STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SIR PETER HALL CBE 1930-2017

The National Theatre is deeply saddened to announce the death of its former Director, Sir Peter Hall, one of the great names in British theatre.

Sir Peter died on 11 September at University College Hospital, at the age of 86, surrounded by his family.

Peter Hall was an internationally celebrated stage director and theatre impresario, whose influence on the artistic life of Britain in the 20th century was unparalleled. His extraordinary career spanned more than half a century: in his mid-20s he staged the English language premiere of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. In 1960, aged 29, Peter Hall founded the Royal Shakespeare Company which he led until 1968. The RSC realised his pioneering vision of a resident ensemble of actors, directors and designers producing both classic and modern texts with a clear house style in both Stratford and London.

Appointed Director of the National Theatre in 1973, Peter Hall was responsible for the move from the Old Vic to the purpose-built complex on the South Bank. He successfully established the company in its new home in spite of union unrest and widespread scepticism. After leaving the National Theatre in 1988, he formed the Peter Hall Company (1988 – 2011) and in 2003 became the founding director of the Rose Theatre Kingston. Throughout his career, Sir Peter was a vociferous champion of public funding for the arts.

Peter Hall’s prolific work as a theatre director included the world premieres of Harold Pinter’s The Homecoming (1965), No Man’s Land (1975) and Betrayal (1978), Peter Shaffer’s Amadeus (1979), John Barton’s nine-hour epic Tantalus (2000); and the London and Broadway premieres of Alan Ayckbourn’s Bedroom Farce (1977). Other landmark productions included Hamlet (1965, with David Warner), The Wars of the Roses (1963), The Oresteia (1981), Animal Farm (1984), Antony and Cleopatra (1987, with Judi Dench and Anthony Hopkins), The Merchant of Venice (1989, with Dustin Hoffman), As You Like It (2003, with his daughter Rebecca Hall) and A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2010, with Judi Dench). Peter’s last production at the National Theatre was Twelfth Night in 2011.

Peter Hall was also an internationally renowned opera director. He staged the world premiere of Michael Tippett’s The Knot Garden (1970) and was Artistic Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera (1984 – 90) where he directed more than twenty productions. Peter Hall worked at many of the world’s leading houses including The Royal Opera, the Metropolitan Opera and Bayreuth where, in 1983, he staged Wagner’s Ring Cycle to honour the 100th anniversary of the composer’s death.

Sir Peter was diagnosed with dementia in 2011. He is survived by his wife, Nicki, and children Christopher, Jennifer, Edward, Lucy, Rebecca and Emma and nine grandchildren.
His former wives, Leslie Caron, Jacqueline Taylor and Maria Ewing also survive him. There will be a private family funeral and details of a memorial service will be announced at a later date.

Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre, said: ‘We all stand on the shoulders of giants and Peter Hall’s shoulders supported the entirety of British theatre as we know it. All of us, including those in the new generation of theatre-makers not immediately touched by his influence, are in his debt. His legendary tenacity and vision created an extraordinary and lasting legacy for us all.’

Sir Nicholas Hytner, Director of the NT 2003 – 2015, said: ‘Peter Hall was one of the great figures in British theatrical history, up there in a line of impresarios that stretches back to Burbage. Without him there would have been no Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre’s move to the South Bank might have ended in ignominious failure, and the whole idea of the theatre as a public service dedicated both to high seriousness and popularity would not have seized the public imagination. He was a man of great warmth, and mischievous wit. When I became Director of the National Theatre in 2003, he was unstinting in his support and always generous with his advice. He was the great theatrical buccaneer of the 20th century and has left a permanent mark on our culture.

Sir Trevor Nunn, Director of the NT 1997 – 2003 said: ‘Peter Hall’s achievement defies definition, except that perhaps, it allows us to understand why we have the word ‘great’ in our language. Peter’s greatness lay in his astonishing originality, his charismatic leadership, his unparalleled daring, his profound scholarship, his matchless articulacy and his visionary understanding of what we call ‘the theatre’ could be. In originating the RSC, he created an ensemble which led the world in Shakespeare production, but which triumphed to the same extent in presenting new plays of every kind. Not only a thrilling and penetrating director, he was also the great impresario of the age. He alone had the showmanship and energy to establish the three ring circus of our unique National Theatre on the South Bank. Peter Hall is a legend, whose legacy will benefit many generations to come. And yes, he was my beloved friend for fifty years.’

Sir Richard Eyre, Director of the NT 1988 – 1997 said: ‘Peter created the template of the modern director - part-magus, part-impresario, part-politician, part celebrity. He was – and is - the godfather (in both senses) of British theatre and like countless directors, writers and actors of several generations I have much to be grateful to him for.’

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Images of Peter Hall and productions directed by Peter Hall at the National Theatre can be downloaded here