

SYDNEY THEATRE CO

MEDIA RELEASE

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STC appoints Jonathan Church as Artistic Director

Jonathan Church will succeed Andrew Upton as Artistic Director of Sydney Theatre Company (STC), it was announced today, 25 August 2015. The British artist has been Artistic Director of Chichester Festival Theatre since 2006 and is credited with completely transforming the much-loved UK institution.

During the last decade at Chichester Jonathan Church has more than doubled the venue's audience base and produced a diverse program of over 100 shows (including 22 new plays) from the large-scale to the intimate. Almost 50 of these have transferred to the West End and/or Broadway or toured to prestigious non-profit organisations such as New York's BAM.

Highlights have included *Enron* directed by Rupert Goold (West End and Broadway), *The Judas Kiss* with Rupert Everett directed by Neil Armfield (West End), *Macbeth* with Patrick Stewart (West End, BAM, Broadway, BBC Film), *Sweeney Todd* with Michael Ball (West End), *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (West End), *King Lear* with Frank Langella (BAM), *South Downs* by David Hare (West End), *The Pajama Game* directed by Richard Eyre (West End), *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill (West End) and the current hit *Gypsy* with Imelda Staunton (West End). His own productions which have transferred to the West End and/or toured internationally include the recent debut play by Mark Hayhurst *Taken at Midnight, Singin' in the Rain* (soon to be seen in Australia), *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Last Confession* with David Suchet (recently seen throughout Australia), *Of Mice and Men* and *The Witches*.

During this period Church also played a critical role in raising the funds for and overseeing a huge \$46M redevelopment of Chichester Festival Theatre in time for the venue's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2014.

“Jonathan Church turned a struggling Sussex festival into a source of adventure”, noted leading UK critic Michael Billington early on in the artistic director’s tenure, while late last year Charles Spencer of the UK’s Daily Telegraph, retiring after 40 years of reviewing theatre wrote that Chichester had become a theatre “I always approach with a spring in my step” and went on to describe Church as “a great impresario and one of the nicest people in the business”.

Prior to taking on Chichester, Church was Artistic Director of Birmingham Repertory Theatre from 2001 - 2005 and Salisbury Playhouse from 1995 - 1999, “both theatres whose fortunes he restored” according to Dominic Cavendish in the Telegraph. He was also Associate Director of Hampstead Theatre from 1999-2001, Associate Director of Derby Playhouse from 1994-1995. He trained as Assistant Director at Nottingham Playhouse, following work backstage as an Assistant Electrician and Stage Manager.

Jonathan has his own production company in the UK, Jonathan Church Productions Ltd, which has a development agreement with Delfont Mackintosh Theatres.

He will commence work on programming STC's 2017 season immediately. Until September 2016, Church will work in both Sydney and the UK as he delivers his final Festival season in Chichester.

David Gonski, Chairman of Sydney Theatre Company said, "I am very excited to announce Jonathan Church as our next artistic leader. After a comprehensive international search, the board was presented with a very accomplished shortlist of Australian and overseas candidates. We are extremely confident that Jonathan Church's tremendous breadth of experience across the course of his career is a brilliant fit for STC. Jonathan is both an acclaimed theatre director in his own right, and also an artistic director with an extremely impressive track record in establishing positive relationships with a broad range of top theatre artists. He has also demonstrated in his leadership of a number of organisations the capacity to build audiences through programming. I know that he will build on the excellent work of Andrew Upton who has been Artistic Director for the last eight years, the first five alongside Cate Blanchett".

Jonathan Church said: "I am delighted and honoured to be the next Artistic Director of Sydney Theatre Company and alongside Executive Director Patrick McIntyre look forward to leading the company through its next phase of development.

I have watched from afar STC's growth over the past 30 years and the company has become a beacon of artistic adventure and international excellence. Recently I have also been fortunate enough to begin to work first hand with some of Australia's best theatre practitioners and I have a strong sense of the extraordinary talent that exists and the deep sense of commitment to the theatre and the arts in general that a wide range of companies have fostered in Australia. I am therefore immensely excited to be coming to STC's home at the Wharf and along with its dedicated staff work with the best existing and emerging Australian talent to continue to serve Sydney audiences with the most vibrant, excellent and entertaining theatre possible."

Patrick McIntyre, Executive Director of STC said: "I'm looking forward to working with Jonathan on taking STC into its next era. His exuberant enthusiasm for our art form and broad tastes have earned him many admirers around the globe, which will be enormously valuable as STC continues to position itself internationally. I'm sure Jonathan will prove a great fit with the team at STC, our community of theatre makers, audiences and supporters."

Current Artistic Director of STC Andrew Upton said: "I think Jonathan Church is a terrific choice as the next Artistic Director of STC. After a period being led by an actress and a writer, I think it's important to have a theatre director once more at the helm. I look forward to fresh perspectives on the international theatre canon and a continuation of STC's championing of local theatre makers and stories, including on the international stage. Developing pathways for artists is one of the key aspects of being an Artistic Director of a theatre company this size and Jonathan has a great track record for enabling artists in the UK", Upton said.

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Note to Editors

STC was formed in 1978. It originally created work for the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House (540 seats), where it remains a designated resident company. In January 1985, its headquarters at The Wharf in Walsh Bay was opened containing two theatres (320 and 200 seats), rehearsal rooms, production and wardrobe workshops, offices and restaurant. And in 2004, the Roslyn Packer Theatre (formerly Sydney Theatre) was opened in Walsh Bay, adding a theatre of 880 seats. The budget of the company is approximately \$35M per annum, making it one of the country's largest performing arts organisations and one of the world's largest non-profit producing theatre companies.

Founding artistic director Richard Wherrett announced that "Sydney Theatre Company exists to provide first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney... theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun." Subsequent artistic directors Wayne Harrison, Robyn Nevin, Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton have remained true to this idiosyncratic vision, in the process helping to define main stream theatre culture in Australia through broad programming of new and existing works, and the promotion of varied theatrical voices.

Many of Australia's most distinguished theatre artists started or developed their careers at STC, including actors Cate Blanchett, Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Toni Collette, Hugo Weaving and Richard Roxburgh and directors Barrie Kosky and Benedict Andrews. International artists such as Liv Ullman, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Isabelle Huppert, William Hurt, Howard Davies and Tamás Ascher have made work with the company, which has also presented in Sydney the works of other companies from around the world including National Theatre of Great Britain, Abbey Theatre, Ontroerend Goed, Frantic Assembly and Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

STC has a long history of international touring stretching back to the 1980s. Most recently, high profile tours have played to critical acclaim and large audiences at the Barbican London, Lincoln Center Festival New York, Kennedy Center Washington DC, Theatre de la Ville Paris, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Vienna Festival.