

DEATH OF JOHN GIELGUD

His death symbolises the end of 20th Century Theatre

The West End in Mid-2000

Musicals:

Adelphi: Chicago

Apollo: Personals

Apollo Victoria: Starlight Express

Cambridge: The Beautiful Game

Coliseum: English National Opera

Dominion: Notre Dame de Paris

Drury Lane:

The Witches of Eastwick

Haymarket: Hard Times

Her Majesty's:

Phantom of the Opera

London Palladium: The King and I

Lyceum: The Lion King

National: Singin' in the Rain

New London: Cats

Palace: Les Miserables

Phoenix: Blood Brothers

Piccadilly: Spend, Spend, Spend

Prince Edward: Mama Mia

Prince of Wales: Fosse

Royal Opera House:

Kirov Opera and Ballet

Shaftesbury: Lautrec

Strand: Buddy

Victoria Palace: La Cava

Plays:

Albery: Baby Doll

Barbican: Jet Lag

Comedy: Passion Play

Criterion:

The Reduced Shakespeare Company

Donmar Warehouse:

Orpheus Descending

Duchess: Copenhagen

Duke of York's: Speed the Plow

Fortune: The Woman in Black

Garrick: An Inspector Calls

Gielgud: The Graduate

Globe: Shakespeare repertoire

Lyric: A Busy Day

National:

The Heiress, Albert Speer,

Hamlet, All My Sons

New Ambassadors:

Stones in his Pockets

Old Vic: Dolly West's Kitchen

Queen's: The Lady in the Van

Royal Court: On Rafferty's Hill

St. Martins : The Mousetrap

Savoy: Enigmatic Variations

Vaudeville: Mindgame

Whitehall: Cooking with Elvis

Wyndhams's: Art

Young Vic: Tales from Ovid

2000: The death of Sir John Gielgud at the age of 96 marks the end of the 20th Century as far as Theatre History is concerned. In years to come the story of British Theatre in the past century will be dominated by just a few names. Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson will be among those names. Gielgud's name will certainly be there.

His family background stretched back to 19th Century theatre. His aunt, Ellen Terry, was the leading actress of that age. His own debut was in 1921 as the Herald in "Henry V" - a one-line part—but by 1926 he was in leading roles in the West End. In 1929 he gave the first of what was to be over 500 Hamlets—the definitive performance of the 20th Century.

He directed for the Old Vic, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Sadlers Wells Opera, in the West End and on Broadway. During World War II he toured Malta, Gibraltar and Burma performing for the troops. His one-man Shakespeare anthology, "The Ages of Man" toured all over the world. He appeared in numerous films—winning an Oscar in 1991— and even made two films in 1996, when he was 92 years old.

But the greatest impact was made by Gielgud the Actor: his Romeo/Mercutio double with Laurence Olivier in 1925; his Othello (1961); his Lear, his Prospero (at the National Theatre, 1974); his Harry in "Home", (1970); his Spooner in "No Man's Land" (1975), and above all, his Hamlet. Sybil Thorndike described it as "hauntingly beautiful". No one in the 20th Century spoke Shakespeare's verse with such beauty as John Gielgud.



John Gielgud as Hamlet

Certy Images

Theatres in the Year 2000

The British Theatre Directory for the year 2000 has the following listings of venues used for performing purposes in the United Kingdom:

London Venues: 203

Regional venues: 1088

making a total of 1,291 "theatres" in the country. Many of these venues are not what would have been described as "theatres" in earlier years. "Fringe" venues are sometimes just large rooms above public houses. However, a major change in the past century has been the realisation that you do not necessarily need a proscenium arch to create a theatrical experience.

By using the "old" definition of a theatre, it is possible to estimate that the figures are:

London Venues: 90

Provincial venues: 433

This would mean that during the Twentieth Century London has lost 26 , and the regions have lost 48 theatres. However, it is clear that there is more theatre activity being staged in the UK than ever before, albeit in a variety of venues not previously classed as theatres.

Sir Alec Guinness dies

In 1936 Alec Guinness , aged 22, made his debut playing Osric to John Gielgud's Hamlet. His stage career included many Shakespeare roles, sometimes directed by Gielgud, and often appearing with all the great star names of the age - in 1948 he played Fool to Olivier's Lear. His own modern dress Hamlet was controversial, and his "Brechtian" Macbeth (1966) opposite Simone Signoret was a theatrical disaster.

His film career started with Ealing comedies in the 50s, and included an Academy Award for "The Bridge on the River Kwai" (1957) and an Oscar for Lifetime Achievement in 1980. In the 70s he was a hugely successful Obi-Wan Kenobi in the original "Star Wars" trilogy. In later years he had a highly successful TV career as George Smiley in "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy". He was knighted in 1959 and made a Companion of Honour in 1994. He has died at the age of 86

