

Lynn Redgrave Receives the 2003 Gielgud Trophy at Gramercy Park

Kathleen Chalfant, Bill Condon, Richard Easton, Elizabeth McCann, and Corin Redgrave Lead Tribute

ON MONDAY NIGHT, May 19, during a touching ceremony that emerged as a salute to one of the most resonant family traditions in the modern theatre, **LYNN REDGRAVE** accepted the 2003 *Golden Quill*.

This year's festivities took place at the historic **NATIONAL ARTS CLUB**, a Gramercy Park jewel that was the original home for a SHAKESPEARE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA that bore such immortals as JOHN BARRYMORE and JULIA MARLOWE on its masthead in the early 1920s. At present the **NAC** is hosting *Food for Thought*, a luncheon forum in which distinguished performers read playscripts, and *SPEAKING OF SHAKESPEARE*, a Guild series that permits attendees to converse with such engaging personalities as F. MURRAY ABRAHAM, SIMON RUSSELL BEALE, HENRY GOODMAN, MARGOT HARLEY, JEFFREY HOROWITZ, BILL IRWIN, JOHN MILLER, ROGER REES, and DAVID SCHRAMM.

AS HE WELCOMED 210 guests to the Club he's led to unprecedented outreach, president **O. ALDON JAMES** began with a letter from **DANA GIOIA**, chairman of the **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS**. After conveying his esteem for this year's laureate, Mr. Gioia cited a line from *Henry VIII* – "The force of his own merit makes his way" – and applied it to the drama's author. "It is the merit of his work – the deep richness and emotional complexity of it – that draws our finest actors and actresses to his plays." Mr. Gioia went on to say that "as the National Endowment for the Arts undertakes *Shakespeare in American Communities*, the largest professional tour" of the repertory "in our nation's history, we do so with gratitude for The Shakespeare Guild and its commitment to keeping" the poet and his masterworks "alive and well for generations to come."

Next to speak was **MARC LEVY**, the NAC member who has been primarily responsible for all the Guild's offerings at the Club. Mr. Levy told Ms. Redgrave that the show of hers which had left the greatest impression on him was her own *Shakespeare For My Father*, which had been nominated for a Tony before it went to London's THEATRE ROYAL HAYMARKET. In this solo piece, Lynn had enacted both the greatest Nurse and the best Juliet he'd ever witnessed.

Mr. Levy's comments were echoed by **BARBARA HAMMERMAN**, who'd served in the early '90s as executive director of the GROVE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL in California. After she brought greetings on behalf of the Guild board of directors, Ms. Hammerman thanked **MARGOT LEBOW** of **WORLDTRAVELSERVICE** and **WENDY BUCK** of **VIRGIN ATLANTIC AIRWAYS**, who'd supplied indis-

pensable support for the gala. In reply they said they looked forward to an even larger part in the Guild's **LONDON GIELGUD CENTENARY** in April of 2004.

RICHARD EASTON, who had earned a 2001 Tony Award as A. E. Housman in Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love*, and who'd been well acquainted with the actor whose "character" the *Golden Quill* perpetuates (Sonnet 85), regaled the audience with some choice Gielgud anecdotes. He was followed by director-screenwriter **BILL CONDON**, who'd won an Oscar for *Gods and Monsters*. Mr. Condon spoke about the lessons he'd learned from seeing how Ms. Redgrave approached her role as servant to the filmmaker who was the movie's flamboyant protagonist. Legendary Broadway producer **ELIZABETH IRELAND MCCANN**, who has enriched our lives with hits like *Amadeus*, *Copenhagen*, *The Goat*, and *Home*, and who now delivers the Tony Awards to us on TV, came to the podium with a yellowed clipping about her first production, one in which Ms. Redgrave had enjoyed her New York debut. She said she had considered giving it to her friend but finally realized she couldn't part with it. In a swift transition from the honoree's earliest Manhattan



triumph to her most recent, **KATHLEEN CHALFANT**, representing the full cast of *Talking Heads*, focused on how much they had all relished a chance to share the stage with so dedicated a talent as Lynn.

MS. REDGRAVE was now treated to a toast from her brother **CORIN**, who said that he found it very difficult to account for her special gifts, which seemed so different from those of **SIR MICHAEL REDGRAVE**, their late father, and of **RACHEL KEMPSON**, their frail 92-year-old mother. He spoke with eloquent candor about the challenges all three offspring had encountered. And he read a letter that had just arrived by fax from **VANESSA REDGRAVE**, who had expected to be present for the gathering but had been called home to Connecticut when Ms. Kempson's condition suddenly worsened.

Like Corin, Vanessa praised her sister, commended the fortitude that had been so crucial at key points in her career, and stressed how proud she was that Lynn was being lauded for her contributions to an artistic heritage that all the Redgraves had fervently cherished.

Photographs by Neshan Naltchayan

BEFORE he bestowed **JOHN SAFER**'s gleaming sculpture on this year's recipient of the Gielgud trophy, Guild president **JOHN ANDREWS** shared several messages.

In one **PATRICK STEWART**, who said he'd been "a fan" before he'd become Lynn's "colleague and friend," assured her that he'd "polka with her anywhere, anytime." In another **SIR DEREK JACOBI** said "I have such very fond and vivid memories of our time together as *Juveniles* in the sixties at the Old Vic. Your warmth and your huge sense of fun, your no-nonsense approach to the often arduous work, your generosity to the other actors, and, above all, your spontaneity and humanity were, even then, an obvious and glowing recipe for a glittering future. You never let your undoubted intellectual curiosity blunt the edges of your great emotional instincts. You made such unexpected choices – the sign of fine acting – and your talents are the more potent for being understated." In a third message, **ZOE CALDWELL** confided that she'd known Lynn "since she was in school uniform" and had "watched her like a hawk. The miracle is that each time I saw her, both in the theatre and in life, she got better, simpler, more true. She now is at the pinnacle of her ability. And like no other actress around, without any conceit or tricks she lets you in on the humanity of the character she is playing." In a fourth missive, **SIR IAN MCKELLEN** asked Lynn "Does anyone know a more beautiful smile than yours? And you have the sense of humour and wit to go with it. Of course that's only half your story. *Georgy Girl* was funny, but she broke the audience's hearts. In *Gods and Monsters*, James Whale's housekeeper Hanna was funny, but how she touched us as she kissed his corpse goodbye. I'm sure that **ALAN BENNETT**, the master of the bitter and the sweet, is currently in your debt." As if on cue, an epistle from Mr. Bennett now manifested itself with a timely return to origins. "That the award is named after John Gielgud," the writer said, is a particular "pleasure, as he starred in my first play, *40 Years On*, itself nearly 40 years ago now. That show never made it to New York, but *Talking Heads* has amply made up for it."



IN HER ACCEPTANCE remarks Ms. Redgrave left no doubt that these accolades meant a great deal to her. Alluding to her mother's fading health and to the medical crises that Lynn and her brother had recently confronted, she closed with a poignant recitation of Prospero's famous assertion that "Our revels now are ended," a statement that includes a magician's elegiac reflection that "we are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep."

Those who heard her were vividly reminded of Sir Derek Jacobi's earlier comment that Lynn Redgrave is, and will long remain, "a shining beacon" to a world of affectionate admirers.