



BFI FELLOWSHIP FOR RICHARD LESTER

Director Richard Lester was presented with the BFI's highest accolade, the BFI Fellowship, on Thursday 22nd March following a screening of one of his best-loved films, **Robin and Marian** at BFI Southbank. The award was presented by BFI Chair, Greg Dyke.

Richard Lester said *'When my career was just beginning, the elegant TV critic Bernard Levin came to see me in rehearsal with Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers. He wrote: 'he seems an amiable young man who climbed into a lion's cage and realised he's forgotten his chair and his whip.'*

Some 50 years later, I still haven't found a whip, but with this extraordinary honour, the BFI has kindly given me a chair.'

Greg Dyke said, *'Richard Lester has created a unique body of work which has enriched the lives of millions with his brilliantly surreal humour and innovative style. Although born in America he has lived in Britain for 60 years and created some of the most enduring and influential creations of British cinema.'*

The BFI Fellowship is awarded by the BFI Board of Governors and it is presented for outstanding achievement in film and television. Previous recipients include Ralph Fiennes, David Cronenberg, Dame Judi Dench, Isabelle Huppert and Martin Scorsese. The full list is a roll-call of the leading lights of the world of film and television.

Richard Lester is perhaps best known for his ground-breaking films with the Beatles, **A Hard Day's Night (1964)** and **Help! (1965)**, which retain a vividly authentic flavour of the 60s zeitgeist. His quirky, surrealist humour is considered a key influence on the Monty Pythons. He is a boldly original film-maker whose originality and creativity have inspired several generations of film-makers and actors.

Although born in the USA in 1932, Lester came to England in 1956, having become a television director at the age of 20. He has remained resident in the UK ever since. Key to Lester's creative output was his working relationship with Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, seen in the

television series **A Show Called Fred** (ITV, 1956), the eleven-minute short *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film* (1959) and the savagely absurdist *The Bed-Sitting Room* (1969), adapted from the play by Spike Milligan and John Antrobus.

Richard Lester's work with Milligan and Sellers brought him to the attention of the Beatles and the films they made together **A Hard Day's Night** (1964) and **Help!** (1965) were both huge international critical and commercial successes and they remain hugely influential. Lester won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1965 for **The Knack...and How to Get It**, which starred Rita Tushingham and Michael Crawford.

Lester's adaptation of the Sondheim stage musical **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum** (1966) boasts Phil Silvers and Buster Keaton in its cast. He worked with many big budget Hollywood productions in the 1970s and 80s including a highly successful series of films based on **The Three Musketeers** starring Oliver Reed and Richard Chamberlain. **Robin and Marian** (1976) starring Audrey Hepburn and Sean Connery is a highly rated late work.

Richard Lester has a long association with the BFI. He presented the first John Player lecture in 1968, stepping in when Jean-Luc Godard refused to appear.

Note to Editors:

The Fellowship of the British Film Institute was created in 1983 to coincide with the BFI's 50th anniversary. On that occasion the British film industry gathered in the Guildhall for a televised event at which the first group of Fellows were created - Marcel Carné, David Lean, Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, Satyajit Ray and Orson Welles.

Since its creation, the BFI Fellowship has been awarded to key figures in British cinema including Peggy Ashcroft, Dirk Bogarde, Alec Guinness, Maggie Smith, Laurence Olivier, Vanessa Redgrave and Mike Leigh. Also recognised have been such film industry luminaries as Jack Cardiff, Sydney Samuelson and Jeremy Thomas, and some of the giants of world cinema, including Michelangelo Antonioni, Abbas Kiarostami, Akira Kurosawa, Jeanne Moreau, Elem Klimov and Bernardo Bertolucci.

The BFI Fellowship also celebrates achievement in the world of television with such names as Alan Yentob, Jeremy Isaacs, David Rose, Michael Parkinson, Lynda La Plante, Lord Bernstein and Verity Lambert all receiving the award.

Since 1983 a total of 73 Fellowships have been awarded.

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Notes to Editors

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences