

# PATRICK STEWART Receives the 2008 GIELGUD AWARD at a Gala in New York

On Monday evening, March 10, in collaboration with the ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION and the NATIONAL ARTS CLUB, the SHAKESPEARE GUILD saluted Patrick Stewart with its 2008 GIELGUD AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE DRAMATIC ARTS. The event occurred in Manhattan, at a venerable 19th-century Gramercy Park brownstone that had once been owned by Samuel J. Tilden, a patriarch of the New York Public Library, a respected Governor of the Empire State, and a Democratic nominee for President of the United States who won the popular vote in 1876 but lost in a controversial disputed election to the Republicans' Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio.

For the better portion of a century the Tilden Mansion has been home to the NAC, and it was in this space that notables such as John Barrymore, Julia Marlowe, and Ashley H. Thorndike established the original Shakespeare Association of America in 1923 and began issuing what would eventually become *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Everyone thought it altogether fitting, then, that in a setting adjacent to another historic institution, a Players Club bequeathed to the acting profession by Edwin Booth, a stellar company of luminaries came together to extol an artist who has been described by Sir Ian McKellen as "one of the great Shakespearians of our time."

Unfortunately, Sir Ian, who had been the first thespian to be honored in Gielgud's name (at a 1996 gathering in Washington's FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY) was unable to attend the ceremony. He sent a warm congratulatory message, however, in which he noted that anyone "familiar with the Wars of the Roses will appreciate how much it pains a Lancastrian, like me, to be nice about" a man with the "disadvantage of being born on the wrong side of the Pennine Hills." Notwithstanding this handicap, McKellen went on to say, he was compelled to acknowledge that he couldn't "think of another actor who works so hard and so consistently well in a wonderful variety of styles." He bestowed special praise on Mr. Stewart's recent performances in Bardic roles such as Macbeth, Malvolio, and Prospero. And he described his friend's 2006 Antony as "by a mile the best I've ever seen."

Similar accolades arrived from other recipients of GIELGUD laurels, among them Sir Derek Jacobi and Lynn Redgrave. One of the most touching came from Michael Kahn, Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, who had been feted in May 2007 at a BRITISH EMBASSY reception hosted by Sir David and Lady Manning. "It is remarkable and inspiring," Mr. Kahn said, "that after achieving recognition in *Star Trek* – making millions of fans, including the high and mighty in your own country – you chose to return to your roots



in classical theatre. With imagination and an unfailing technique, you have investigated, inhabited, and indeed triumphed in most of the greatest and most challenging roles in the repertory."

In light of the auspices under which Mr. Kahn had himself been toasted, it seemed entirely apt that one of the most eloquent tributes to the 2008 GIELGUD awardee was delivered by Sir Nigel Sheinwald. Sir Nigel had succeeded Sir David Manning as Her Majesty's Ambassador to the United States in October 2007, and he expressed both pride and pleasure as he ascended the podium to extol the achievements that had made Patrick Stewart so popular and revered a figure on both sides of the Atlantic. As he did so, he reinforced many of the comments that had been transmitted by others who couldn't be on hand for the revels.

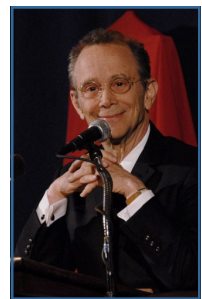
Among the remarks he echoed was a testimonial from Peter Holland, Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame, Editor of *Shakespeare Survey*, and former Director of the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. Dr. Holland talked about the work that Mr. Stewart did as a key founder of ACTER: A Center for Theatre, Education, and Research, an enterprise inaugurated by Dr Homer Swander at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Beginning in the 1970s, Stewart and dozens of his RSC associates helped organize and took part in tours of American educational institutions. During week-long residencies that brought talents like Lisa Harrow, Ben Kingsley, Ian Richardson, and David Suchet into classrooms and auditoriums from one coast to the other, Mr. Stewart and his colleagues revolutionized the teaching of dramatic literature, not only in the United States but, in ways that could not have been anticipated, throughout the world. As a result they transformed the way Shakespeare and other playwrights were approached in the study, in rehearsal, and in production. Because of their efforts, theatre and film artists, scholars, critics, and playgoers are now engaging in sophisticated forms of practice and discourse that would have been unimaginable a few decades earlier.

Mr. Stewart's impact as an inspiring educator became even clearer when Vice-Chancellor Robert Cryan talked about how much the actor has done to support the instructional programs of his alma mater, the University of Huddersfield in Yorkshire, where he now serves both as Chancellor and as an active Professor of Performing Arts. Not only did Dr. Cryan emphasize the philanthropy with which his colleague is providing opportunities to students who, more often than not, are the first in their families to experience the benefits of higher learning. He went on to discuss a number of Mr. Stewart's other civic engagements, among them his endeavors as Honorary Patron of Refuge, the UK's leading charity to assist the victims of domestic violence. According to Sandra Horsley, who heads this agency, Stewart has been a strong advocate of its mission since the early '70s, when "he carried armfuls of clothes and household goods to help equip its very first safe house in West London. Hundreds of women and children flocked to it because, for the first time, someone was saying it was wrong to beat your partner."



Stewart aficionados at the NAC were treated to a similar message from **William F. Schulz**, who had retired in 2006 after an eventful and highly productive decade as Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. Opening with a speech from Claudio in Act III of *Measure for Measure* (“The miserable have no other medicine, but only hope”), Mr. Schulz said “It strikes me that this line captures perfectly all that you have given to the human rights movement over the past twenty or more years.” After enumerating several of Mr. Stewart’s extraordinary contributions, Mr. Schulz told him that what made each of them particularly significant was that “you didn’t *have* to do any of these things.” The lesson they all conveyed, he said, was “that by the very lending of your time, you were sending a profound message: that valuable as celebrity and honor may be, they pale in comparison to generosity of heart, and that, in the face of tears and torture and tragedy, you chose to cast your lot not with the mighty but with the miserable. Your voice and your presence, the gifts that have made you a world-class actor, gave them hope. If for no other reason than that, you deserve the great honor you receive tonight.”

For most of the gala’s attendees, Patrick Stewart’s efforts in these spheres were unfamiliar. But it soon became evident that none of his charitable activities were incompatible with those which had always guided him in roles that are better known to the fans of Jean-Luc Picard, Charles Xavier, Captain Ahab, and other personae. The festivities commenced with warm greetings from **O. Aldon James**, President of the **NATIONAL ARTS CLUB**, and from **Marguerite Yaghjian**, head of the NAC’s Shakespeare Committee. These leaders were followed by **Barbara O’Dwyer Lopez**, Executive Director of the **ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION OF NEW YORK**, and by **John Andrews**, President of the **SHAKESPEARE GUILD**. Attendees also heard witty comments from **Whoopi Goldberg**, who talked about how much fun she’d had during her guest appearances on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Everyone smiled as actor **Joel Grey** sang a ditty from *Cabaret* (for which he had won both a Tony and an Oscar) and as television producer **Robert Halmi Jr.** reminisced about memorable moments from a TV rendering of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* in which Grey had represented the Ghost of Christmas Past and Mr. Stewart had portrayed Ebenezer Scrooge.



Patrons were touched by the ardor that pianist **Emanuel Ax** brought to his recollections about how thrilling it had been to team up with Stewart for a concert at Hollywood Bowl and at other legendary venues. Mr. Ax observed that one of their special performances of Richard Strauss’s *Enoch Arden* had been recorded, and he said he was



hoping for an encore recital in the near future at Carnegie Hall.

Attendees cheered, along with the actress’s fellow cast members, as a beauty who had been lauded by *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley as “the fine, fierce **Kate Fleetwood**” saluted the Thane with whom she’d enjoyed so many ovations as Lady Macbeth. In a Scottish Play that had been directed by Ms. Fleetwood’s husband **Rupert Goold**, the company had earned several Olivier nominations at the Gielgud Theatre in London and a comparable array of Tony nods for the Lyceum transfer that resulted from the show’s sold-out initial American run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Everyone was moved by the fervor with which **F. Murray Abraham** praised the conviction Mr. Stewart had brought to a pivotal moment in his Broadway rendering of a role that Mr. Abraham had originated Off Broadway in Arthur Miller’s *A Ride Down Mount Morgan*. The audience chuckled as the awardee’s son **Daniel Stewart**, himself a stage and screen actor with a number of impressive credits and a very promising future, recounted some of his favorite boyhood memories, several of which illustrated the difficulties a typical English family had endured as it sought to make ends meet in the days before one of Gene Roddenberry’s subordinates happened to attend a one-man show by a visiting RSC performer in the mid-’80s at UCLA.



Finally, everyone relished the perspective that **David Jones** brought, both to his four decades of association with the awardee, many of them during the glory days of the celebrated Aldwych Theatre on the perimeter of Covent Garden, and to his admiration for Sir John Gielgud and for all he’d done to keep Shakespeare and other classics vibrant during what is universally regarded as a golden age for modern British drama. A gifted film and TV director with *The Trial*, *Betrayal*, and *84 Charing Cross Road* among his many accomplishments, Mr. Jones had unveiled a star in Mr. Stewart’s honor on Hollywood Boulevard. For this reason the audience was enormously grateful for his willingness to bestow the 2008 **GIELGUD AWARD** on Mr. Stewart.



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Among the many highlights of the gala was the thoughtfulness, charm, and humility with Mr. Stewart thanked those who’d participated in what he described as an unforgettable evening. In a note the following day he told those who’d arranged a joyful get-together that “nothing like this” had “ever happened” to him before.

Like him, the **SHAKESPEARE GUILD** is immensely indebted to those who did so much to make a lovely occasion successful. Above all the Guild wishes to single out actor **Clive Francis**, whose many delightful caricatures include a limited-edition print to commemorate the 1996 ceremony at which Sir John Gielgud was inducted into Britain’s august Order of Merit. He inscribed a few of those portraits, and Mr. Francis has generously donated them for presentation to those selected for what David Jones tellingly commended as one of the most prestigious distinctions in the performing arts.

