Judi Dench, Lesley Manville and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan unveil public installation celebrating 50th anniversary of the National Theatre's building

Images of can be downloaded here.

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Today, **Judi Dench**, **Lesley Manville** and Mayor of London, **Lord Khan of Tooting**, joined NT Co-Chief Executives, **Indhu Rubasingham** (Director) and **Kate Varah** (Executive Director), and Chair of the NT Board, **Sir Damon Buffini**, to celebrate the opening of ***50 Stories for 50 Years***, the National Theatre's anniversary exhibition marking 50 years of its iconic building. The group was also joined by **Ilan Bankes** and **Joe Hutchings**, two apprentices that have been selected from over 700 applicants who will learn the vital engineering skills needed to care for a cultural building through a new apprenticeship named in honour of the NT's architect, Denys Lasdun.

50 Stories for 50 Years is a free physical, digital and audio exhibition featuring personal stories from long-term NT supporters and collaborators including **Judi Dench, Hugh Jackman, Lesley Manville, Lucian Msamati**, and **David Oyelowo**, alongside memories from writers, directors, staff, individuals involved in the construction of the NT, as well as young people and audiences. It celebrates five decades of creativity, innovation and world-class theatre seen by millions of people across the UK and around the globe.

From backstage mischief to life-changing moments on stage, the stories reveal a side of the National Theatre audiences rarely see. Judi Dench recalls a moment of pre-show calm playfully disrupted by an unexpected intervention from a fellow actor, while Lucian Msamati lifts the lid on a dressing-room water fight between production casts. Hugh Jackman recounts the student visit that inspired a dream of performing at the NT, Lesley Manville remembers the unexpected joy of returning to the stage after ten years, and NT Director Indhu Rubasingham shares how her first NT production took a dramatic turn when she was suddenly called upon to step into the action herself.

Installed outside the National Theatre on the Queen's Walk, *50 Stories for 50 Years* is a wooden structure inspired by the iconic amphitheatre seating of the Olivier Theatre. Facing the National Theatre, it invites visitors to sit and listen to audio recordings of personal stories about the building, offering a unique insight into the hidden corners, quirks, and long-standing traditions that make the NT one of the greatest civic buildings of modern Britain.

People around the world are able to experience these stories via the NT's free digital guide on Bloomberg Connects, making them accessible to audiences wherever they are.

The National Theatre is a building that has launched generations of talent, nurturing them as they find their feet and voice at the start of careers across theatre and beyond. To carry on that legacy, the NT has created a **new apprenticeship**, named in honour of the NT's architect Sir Denys Lasdun, offering two young people hands-on training in the vital engineering skills needed to care for and maintain a working cultural building. Designed to provide a springboard for the next generation of theatre-makers as they push their careers forward, it forms part of the NT's wider commitment through the National Theatre Skills Centre, in partnership with Bank of America, to opening pathways into careers in the creative industries. The National Theatre Skills Centre currently supports nearly 6,000 people around the country annually and ensures that specialist technical skills are developed, retained and passed on to future generations.

Indhu Rubasingham, **Director and Co-Chief Executive of the National Theatre**, said: *"For 50 years, the National Theatre's South Bank building has been a place where artists, audiences and communities have come together to share stories that help us understand ourselves and one another. It was created with the conviction that great theatre should belong to everyone, and that artistic excellence and public access go hand in hand. At a time when so much of modern life encourages us to retreat into our own worlds, the beautiful stories captured in our anniversary exhibition demonstrate why theatre remains one of the few places where we gather collectively, embrace complexity and experience something together."*

Kate Varah, **Executive Director and Co-Chief Executive of the National Theatre**, said: *"This milestone anniversary offers a moment of renewal, hope and celebration of the NT's remarkable legacy, and a brilliant reminder of the cultural foundations that we as a nation have been given to build on. But caring for it means maintaining and modernising the spaces that make all of that possible. The National Theatre generates £241 million for the UK economy each year, with a third of that impact felt outside London. Continued investment in this iconic building will help ensure the National Theatre can keep creating opportunities for all, bringing people together and giving audiences joy for generations to come."*

Lord Khan of Tooting, **Mayor of London**, said: *"The 50th anniversary of the National Theatre's South Bank home is a celebration not just of an iconic institution but of everything that makes London's cultural sector so special. For five decades the National Theatre has showcased British theatre at its very best, nurtured talent, and made a huge contribution to our city's rich cultural heritage and global reputation. It's fitting that this milestone is being marked by investing in the next generation through new apprenticeships. This new programme will help aspiring theatre makers, craftspeople and technicians develop the skills they need to keep London's world-leading creative industries thriving for decades to come as we continue to build a better London for everyone."*

The installation was designed and fabricated by **La Cuarta Piel** and co-curated by **Sarah Hemming**, theatre critic for the Financial Times and author of *The National Theatre Guide,* and the NT's Special Projects Producer **Katurah Morrish**.

The anniversary programme is made possible by global built environment consultancy **Arup** and the Queen's Walk installation is kindly supported by **Sir Robert McAlpine**, two

companies that helped build the National Theatre 50 years ago – a powerful marker of their continued commitment to this iconic building.

Located on the South Bank, the National Theatre was built between 1969 and 1976. For its first 13 years, the company was based at The Old Vic before moving into its first purpose-built home on the banks of the Thames. Designed by architect Denys Lasdun, the Grade II listed 250,000-square-foot building divided opinion at the time of its construction but is now widely regarded as a masterpiece of brutalist architecture. Its textured concrete, sweeping riverside terraces and three auditoriums - the Olivier, Lyttelton and Dorfman (previously Cottesloe) theatres - have become one of Britain's most recognisable cultural landmarks.

But the National Theatre is far more than a theatre. Conceived as a place where every stage of theatre-making happens under one roof, it brings together performance, design, engineering, construction, craft, technology and education in a single creative ecosystem. Alongside its three theatres are rehearsal rooms, production facilities, and workshops where scenery is built, costumes are made, props are crafted and world-class productions are created. Inside the concrete walls are restaurants, bars and public spaces where people come to socialise, work and enjoy a moment of pause by the river. Jennie Lee, the UK's first Minister for the Arts, called the creation of the National Theatre *'an act of faith in the future'* - a place where culture belongs to everyone.

The National Theatre today offers the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world, serving audiences, artists and communities locally, nationally and globally. Through touring productions, NT Live cinema screenings, its streaming platform NT at Home, and digital education platform the NT Collection, work created here reaches people in every local authority in the UK and 184 countries around the world.

As the National Theatre celebrates this milestone, continued investment is needed to maintain its working building and modernise ageing infrastructure. Caring for the theatre, workshops and creative spaces behind these stories will ensure they continue to serve artists, audiences and future generations.

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Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact Benno Rembeck: brembeck@nationaltheatre.org.uk

About the National Theatre

The National Theatre offers the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world. This year, we will produce 18 plays, following over a thousand shows that have shaped British theatre since 1963.

Our productions transfer from our home in London to the West End, Broadway and beyond, winning awards on both sides of the Atlantic. We champion bold storytelling that inspires, challenges and entertains, bringing the world to the National Theatre, and taking the best of British theatre to the world. Through our online streaming service NT at Home; our education platform, the NT Collection in schools; and in cinemas with NT Live, we reach audiences digitally in almost every country worldwide – 184 out of 195 and counting.

We operate as a registered charity with a deep social purpose and a nationwide footprint. We partner with regional theatres to tour our shows, are active in more than 90% of state secondary schools, and our Skills Centre trains nearly 6,000 people each year.

Our dedicated NT Studio champions new writing, and we are central London's 'biggest factory' with workshops that craft every aspect of our productions. We host the world's most extensive theatre archive, and our Green Store houses more than 150,000 reusable props and costumes as part of our sustainability commitments.

For more information, please visit nationaltheatre.org.uk