



Clive Banda

2010, October 10th: Opera singer Joan Sutherland has died at her home in Switzerland at the age 84. She and Maria Callas were considered the greatest opera divas of the 20th Century. Their repertoire was the same – coloratura and bel canto – but their personalities very different. Callas was seen as the fiery temperamental Greek whose powerful acting and unique vocal sound earned her the title “La Divina”. Sutherland was seen as an easy-going Australian working girl whose acting ability was acceptable, but whose voice possessed unparalleled beauty and power, earning her the sobriquet “La Stupenda”.

Following early appearances in her home country Australia, she won a scholarship to London’s Royal College of Music, and by 1952 was engaged to play smaller roles at Covent Garden, singing the “walk-on” role of Clotilde in a “Norma” where Callas was the hugely-praised star. Sutherland was rapidly promoted to leading roles over the next few years, and her performance as Lucia di Lammermoor in 1960 was hailed as marking the arrival of an operatic superstar.

During a brilliant career, mainly managed by her conductor husband, Richard Bonyngue, she added most of the great bel canto roles to her repertoire, becoming one of the best-selling recording artists of the age. Her retirement came in 1990 with a farewell guest appearance on New Year’s Eve at Covent Garden in “Die Fledermaus”.

Arguments have always debated whether La Divina or La Stupenda were the greatest: La Divina could sometimes produce some worrying high notes; La Stupenda’s diction could sometimes lead to incomprehension. But, ultimately, no argument! Joan Sutherland, created a Dame in 1979 for her services to opera, was one of the two greatest opera singers of the age.

Two great Shakespearan performances Theatre Honours

2010: In the last months of the year two separate Shakespeare productions earned enormous critical praise for the leading actors. In October Nicholas Hytner’s “Hamlet” at the Olivier was a modern-dress affair - Hamlet smoked a cigarette during “To be or not to be” - and staged in a totalitarian state of surveillance cameras monitored by security guards wearing earpieces. Rory Kinnear’s performance was acclaimed: “one of “thrilling detail and freshness”; “mould-breaking” (Sunday Telegraph); “a Hamlet of our times” (Mail on Sunday). He was universally acknowledged as one of today’s leading actors.

December at the Donmar Warehouse saw Derek Jacobi’s Lear, directed by Michael Grandage- a performance ranked alongside the best ever – alongside Paul Scofield in recent memory. “The finest and most searching Lear I have ever seen” (Telegraph), “one of the most remarkable performances of the past decade” (Express), “exquisitely calibrated performance” (Observer), “a transfixing blend of passion and poignancy that is phenomenal” (Sunday Express). Now aged 72, “Sir Derek Jacobi has earned his place among the giants of British Theatre” with this unforgettable Lear.

2010: Among theatre honours this year are knighthoods for the actor Patrick Stewart, playwright Ronald Harwood (author of “The Dresser”) and National Theatre director, Nicholas Hytner. There was also a CBE for Catherine Zeta-Jones, the Swansea-born actress who has become the Queen of Hollywood, and is currently appearing in “A Little Night Music” on Broadway. The award cites her services to charity.

Wendy Toye, Choreographer

2010, Feb 27: Wendy Toye, who has died at the age of 92, was a dancer, choreographer, director of plays, ballets, musicals and operas, and one of the first women film directors in Britain. In the 1930s and 40s she was a member of the original Vic Wells Ballet. Later stage work included several West End musicals, the last of which was in 1992—“The Sound of Music” with Liz Robertson at Sadlers Wells.

Some you win, Some you Lose in the Musical World

2010: “Les Miserables” celebrated 25 years in the West End with a special Anniversary Concert at the O2 and with the launch of a UK tour in a “new” production. The original director, Trevor Nunn, was not invited to direct the tour, and this led to a very public quarrel between Sir Trevor and Sir Cameron Mackintosh. Meantime “Love Never Dies”, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “sequel” to the long-running “Phantom of the Opera” opened in March at the Adelphi to lukewarm reviews, and then closed for a few days in November to incorporate some major re-writing and new direction.

More problems hit “Paradise Found” at the Menier Chocolate Factory, directed & choreographed by Broadway showbiz-royalty, Harold Prince and Susan Stroman, with Mandy Patinkin in the lead role. It was reviewed as a “total mess.” Winning musicals this year were “Matilda” and “Legally Blonde”, with Sheridan Smith in the leading role.



David Sillitoe

Michael Boyd in the "new" auditorium at Stratford-upon-Avon

audience to draw closer to the performers and the action. The project has also included improvements to the Swan Theatre, the creation of several new public spaces, including a new Riverside Cafe and Rooftop Restaurant, an observation tower, and vastly improved backstage conditions for the actors and crew. Preview and try-out activities began in November last year, with the first full production from the RSC's current repertoire being staged in February this year. The first production designed specifically for the redeveloped theatre opened in April, and was Michael Boyd's "Macbeth". This year the RSC is also celebrating its 50th Birthday Season.

2011, Feb: After four years of intensive re-development, and following the creation of a temporary Courtyard Theatre to serve as a stopgap, the renovated Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon was officially opened on March 4th by the Queen and Prince Philip, who were given a performance of the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet".

The "transformation project" has cost in excess of £100 million, and includes a re-designed auditorium with a thrust stage reaching out into the audience, who are seated on three sides of it. This "one-room" theatre creates a more traditional Shakespearean performance area, allowing the

Passion in Port Talbot Death of Dame Elizabeth Taylor

2011: The National Theatre of Wales staged "The Passion", a community-specific theatre piece which attracted thousands onto the streets of Port Talbot over the Easter weekend. Michael Sheen played a modern day socialist Christ figure resisting corporate exploitation and cherishing the ghosts of the past. His climactic crucifixion and resurrection was staged on a traffic roundabout by the beach. This was hugely praised as a genuine example of community theatre, raising the spirits of the residents of Michael Sheen's industrial home town. At the end of the year Michael Sheen played "Hamlet" at the Young Vic in a controversial production suggesting the Freudian dream of a disturbed in-patient.

Two Dames One Knight

2011: Honours in the arts world this year ranged from grand opera and classical drama to variety theatre: Opera singer Felicity Palmer and actress Janet Suzman were created Dames of the British Empire, and a Knighthood was bestowed on the veteran entertainer, Bruce Forsyth, leading to much punning on his catch-phrase, "Nice to sir you, to sir you—nice!"

2011, March: Elizabeth Taylor, the last of the great major stars to come out of the old Hollywood studio system, has died at the age of 79. London born, she began a Hollywood career as a child actress. Her adult film career included highly praised performances in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and "Suddenly Last Summer" by Tennessee Williams, an Oscar-winning performance in Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" and Shakespeare's Katarina in "The Taming of the Shrew". She became the highest-paid performer in the world with a million-dollar contract for 20th Century Fox's "Cleopatra", where her affair and subsequent marriage to Richard Burton caused a world-wide scandal. She was married eight times to seven men (twice to Richard Burton), endured serious illnesses, and led a jet-set lifestyle, including collecting one of the most expensive private collections of jewelry. She was actively involved in AIDS research, and dedicated much of her later life to philanthropy. She was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal in the USA and made a Dame of the British Empire. She appeared on the London stage in "The Little Foxes" in 1982 and had earlier appeared as Helen of Troy with Richard Burton in a 1966 fund-raising production at Oxford University.



It's all Greek to me!

The Globe Theatre's multi-language Shakespeare productions included:

All's Well that Ends Well (*Gujarati*)
 Antony & Cleopatra (*Turkish*)
 As You Like It (*Georgian*)
 Comedy of Errors (*Dari Persian*)
 Coriolanus (*Japanese*)
 Cymbeline (*Juba Arabic*)
 Hamlet (*Lithuanian*)
 Henry IV Part 1 (*Mexican Spanish*)
 Henry IV Part 2 (*Argentine Spanish*)
 Henry V (*English*)
 Henry VI Part 1 (*Serbian*)
 Henry VI Part 2 (*Albanian*)
 Henry VI Part 3 (*Macedonian*)
 Henry VIII (*Castilian Spanish*)
 Julius Caesar (*Italian*)
 King John (*Armenian*)
 King Lear (*Belarusian*)
 Love's Labours Lost (*Sign Language*)
 Macbeth (*Polish*)
 Measure for Measure (*Russian*)
 Merchant of Venice (*Hebrew*)
 Merry Wives of Windsor (*Swahili*)
 Midsummer Night's Dream (*Korean*)
 Much Ado About Nothing (*French*)
 Othello (*Hip-Hop*)
 Pericles (*Greek*)
 Richard II (*Palestinian Arabic*)
 Richard III (*Mandarin*)
 Romeo & Juliet (*Brazilian Portuguese*)
 Taming of the Shrew (*Urdu*)
 The Tempest (*Bangla*)
 Timon of Athens (*German*)
 Titus Andronicus (*Cantonese*)
 Troilus & Cressida (*Maori*)
 Twelfth Night (*Hindi*)
 Two Gentlemen of Verona (*Shona*)
 Winter's Tale (*Yoruba*)

Two Knights at the Opera

2012: 50 year old Antonio Pappano was born in Epping, Essex a year after his parents moved to the UK to work in the restaurant business. When he was 13 the family moved again – this time to the USA, where “Tony” studied piano and by the time he was 21 had become a rehearsal pianist for the New York City Opera. In 2002 he was appointed Music Director at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the youngest person ever to hold that office. He has been knighted this year for his services to music. A knighthood has also been bestowed on the Scottish opera director, David McVicar, and the actor Kenneth Branagh.

2012's World Shakespeare Festival was more successful than anyone could have imagined. The majority of events were staged in London, but the rest of the UK rose to the challenge, with six separate productions in Glasgow, and contributions from Bath (with Tim Piggot-Smith as Prospero, directed by Adrian Noble), and Chichester (with “Antony & Cleopatra” directed by Janet Suzman). Other major events were staged at Bristol, Bolton, Cardiff, Cheltenham, Chester, Derby, Halifax, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Oxford, Sheffield and Southampton

There were ten RSC productions at Stratford-on-Avon, three of which, “The Comedy of Errors”, “Twelfth Night” and “The Tempest” transferred to London's Roundhouse for a Summer Festival. The RSC also produced “Romeo & Juliet in Baghdad” at the Riverside Studios; “Cymbeline” in Japanese at the Barbican; and, at the Noel Coward Theatre, both “Julius Caesar” with Jeffrey Kissoon, and “Much Ado About Nothing” set in India .

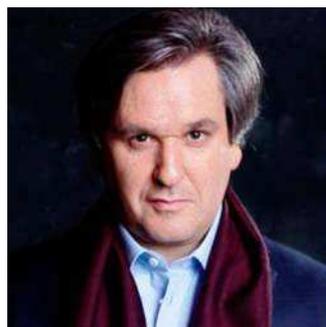
The National Theatre offered Simon Russell Beale in “Timon of Athens”, directed by Nicholas Hytner, and updated to the world of Fat-cat bankers and “Occupy-London” style campaigners. Other major London productions included Jonathan Pryce as King Lear at the Almeida; Frances Barber in an all-female “Julius Caesar” at the Donmar (set in a women's prison!); “A Midsummer Night's Dream” at the Lyric, Hammersmith; and both “Henry V” and “Winter's Tale” at Hampstead. There were fringe productions all over London, including the Union, New Diorama, Lion & the Unicorn, St Paul's Church, Middle Temple Hall, Coram's Fields and the Old Red Lion.

The outstanding contribution came from the Globe Company. As well as Simon Paisely Day and Samantha Spiro in “Taming of the Shrew”, and Jamie Parker in “Henry V”, there was Mark Rylance as “Richard III” and an all-male “Twelfth Night” with Stephen Fry as Malvolio and Mark Rylance as Olivia. These last two shows were enormously successful, both with the critics and at the box office, and they transferred for a season at the Apollo Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue, and later to New York. And the Globe made theatrical history by presenting all 37 Shakespeare plays from 35 countries and performed in 37 different languages. Not since the glorious days of Peter Daubeney's World Theatre Season has London seen such an exciting world-wide celebration.



Stephen Fry & Mark Rylance in “Twelfth Night”

Tristram Kenton



Antonio Pappano



David McVicar



Kenneth Branagh



Donald Cooper

2013, December 14th: Peter O'Toole has died at the age of 81. Best known to the general public for his films, he came to stardom in 1963 in the title role of "Lawrence of Arabia", the start of a highly successful film career which included "Beckett", "The Lion in Winter" and "My Favourite Year". He was nominated for an Oscar on eight different occasions, a record number without actually winning, and had to be persuaded to accept an honorary Oscar in 2002 (he originally refused and said he wanted more time "to win the bugger outright".)

His earliest stage work was at the Bristol Old Vic in the mid-1950s, and he made his mark with the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960 Stratford season, playing Petruchio and Shylock. In 1963 he played Hamlet, directed by Laurence Olivier, to launch the National Theatre Company at the Old Vic, and later played "Waiting for Godot" at the Abbey, Dublin, before returning for a guest season at Bristol Old Vic.

The 1980s opened with his legendary "Macbeth" at the Old Vic. This was a production in which he demanded absolute artistic control, over-riding any director or management requirement. It was a total disaster, with a first night audience roaring with laughter at some its ludicrous staging, and followed by much adverse publicity. O'Toole managed to compensate for this debacle with a successful series of Shaw performance in the West End, including a "Pygmalion" which transferred to New York in 1987. He returned three times to the title role in "Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell" (in 1989 at the Apollo, 1991 at the Shaftesbury, and 1999 at the Old Vic. For twenty years he was married to the actress Sian Phillips, until they divorced in 1979.

The home life of our own dear Queen You wait ages for a ghost and then. . .

2013: It started with Peter Morgan's screenplay for the film "The Queen", showing the crisis facing the Royal Family following the death of Princess Diana. Helen Mirren's Oscar-winning performance as HM inspired Peter Morgan to write a stage play, "The Audience", which has struck box-office gold in a three month limited season run at the Gielgud.

Dame Helen covers the sixty years of the Queen's reign in a series of subtle wig and costume changes, and the impersonations of eight of the twelve Prime Ministers of her reign manage to be painfully funny as well as expressing hidden truths about the strange lives of constitutional monarchs. Stephen Daldry's production and Helen Mirren's majestic performance prompted the Guardian critic to speculate: "I have a theory that all plays about monarchy, from Shakespeare onwards, end up as studies of solitude."

Musicals make (and lose) millions

2013: Hit musicals of the year have been "The Book of Mormon", a nine Tony-Award winning Broadway transfer, and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" - both of which have had record advance sales and extended booking periods. But the much anticipated "From Here to Eternity", with lyrics by Tim Rice, closed after six poorly attended months, and the latest Andrew Lloyd Webber, "Stephen Ward- the Musical", closed after four months. The latter shows have lost many millions of pounds.

Lesley Manville & Jack Lowden

2013: After six years as artistic director of the Kingston Rose, Stephen Unwin's farewell production was his own version of Ibsen's "Ghosts". With Kelly Hunter as Mrs Alving, and scenery inspired by Edvard Munch's 1906 designs for the play, it was respectably reviewed, though several critics pointed to the imbalance between the two acts - 85 minutes and 25 minutes, giving scarce time to recover the tension after the interval. Kelly Hunter was praised for her moving and eloquently anguished performance.

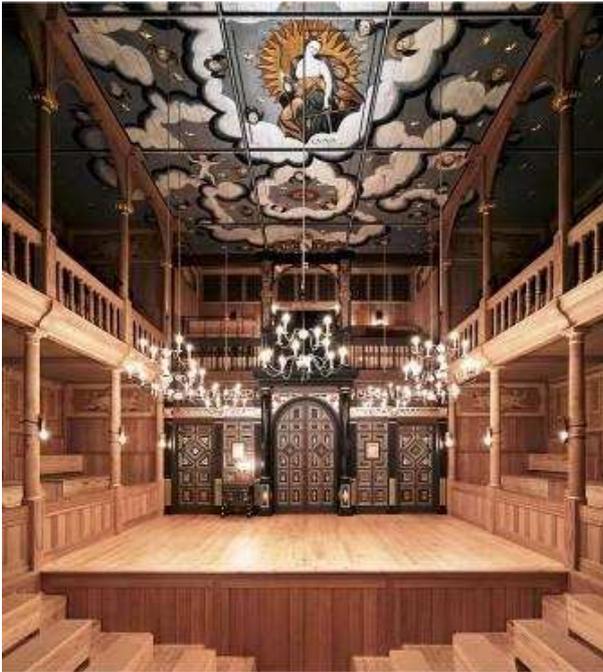
Just one week later yet another "Ghosts" was staged, this time directed and adapted by Sir Richard Eyre at the Almeida Theatre. This was performed as a 90 minute long piece with no interval. In every respect this was acclaimed as a major theatrical event, with Lesley Manville giving the performance of her life as Mrs Alving, and Jack Lowden's shambling, anguished decline into madness being praised as a harrowing experience to rival any horror in Greek tragedy. This was felt to be one of the greatest ever productions of the play.



Tristram Kenyon

2014

Sam Wanamaker Playhouse opens



Nick Gnatridge

2014, Jan: When the replica open-air Globe Theatre was built in 1997 there were plans to re-create an indoor winter-quarters venue on the same complex. This was to be based on the indoor building used by the Lord Chamberlain's Men during the Jacobean era. A basic shell was constructed, but lack of funds meant the structure remained unfinished, and could only be used as a space for education workshops and rehearsals. Two years ago a major fund-raising effort was launched, aimed at creating an oak structure inside the building's brick shell – based on presumed designs of the original Blackfriars Theatre. With its ornately painted ceiling, seating for 340 and lit by beeswax candles, the new venue opened with a production of “The Duchess of Malfi” with Gemma Arterton, directed by Dominic Dromgoole. Regarded as a gorgeous recreation (if somewhat uncomfortable!) it is named the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, as a tribute to the American actor whose tireless campaign led to the original construction of the new Globe Theatre on London's South Bank.

Kevin Spacey to leave Old Vic

2014: Kevin Spacey has announced he will be stepping down as artistic director at the Old Vic after eleven years and will be replaced next season by Matthew Warchus. During his tenure he has restored the fortunes of the Old Vic, giving it stability and, through his acting appearances, considerable glamour. His memorable performances include “Richard III” (directed by Sam Mendes) and his one-man performance as Clarence Darrow, as well as “Speed the Plow” opposite Jeff Goldblum. Other hit shows during his years have included “The Crucible” with Richard Armitage and “Electra” with Kirsten Scott Thomas

The West End's First Billionaire

2014, May: Sir Cameron Mackintosh has become the first theatre impresario to make it to the Sunday Times' Super-Rich List, with his gross wealth reported at £1 billion. The theatre-world's first billionaire has announced he will add to his theatre ownership by buying the Victoria Palace and the Ambassadors, which he will rebuild and rename the Sondheim Theatre

There is Nothing like a Dame

2014 Jan: The New Year's Honours created three new Theatre Dames: actresses Angela Lansbury, and Penelope Keith and for choreographer, Gillian Lynne. There was also a knighthood for the producer, Michael Codron. Later in the year a knighthood was awarded to the actor Daniel Day Lewis and an honorary Damehood for Angelia Jolie.

£22m refit at Chichester

2014, The 51 year old Chichester Festival Theatre has undergone a £22 million redevelopment programme which has provided the venue with larger foyer areas, a refurbished auditorium and improved access both backstage and front-of-house. It has taken 21 months to complete the work (and work on improvements for the adjoining Minerva Theatre are planned for the winter of next year)

The new season opened with Peter Shaffer's “Amadeus” with Rupert Everett as Salieri and included the musicals “Guys & Dolls” with Jamie Parker and “Gypsy” with Imelda Staunton.

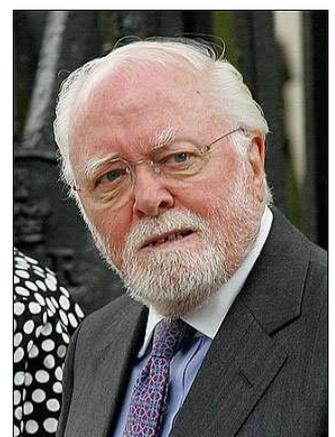
Final curtain for a Lord & a Knight

2014: The names of Lord Richard Attenborough and Sir Donald Sinden, both of whom were 90 years old, head this year's list of theatre obituaries, which includes the composer Sandy Wilson, also 90, and the actress Dora Bryan, 91.

Amongst other deaths were actor Bob Hoskins, 71, and the controversial writer-director, Charles Marowitz whose avant-garde “underground” work at the Open Space Theatre in the 1960s had a considerable impact on the theatre of that era. He has died in America at the age of 80.



Press Association



Press Association

Ta-ra, Liverpool's Cilla Black



2015: The Grim Reaper's toll amongst performers this year has been a large one. The death of Cilla Black at the age of 72 has caused widespread sadness. Beginning as a million-selling pop-singer from Liverpool's Beatles era, she went on to become the Queen of Saturday night television with a series of hugely successful shows. She was enticed back into the world of pantomime at Liverpool Empire in 2008, when that city was nominated European City of Culture, and was said to have been paid half a million pounds for six weeks' work. She was one of the nation's best-loved entertainers

Other major figures to die this year included the legendary Dracula and Bond villain Christopher Lee, 93, and Ron Moody, best remembered for his Fagin in "Oliver" 91. Actors Keith Michell and Warren Mitchell, both 89, and Roger Rees, 71 together with actress Geraldine McEwan, 82 have also died.

Fire and power cuts close eight West End theatres

2015, April: A major underground electrical fire and power outage in Holborn forced eight West End shows, including "The Lion King", "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory", "Woman in Black", "Gypsy" and "Mamma Mia" to cancel performances. The Royal Opera House lost front-of house power to the escalators and bars, but was able to carry on. Holborn Underground station was closed, and many offices evacuated. The fire damage was so great that some theatres were unable to reopen for several days, with others relying on generators for additional power.

2015: Internal feuding at the English National Opera was first revealed in January when the Chairman, Martyn Rose, announced his resignation after less than two years in the post. From a leaked letter in the Sunday Times it seemed Rose blamed the company's financial plight on John Berry, the company's Artistic Director, and the resignation followed an "either he goes or I go" threat. A week later the opera's Executive Director, Henriette Götz, also resigned, after just six months in the job, apparently agreeing with Martyn Rose.

The Arts Council then announced it was placing the ENO "under special funding arrangements", putting the company's future at serious risk. John Berry successfully toughed it out when factions of the board tried to remove him, and the company proceeded to complete its most artistically successful season for many years, which included a highly profitable venture into the semi-staged "musical-opera" "Sweeney Todd" with Bryn Terfel and Emma Thompson.

Then, in July, came the next bombshell: John Berry announced his own resignation. Did he jump? Or was he pushed? It was rumoured the Arts Council gave the board no option other than to let him go. By the autumn Harry Brünjes had been appointed Chairman, and Cressida Pollock Executive Director, leaving Music Director, Mark Wigglesworth, to work with temporary artistic directors. The new ENO management announced a semi-staged "Sunset Boulevard" with Glenn Close for next season. The purists were up in arms, arguing no "connection between Lloyd Webber's over-amplified, under-orchestrated world and the unmediated act of opera singing" (Opera Magazine), but others argued this is a sensible way forward to balancing the books.

And resignation at the National

2015, April: Echoing the upheaval in the National Opera, the National Theatre's Chief Executive shocked the arts world with her resignation, just six months into the job. Tessa Ross, who was formerly controller of film and drama at Channel 4, was appointed to work with the NT's new director, Rufus Norris, who has taken over from the retiring Sir Nicholas Hytner. Tessa Ross said in a press statement "it has become clear to me that the new leadership structure, with a separate role of chief executive, is not right for the NT at this time." Rufus Norris's statement said there was no clash of personalities, and her work over six months had been "invaluable and immense. I'm sad that our partnership is ending prematurely but am grateful for everything she has done here."

The Cumberbatch Hamlet

2015, August: Tickets went on sale a year ahead and sold out instantly. Black-market tickets have gone through the roof. The very limited number of £10 tickets released daily at the Barbican during the two month run have continually led to overnight queuing. The show? Benedict Cumberbatch as Hamlet. A row broke out over critics reviewing the show in preview and not waiting till the press night—but despite some tweaking with the text and a modern-dress approach, this has been hailed a triumph.

