You were producing programmes there. And films.

**Lew Grade :** When I left.

**Alan Sapper :** Then you went to Embassy.

**Lew Grade :** I made four films based on Barbara Cartland's books.

**Alan Sapper :** That was in Embassy, wasn't it?

**Lew Grade :** No.

**Alan Sapper :** No?

**Lew Grade :** I joined Embassy with my greatest friend Jerry Parentio[?] who was the most wonderful man. And I've known him for many years and I went he knew that I wanted to leave ATV because I had three more years on my contract, but I just could not stand the environment.

**Alan Sapper :** Because that bloke came out ...

**Lew Grade :** Because all I ... this man cared about was money. I cared about people. Were more important to me than the money. And ...

**Alan Sapper :** So you left ACC ...

**Lew Grade :** I left June 22nd 1982, I joined Embassy on June 23rd 1982.

**Alan Sapper :** That's incredible. That's with your friend Jerry.

**Lew Grade :** And I was with him until he sold the company to Columbia. And he then bought Loews Theatres in America, which was a huge theatrical group, and made me vice-chairman. I then started up on my own, called it the Grade Company. And I made a film called 'The Champions' with Bob Champion and the story of his life...

**Alan Sapper :** With John Hurt, was that?

**Lew Grade :** How he recovered from cancer and the horse, Aldaniti, who had a broken leg and it was repaired and they won the Grand National together, and I thought it was a wonderful film.

**Alan Sapper :** Great story.

**Lew Grade :** And it did very very well.

**Alan Sapper :** Did it do well?

**Lew Grade :** It did very well.

**Alan Sapper :** Oh, good.

**Lew Grade :** One of the few films Embassy made money with. And then I decided, John Hough came to me with an idea of doing a series of films based on Barbara Cartland's books. And when I heard that she had sold five hundred million books throughout the world...

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, wow!

**Lew Grade :** I hadn't read any of the books, I said "Let's make them". And I went out and I sold them.

**Alan Sapper :** Did you actually sell them?

**Lew Grade :** Oh, yes. I sold two to CBS, two to Turner, and then they wanted me to make more but I had enough of that, because it was ... they were beautifully made and ...but very costly.

**Alan Sapper :** Well-dressed, I understand.

**Lew Grade :** Beautifully dressed.

**Alan Sapper :** People were saying how....

**Lew Grade :** The costumes were phenomenal, and we used to go to twelve different locations on each film, which was murder in moving the crews about. And the crews were wonderful, they liked working with John Hough, everybody likes working with John Hough, and they wanted me to make more - and I didn't want to. And then I did 'The Biko Inquest' with Albert Finney, with a fellow called Peter Shaw.

**Alan Sapper :** Oh, yes.

**Lew Grade :** A producer. And ever since then I have been developing projects and I have got a lot of development, and I am continuing because I love the business...

**Alan Sapper :** You are looking at loads of projects at the moment, aren't you?

**Lew Grade :** Yes, I am.

**Alan Sapper :** And you are trying to get the finance and the packaging together.

**Lew Grade :** Yes, I use my own money for development. That's the only advantage that I have but the time is getting near when I have to stop.

**Alan Sapper :** When you can't ....that's life.

**Lew Grade :** But I have got four or five very important projects, at least I think they're important. I won't do anything that I don't believe in.

**Alan Sapper :** It's your own personal identity you want reflected in ...

**Lew Grade :** That's right. It's what I feel like - I don't like nudity and bad language. Sometimes you have to put in a little bit of bad language because the story absolutely calls for it...

**Alan Sapper :** When it's part of the story, yeah...

**Lew Grade :** But otherwise I am not a believer in that. Because when you look at all the wonderful films years back there was no nudity, no bad language and they were very successful and beautifully made. Like I saw a film called 'Sleepless in Seattle' which hasn't been shown here yet, with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. No bad language, nothing. Beautiful, most wonderful film and it's taking a fortune at the box office.

**Alan Sapper :** Is it?

**Lew Grade :** Yes ...and it will worldwide, which shows that the public will look at films that are not full of violence, and action, and nudity, and bad language. And I am working hard to try to get one off. I am sure I will. I am very confident, it's something I really believe in.

**Alan Sapper :** How are you getting on with the new people coming into the industry, the younger generation, you know, who are making a fortune in cable, satellite and all the rest of it?

**Lew Grade :** Well, they are all good friends of mine, I mean all the people in America... The most important, the three things in life that I have cared about: first is your family, second is your health and third is relationships and friendship. That's what counts. And I have a wealth of friends that makes me probably the richest man in the world in friends.

**Alan Sapper :** And you keep in touch with the new generations coming through?

**Lew Grade :** Oh, I see them all when I go to America, whenever I go, I see them all. And I keep in touch with the new generation here, there are a few young people that are doing quite well.

**Alan Sapper :** There are many young people...

**Lew Grade :** And we have great creative talent. Our technicians are probably the best in the world, they are amazing and they don't look at union rules, they work any hours if they love the project, love the people that are involved with. I found them absolutely remarkable, here.

**Alan Sapper :** And the tragedy is they don't have the work.

**Lew Grade :** No, in fact this film that I am going to make or hope to make, we'll start shooting in February or March if it all materialises the way it looks like, I will use a considerable number of British crews although the film is not being made here. But all the post-production will be done here. And the music will be done here. So ... because I believe that it is not a question of keeping the studios busy. I want to keep the people who are the workers who really made the film busy.

**Alan Sapper :** That's what we all want.

**Lew Grade :** Doesn't matter where it's done, as long as we use them.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, exactly.

**Lew Grade :** And England has the, Britain has the top technicians in the world, they're amazing.

**Alan Sapper :** Well, the number of Academy Awards they got! The number of awards they got all over the world! It proves your point.

**Lew Grade :** They're tremendous, very tremendous.

**Alan Sapper :** How do the Americans feel when you get, perhaps your finance from America, distribution in America, having British technicians working on the film even post-production wise? Do they object?

**Lew Grade :** They lump it, or they don't have it.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. Because they used to object, very, very strongly.

**Lew Grade :** Yes, because, you know, I know them well enough and they trust me. When you build it a relationship lasts forever.

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely. I always...

**Lew Grade :** A strange example. There's a man now who is head of ABC in America, called Bob Eiger[?]. I was in America a few weeks ago and I thought, I had never met him, I was in New York, I called him and he said "How are you?", I said "Fine", I say "We have never met", he says "Yes, we have". He says "I was in the sound crew of 'Salute to Sir Lew' in April 1975, for ABC."

**Alan Sapper :** Really?

**Lew Grade :** And he fixed up an appointment for me with the head of the network, the entertainment network in California. And the guy came and saw me, you know, so relationships last forever...

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely. I mean we are all knew from our side in the union - a hand shaken and that was it.

**Lew Grade :** You know, I never had problems with the union.

**Alan Sapper :** Never. I know you didn't.

**Lew Grade :** You know, there is one story you probably don't know, and I'll tell it to you now. I was producing three or four series a year on film. And that was the most I could do. But I felt that the other companies should produce film, television series. So I came up with an idea that I would approach the IBA and say that for every hour of filmed television series that are produced in this country we should have a half hour of extra quota. Foreign quota.

**Alan Sapper :** For films, yeah.

**Lew Grade :** Because they were much cheaper and therefore we could use that money towards making British films series. Then I told myself "I will have problems with the unions", so I thought I'll tackle them one by one. So I got Sir Tom O'Brien up to see me, we had a talk and he said "I would agree it but you will never get George Elvin to agree". I says "What happens if I get George Elvin to agree?" he says "You'll have NATKE's support". Because I intended to get the unions' approval before I went to the IBA. So I called George Elvin, he came up to see me, and he said "Well, it's good idea. It gives work to all the technicians, to all the people working in the industry. I will support it but you will never get approval from the Musicians' Union. And I forgot the name of the guy. Tough guy.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, Hardy Radcliff [?].

**Lew Grade :** Hardy Radcliff. You never get permission from Hardy Radcliff. I says if I get... he never mentioned Tom O'Brien, he mentioned Hardy Radcliff. So I saw Hardy Radcliff, and he also agreed

**Alan Sapper :** Really?

**Lew Grade :** But he said you'll never get approval, I think it was Frank Chapple then.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, the Electricians' Union.

**Lew Grade :** I saw Frank Chapple, and he approved. Then I called them all together for lunch and I said "you have all approved, now I am going to the IBA". Then I had second thoughts about it, maybe selfishly because I told myself everybody will do it to get another extra half-hour ... the market will be flooded with probably not such good material just to, you know, get the extra quota.

**Alan Sapper :** Just to fill it. Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** Are you getting me ok? I must get a little water.

**Alan Sapper :** Shall we stop for a moment?

**Lew Grade :** Another instance of my relationship with the unions. There is tremendous jealousy between Birmingham and Elstree. We produced a programme at Elstree which the ACTT in Birmingham said they will not transmit, because the transmission centre was Birmingham. Because they felt that the programme should have been made...

**Alan Sapper :** In the transmission centre, yeah.

**Lew Grade :** Right. So, I got in John Walton/Waltham[?] who was then the head of Public Labour Relations, talked to him and he said "No way are we going to do it". I said "Ok, I want the three shop stewards tomorrow morning at Birmingham. I am getting the train... I went to Birmingham and I went into a little dressing room with the three shop stewards. I said "Look, this programme has to go out". They said "No, it's a matter of principle with us". I said, "I

understand your principles but I want you to transmit it" and I said "I am leaving this building in fifteen minutes and I want an ok from you that you'll transmit it". They said "Why should we transmit it? It's against our principles!". I said "I know and I agree with you, but I want you to do it for me". They said, "But what do we tell the staff...the crews?". "Exactly what I said, I want them to do it for me". So they said "Ok, we understand. Give us ten minutes". They went away, ten minutes time they came back "Ok, we'll transmit it". That's relationships!

**Alan Sapper :** Incredible. Well, that's you!

**Lew Grade :** That's relationships.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, nobody else could have done that. But you only...you didn't do it off the top of your head, Lew, you did it from your experience and the way you dealt with people throughout your whole professional life.

**Lew Grade :** It's people that counts.

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely.

**Lew Grade :** I mean, I didn't care whether it's the lift man or whether it's the managing director of the company, they are all the same to me.

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely. You must have been absolutely astonished to what's happened to television, in the last two, three years.

**Lew Grade :** Oh! Unbelievable. I just can't understand it.

**Alan Sapper :** You know, this ... that Television Act has destroyed, you know, ITV as we knew it. As it served the public.

**Lew Grade :** Yes. It's a terrible thing to have a central planning committee who approve everything, I mean you can't make anything without first going to central committee - what's all the creative people for?

**Alan Sapper :** Well, they don't want creative people, they want factory workers.

**Lew Grade :** It's terrible.

**Alan Sapper :** Switching a bit to the film industry and how it's in such a poor way: what do you think is needed to revive the British film industry, Lew?

**Lew Grade :** They are making too many, what we would call, local films. You have to make, anything you put on film should be for the international market.

**Alan Sapper :** For the marketplace, not for you own personal benefit. Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** That's right. Must be suitable for your transmission, or for your public, in your country, but it must be suitable for the rest of the world.

**Alan Sapper :** But how are we going to get the money to do that? These days you need 20 million pounds or more!

**Lew Grade :** Well, if you find ... you can make a good film for five or six million pounds, seven million pounds.

**Alan Sapper :** But even that's difficult to get these days.

**Lew Grade :** Yeah, but if you find the right property, the right subject - I mean, look at the films Alan Parker has made - and [it] surprised me, because I saw 'The Commitments' which is a great film, and I am surprised that it did so well foreign, but it did.

**Alan Sapper :** It did very well in America.

**Lew Grade :** And it's very tough and you can't...you see, when you make a film for a million or two million pounds, you have no hope, you really have no hope... I mean you can make them, like you know. I won't make TV movies any more because they give two and a half million dollars in America, and you get maybe a million from the rest of the world, three and a half million dollars. So all the time you are fighting to get out. It's better to take a risk with a major movie, by major I don't mean 20 million pounds. I think you should be able to go up to eight to ten million pounds, you can make a wonderful movie. Once again, it all depends upon the words. And what the director does. You see, the trouble with this business, with the entertainment industry today - not 20 years ago, not 15 years ago - nowadays the people - they've got so much work to do that they don't read, they read the words, but that's not it. Just the words or the guidelines for the director and the producer, they are the guidelines.

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely. But, you know, there are still some directors who actually understand their true creative function.

**Lew Grade :** Oh, directors do. Directors do. It's the people you have to get to put up the money, like the studios. They don't understand.

**Alan Sapper :** No, they don't.

**Lew Grade :** They give them to readers and the reader gives them a two page synopsis, I don't think that this works. But they don't understand what's behind the visual concept.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. And the trouble is that the reader is not qualified to understand the needs of the production industry.

**Lew Grade :** And apart from that, he doesn't take into account, he reads the words. "She walked over to the table". He says, "Oh, she just walks over to the table". But what happens, what the director does before she walks over to the table?

**Alan Sapper :** And why does she walk over to the table?

**Lew Grade :** Yeah. And, you know.

**Alan Sapper :** I know - I absolutely agree with you. It's the problem we've been having all along in the last five years.

**Lew Grade :** I know. It's a very tough business, but some people make a success of it. I think. Polygram are really doing a great deal to help the film industry. [coughs]

**Alan Sapper :** Lew, you know, you've got an extremely good and human reputation., and you've been, you know, like this for 50 years. I would like to ask, how have you survived, because there's so many awful people in our industry. You may not agree with what I'm saying, but I'm telling you there are really nasty, vicious, vindictive people about. How have you survived in a shark infested water?

**Lew Grade :** Well, I don't deal with them.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, I know. Maybe you have been in a position you don't have to deal with them.

**Lew Grade :** No, I don't deal with them. I find everybody ... people know that I never break my word.

**Alan Sapper :** That's right.

**Lew Grade :** That's the most important thing.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** And,, they deal with me on that basis. When I say, "I have faith in this", you know, I am one of the lucky ones. You know. After all, I have been in the entertainment business, including my dancing years, for sixty-six years... it's quite a long time.

**Alan Sapper :** Incredible. And when you were ennobled and became Lord...

**Lew Grade :** It made no difference.

**Alan Sapper :** ...that's incredible. Tell me something...

**Lew Grade :** When I go to America...

**Alan Sapper :** Tell us something about this. How did you first hear about this? I mean, who told you for God's sake? Did you get any intimation this was going to happen?

**Lew Grade :** Yeah.

AS:. They asked you...

**Lew Grade :** One day I had a phone call from the private secretary of Harold Wilson, when he was Prime Minister.

**Alan Sapper :** Marcia?

**Lew Grade :** I don't know whether it was Marcia or ...it might not have been Marcia. It may have been somebody else. "And the Prime Minister would like to see you at eleven o'clock, tomorrow". I said, "I am sorry, it's impossible". "The Prime Minister wants to see you at eleven o'clock, tomorrow". ... I said, "I can't do it. I have got somebody coming from America, I am having lunch with him and I am not free". "But what time are you free?". "I can make it at three o'clock." Three o'clock I went to see the Prime Minister. He said "How are you?" He says "I would like to offer you a peerage for all you've done for the ... in the export field"...because before I was knighted for my contribution to television.

**Alan Sapper :** That's right, yes.

**Lew Grade :** I was taken aback, I said "is that what you wanted me for at eleven o'clock?" he says "The same thing". I said "If I had known I would have cancelled the lunch". And that was it.

**Alan Sapper :** And that was it, yeah.

**Lew Grade :** And it was great. I went and told my wife.

**Alan Sapper :** I bet she was delighted.

**Lew Grade :** And we had to keep it very secret until you get the official letter. And it was very exciting, and ... but I never looked for knighthoods, I never looked for peerages. To me, I love the industry. I love the whole entertainment world.

**Alan Sapper :** And in return the industry has the greatest respect and love for you, Lew. I mean...

**Lew Grade :** Oh, it's very nice. I find...

**Alan Sapper :** We always say, if Lew had been there, if we were in a difficult situation...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah.

**Alan Sapper :** if he had been there this wouldn't have happened.

**Lew Grade :** I'll never forget a thing that happened. When we went on strike with Equity, we were out of work...

**Alan Sapper :** I remember that.

**Lew Grade :** ...walked down for six months, six months of strike.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** Eventually was settled at a very heavy cost. Because Equity knew that they had us, we couldn't exist. The one thing they didn't do is the residual payments, they didn't worry about that because the contractors who did it they were not selling programmes, I was the only one. Eventually I said "We've got to do it". And Paul Croasdell [?] was then the head of the Negotiating Committee. I said, "Paul, I want have a meeting with you and Gerald Adorian and me. But I don't want you to say a bloody word other than "good afternoon"." And I called Gerald Adorian, and we went over to Rediffusion offices. Paul Croasdell said "Ok". We started off, and in thirty minutes we settled sixty territories.

**Alan Sapper :** Incredible.

**Lew Grade :** Thirty minutes. And we left then and Gerald Croasdell said "If we had done the deal... if we had dealt with the Equity strike the same way as we did today, there would have been no strike and it would have cost you much less money". Which shows you have to be straightforward and put the cards on the table. All the time.

**Alan Sapper :** Absolutely. Lew, I think we have gone through the story, as we can put it within this small time, because the alternative story would take a couple of days and perhaps a week. But, can I ask you just one final thing, Lew?

End of side 1 Tape 1, side 2

**Alan Sapper :** Well, Lew, we've gone through the story in this short time, and it could have been, you know, two or three days to go through the other story. But before we conclude, what advice would you give to people coming into the industry now, as producers or you know..?

**Lew Grade :** Directors...

**Alan Sapper :** ...as young people, financiers, or directors, what would you say to them? And they say "Look, Lew, we can't get money, we can't do this, we can't do that. What can we do?"

**Lew Grade :** In most cases, I would say the project is not right.

**Alan Sapper :** You'd look to the project.

**Lew Grade :** The main thing is the project.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** A well-known journalist sent me a script last week, I just returned it today. It's a good idea but it's too costly, and not only too costly it's ... There have been so many things previously like it, based on wartime pilots, you know, and things like that...

**Alan Sapper :** It's a rehash.

**Lew Grade :** There are so many rehashes.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, yeah.

**Lew Grade :** I know it's hard to find new things. Unfortunately, the public like action and adventure. They like action and adventure. I think you could do action and adventure without bad language.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes.

**Lew Grade :** Or nudity.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. Oh...

**Lew Grade :** You know.

THIRD VOICE: Certainly you can.

**Lew Grade :** And it's just...the thing is always the project. The key words are the basic idea. All you need is a basic idea. Like with this project that I am working on, all we had was the basic idea.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. But it is the way you deal with...

**Lew Grade :** Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite, switch, rewrite, switch, rewrite, rewrite...

**Alan Sapper :** Rewrite, but it is the way you deal with it.

**Lew Grade :** And eventually you get it near to perfection. It's never perfection. Because the director...

**Alan Sapper :** Would give the shooting script...

**Lew Grade :** Always gives it that extra thing, dimensions and things. You know.

**Alan Sapper :** When you are at this stage with you project, have you got a director in mind?

**Lew Grade :** I have a director in mind, of course, who works with me on it. John Hough.

**Alan Sapper :** Oh, he is very good. And what of the future, Lew? I mean, do you see there is a future in two ways, in two things: what's going to happen in your opinion to British television? Do you think we've lost it?

**Lew Grade :** I think there is going to be terrible troubles. I really believe that there is going to be, you know... eventually they talk about 500 channels, but let's assume there was only a hundred. I mean, now on Sky you can get 14 channels from September 1st, plus the four that are on in England, that's 16 [sic] channels you can get already. And you can get more if you've got a satellite. So it's going to be very hard for them all to exist and if you talk about...

**Alan Sapper :** And if they all exist on commercial revenue...

**Lew Grade :** I think, and they all talk about,, BBC taking advertising... That would be absolutely disaster.

**Alan Sapper :** Disastrous. Absolutely.

**Lew Grade :** Disaster. The BBC still have a chance of making it.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah. As long as they keep the licence fee method of financing.

**Lew Grade :** But if there is any other way, if it's by advertising, they've got no hope. Because, after all, we are a small country.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes.

**Lew Grade :** Fifty million people, or whatever it is.

**Alan Sapper :** But you see, you already see what's happening to ITV. They are losing money, they don't get sufficient revenue in to make the programmes, even if they wanted to make the programmes.

**Lew Grade :** When you think of...one, two, three, three breakfast programmes. Or four breakfast programmes...

**Alan Sapper :** Four breakfast programmes.

LG:...Four breakfast programmes, how can they all exist?

**Alan Sapper :** There is not that much Weetabix, is there?

**Lew Grade :** I think it needs a Michael Grade to put it all right.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes. Well, he is doing very well with Channel 4, isn't he?

**Lew Grade :** He's wonderful. I mean, I probably wouldn't have sold ATV, I didn't have to.

**Alan Sapper :** No. Yeah.

**Lew Grade :** I mean, when I sold I only had a certain number of voting shares, which held the key to the sale. Without my voting shares they couldn't buy ATV. If Michael Grade hadn't been my nephew, he would have been a natural successor to me. But he was a Grade, and I don't believe in nepotism.

**Alan Sapper :** No. But he is a person in his own right. He hasn't made his way because...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah, but, I mean, now. But, I mean, then...

**Alan Sapper :** Then, it would have been said... yes, absolutely. But he's doing well...

**Lew Grade :** Oh, he's wonderful. And he has got a real show business instinct, and talent. You know.

**Alan Sapper :** He has got pizzazz, as they say in America.

**Lew Grade :** Yeah.

**Alan Sapper :** And do you often go to America, still?

**Lew Grade :** About four or five times a year. I'll probably go about September 3rd or 4th.

**Alan Sapper :** And how are you getting on with the European Economic Community? Is that meaning anything different to the way you finance things? Do you get any resources from them?

**Lew Grade :** No. I don't go to them for money. Because you only go to them for development money.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah, exactly. I am not talking necessarily about the Commission, I am talking about the production people in Germany and France.

**Lew Grade :** Oh, well, I know them all very well... we are very close friends. I mean, Leo Kirsch in Germany, we are very close friends. And Silvio Berlusconi, I started in... but now I mean, if there was something, like I've got something that I am trying to get away for television which is unique, but I can't do it without an American sale.

**Alan Sapper :** Because that's where the revenue is.

**Lew Grade :** Because it's that expensive. It's a very, very expensive project. But I am still not giving up. And I can get all the European money that I want.

**Alan Sapper :** You can. Because this is...

**Lew Grade :** No, I mean I know I can...

**Alan Sapper :** ... this is the counterbalance, isn't it?

**Alan Sapper :** If Europe was in a business sense, I don't mean politically, but in a business sense is bigger than America. It's 350 million...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah, but the trouble is they still don't get such big money in advertising.

**Alan Sapper :** No, they don't.

**Lew Grade :** A lot of them, you know, small monies make small profits, you know.

**Alan Sapper :** That's why most Germans...

**Lew Grade :** I mean, Norway and Sweden, little monies, you know.

**Alan Sapper :** Unfortunately, it's peanuts for the international market.

**Lew Grade :** When you're making a project like this is, like four hours, say it will cost 12 million dollars. Will you get that without a sale in America?

**Alan Sapper :** No, you won't get it without a sale in America.

**Lew Grade :** You get at least half from America. And I'll keep at it.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, I'm sure you will. I can't imagine you giving up.

**Lew Grade :** I'm not going to give up. I just haven't got enough to do.

**Alan Sapper :** Yes, well, because you're like every other film producer, if I may say so...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah.

**Alan Sapper :** It's not one after the other, you have to look and struggle and fight...

**Lew Grade :** Yeah.

AS:... and fit in.

**Lew Grade :** Yeah, to fight. And if you believe in something you keep on with it, don't just give up.

**Alan Sapper :** I agree. And I think that really is the motto...

**Lew Grade :** I could have stopped spending money and said "oh what the..."

**Alan Sapper :** Never give up if you believe in something.

**Lew Grade :** That's right.

**Alan Sapper :** And that would be the motto theme for this interview, I think. What do you thin, Lew? You know.

**Lew Grade :** I think I like it.

**Alan Sapper :** And thank you very much indeed for spending time with us.

**Lew Grade :** It's a pleasure, it's great to see you again, Alan.

**Alan Sapper :** And it's good to see you.

**Lew Grade :** You look terrific.

**Alan Sapper :** Yeah. And what's going to happen to this tape, is it's going into the temporary archive, and when the typist gets round to it - because she is typing all the time, you can imagine, four, five of these a month - she's typing away. Then it will go into the main archive at the BFI and be categorised.

End of interview.