

1996

LYCEUM OPEN AGAIN -57 YEARS ON

Dame Judi Triumphs

1996: Dame Judi Dench entered the record books this year by becoming the first ever artist to win two Olivier Awards in the same year. She was awarded Best Actress for her performance in "Absolute Hell", and Best Actress in a Musical for her performance in the National Theatre's production of Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night Music". To cap her triumphs, she has also been nominated for a Hollywood Oscar for her film portrayal of Queen Victoria.

Manchester Bomb

1996: The centre of Manchester was devastated by an IRA bomb. 200 people were injured, nine of them very seriously. The heart of the great city was ripped out. The Royal Exchange Theatre was destroyed in the blast. The twenty-year old "futuristic" theatre will be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

Dewinter



1996: In 1939 John Gielgud gave six farewell performances of "Hamlet" at London's Lyceum Theatre, prior to the demolition of the theatre for road-widening. The Second World War intervened and the Lyceum was not demolished but stood empty until 1945 when it became a dance hall. A few years ago the National Theatre presented some "platform" performances in the auditorium, but there has been no performance on its famous stage for 57 years. Now the theatre has been lavishly restored to its original glory and has been acclaimed for the sensitivity of its renovation and for its splendour and comfort. Because of its enormous stage, it is likely to become a major musical theatre in London's West End.

The reopening show is a revival of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's "Jesus Christ Superstar" - first seen at the Palace Theatre twenty-five years ago.

Steve Balsamo in the role of Jesus

Martin Guerre to be rewritten

1996: "Martin Guerre", the latest musical by Schonberg and Boublil, has received a cool critical reception. The show's producer has taken the most unusual step of closing the show for a few weeks for the purposes of re-writing and re-staging the work, and then having a second "opening night" to re-launch the production. The second version was much better received by the critics.

John Gielgud, O.M.

1996: At the age of 92 Sir John Gielgud has received the highest possible honour. He has been awarded the Order of Merit - confined to 24 British men and women who have made an "exceptionally meritorious contribution to the nation". Last year it was announced that the Globe Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue would be renamed the Gielgud Theatre in his honour.

Stephen Sondheim's London hat trick

1996: A revival of "Company" has transferred from the Donmar Warehouse to the Albery, a new work, "Passion" is at the Queen's, and "A Little Night Music" has had a triumphant new production at the National Theatre - making a hat-trick of London shows for composer-lyricist, Stephen Sondheim.

For most people Sondheim is quite simply the greatest living composer working in musical theatre. He has advanced "musical comedy" into the realms of highest art. His works are groundbreaking, innovative and startling in their achievements, and many of them are equally at home in Shaftesbury Avenue, on Broadway, and in opera houses throughout Europe.

From his early work as a lyricist only on "West Side Story" (1957) and "Gypsy" (1959), he turned to writing music and lyrics for a series of shows which have become classics of modern theatre: "Company" (1970), "Follies" (1971), "A Little Night Music" (1973), "Sweeney Todd" (1979) - all of which won New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. In 1983 he won the Pulitzer Prize for "Sunday in the Park with George". His more recent works include "Into the Woods" (1987), "Assassins" (1991) and his latest, "Passion" (1994). In 1990 he was appointed the first visiting professor of drama at Oxford University.



Preston Huddham