



SPECIAL RECOGNITION OLIVIER AWARD RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

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Friday 8 March 2019

Ahead of the Olivier Awards 2019 with Mastercard, four Special Recognition Awards were today presented to Bendy Ashfield, (Royal Opera House Apprenticeships Manager), Vivien Wallace (The Old Vic's former Executive Director of Development) and Linford Hudson (long-serving London Palladium Follow Spot Operator), celebrating their outstanding contributions to British theatre. Family members of fellow recipient Bob Thomas, a renowned theatre accountant who died in late 2018, collected his award on his behalf.

The awards were presented during an Olivier Awards Nominees' Celebration at The May Fair Hotel in London (part of Edwardian Hotels London, official hotel partner for the Olivier Awards). Producer and Society of London Theatre President Kenny Wax presented Bendy Ashfield's award, Vivien Wallace received hers from Executive Director of The Old Vic Kate Varah, composer Andrew Lloyd Webber presented Linford Hudson's, and producer Peter Wilson presented Bob Thomas's posthumous award.

Julian Bird, Chief Executive of Society of London Theatre and Executive Producer of the Olivier Awards, said:

'Theatre is about so much more than what happens on stage, and the Society of London Theatre is proud to recognise these four inspirational individuals, who, in the course of their incredible careers, have all changed the industry for the better in very different ways.'

Bendy Ashfield has been Apprenticeships Manager at the Royal Opera House since 2006, and is the founder of the hugely successful ROH Apprenticeships Scheme, offering experience in backstage and technical disciplines. Many of the 50 ROH apprentices Ashfield has personally recruited and supported have gone on to long-term careers in award-winning theatre, ballet and opera. Passionate about ensuring young people from diverse backgrounds get equal opportunities, Ashfield believes that a background in theatre isn't essential for a budding apprentice, but that more important is aptitude, enthusiasm and personality.

Vivien Wallace was Executive Director of Development at The Old Vic from 2005 until 2018, and has had an immeasurable impact on the theatre industry over a long and varied theatre career – which began as the first ever Press Officer at the Royal Ballet. Through her outstanding work as a fundraiser she introduced new audiences to the theatre and engaged local communities. In her 12 years at The Old Vic, Wallace raised £28.5 million, funding multiple education, community and talent development initiatives and maintaining the 200 year old building. She continues to support the theatre on various projects as Executive Associate.

Linford Hudson, known to many in the industry as ‘Mr Follow Spot’, is widely regarded as the best Follow Spot Operator in the business. He worked at the London Palladium for over 50 years, lighting countless legendary entertainers including Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra and Bette Midler. Hudson got the job within two months of arriving in London from Jamaica in 1962 aged fifteen. During his extraordinary career at the Palladium, Hudson lit 41 Royal Variety performances and oversaw some of its first colour TV broadcasts. Other career highlights include lighting Princess Diana’s funeral at Westminster Abbey.

Bob Thomas worked as a theatre accountant for 25 years until his death in late 2018. In the course of a varied and distinguished career, he worked with almost every producer and theatre in London and the UK. Thomas was Financial Controller at PW Productions, and also worked independently for well over 350 West End and touring shows. He guided producers through countless hits, flops and all the shows in between, with a crystal clear view of the financial state of a show – and an opinion on whether it was any good! Known and loved by many as one of Theatreland’s great characters, Thomas sadly died before he could be formally presented with his award, but was delighted to have been given it as a testament to his invaluable contribution to theatre.

The full list of nominations for the Olivier Awards 2019 with Mastercard was announced on 5 March, and is available to view on OlivierAwards.com.

The Olivier Awards will take place on Sunday 7 April at the Royal Albert Hall, hosted by Jason Manford. The ceremony will be broadcast via official media partners ITV, Magic Radio and Facebook. Further details to be announced soon.

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EDITORS NOTES

Established in 1976, the [Olivier Awards](http://OlivierAwards.com) celebrate the world-class status of London theatre and are Britain’s most prestigious stage honours.

[Society of London Theatre \(SOLT\)](http://SocietyofLondonTheatre.org) is a not-for-profit organisation representing the London theatre industry. SOLT runs the Olivier Awards, West End LIVE, TKTS, Theatre Tokens, Kids Week, the New Year Sale and Official London Theatre.

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