

Michael Attenborough

Director

Michael Attenborough was educated at Westminster School and Sussex University, where he read English and was President of the University Drama Society. He graduated in 1972 and took on the post of Assistant Director at the University's Gardner Centre Theatre – now re-named the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts.



Between 1972-74, he was Associate Director of the Mercury Theatre, Colchester, where he directed productions for both the main house and the studio theatre. He then moved to the Leeds Playhouse as Associate Director (1974-79) where he directed 26 plays during his five years there. These included new works by Willy Russell, Alan Bleasdale, James Robson and Arnold Wesker and a range of major classics by Chekhov, Shaw and Shakespeare.

In 1979, Michael became Associate Director of the Young Vic with Michael Bogdanov. His productions included Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

The following year he moved to the Palace Theatre, Watford where he was Artistic Director for five years. During that period his productions included *The Girl in Melanie Klein* (with Frank Finlay), *Terra Nova* (with Robert Powell and Stephanie Beacham), *Romantic Comedy* (with Simon Callow and Pauline Collins) which transferred to the Apollo Theatre and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (with Dame Wendy Hiller) which was filmed by LWT and twice screened by Channel 4. In 1983, Michael was selected for the BBC Television Drama Directors Course which he completed just before he took up his next appointment as Artistic Director at the Hampstead Theatre (1984-89).

During this period, Hampstead Theatre produced 33 plays, five of which transferred to the West End and one to Broadway. The theatre also won 23 awards and was nominated for the 1987 Olivier Outstanding Achievement Award "for its overall high standard of work." Amongst the plays Michael directed were *The War At Home* (with Timothy West, David Threlfall and Frances Sternhagen; which transferred to Broadway and for which he was nominated as Best Director in the London Theatre Critics Awards 1984), *Particular Friendships* (winner of Thames Television Award for Best Play and Production 1985), *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (winner of the 1987 Time Out Theatre Award for Best Director), *That Summer* by David Edgar and *Separation* by Tom Kempinski (with David Suchet and Saskia Reeves, which transferred to the Comedy Theatre and was nominated for three Olivier Awards).

During his time at Hampstead he also directed two freelance productions abroad at the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton, *Canada* (a new stage version of George Orwell's *1984*) and at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (Lorca's *Yerma* in a new translation by Frank McGuinness).

In 1989, he became Artistic Director of A.T.G's Turnstyle Group and directed four productions between 1989-90. These were Alan Bennett's *Single Spies* (a co-production with the National Theatre), *My Mother Said I Never Should* by Charlotte Keatley at the Royal Court (nominated for an Olivier Award), *Fashion* by Doug Lucie (transferred from Leicester Haymarket to the Tricycle Theatre) and *Over a Barrel* by Stephen Bill (Palace Theatre, Watford, winner of 1991 Writers Guild Award for Best New Play outside London).

In 1990 he was appointed Resident Director and Executive Producer of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In 1992 Michael Attenborough directed Billy Roche's new play *Amphibians* in the Pit, followed by *The Changeling* in the Swan Theatre. He transferred *The Changeling* into the Pit during the 1993 London Season and directed two national and European tours of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

In 1994 he directed two world premieres in the Stratford Season at The Other Place, *After Easter* by Anne Devlin and *Pentecost* by David Edgar (winner of the 1994 Eileen Anderson Award and the 1995 Evening Standard Best Play Award). Both productions transferred to London in 1995.

In January 1996 Michael became Principal Associate Director. In the 1996/97 Stratford and London Season he directed the world premiere of Peter Whelan's *The Herbal Bed* at The Other Place, the Pit Theatre, the Duchess Theatre in the West End and subsequently on Broadway. *The Herbal Bed* was nominated for a 1997 Olivier Award as Best Play and won the 1996 Eileen Anderson Award and the 1997 Lloyds Bank Playwright of the Year Award. His production of *Romeo and Juliet* opened in the Pit Theatre, London in October 1997 and played in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon before embarking upon a national and international tour in February 1998, coming to a conclusion in Verona in July 1998.

His production of *A Month In the Country* (in a new version by Brian Friel), which formed part of the 1999 Regional Tour, opened in the Swan Theatre in December 1998 and toured in the UK and internationally from March 1999. Michael then directed *Othello* in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre as part of the 1999 Stratford Summer Festival Season, which subsequently transferred to the Barbican Theatre. In October 1999 he directed *Anna Weiss*, a new play by Mike Cullen (with Catherine McCormack) at the Whitehall Theatre in the West End. In the Stratford Summer Festival Season 2000 he directed *Henry IV Parts One and Two* in the Swan Theatre, which transferred to the Barbican Theatre in 2001. He directed David Edgar's new play, *The Prisoner's Dilemma*, at The Other Place Theatre in the Stratford Summer Festival Season 2001, which transferred to the Pit Theatre, London in January 2002.

Michael went on to direct *Antony and Cleopatra* which opened at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in April 2002 and then transferred to the Haymarket Theatre in the West End. On leaving the Royal Shakespeare Company he was invited to become an Honorary Associate Artist of the RSC.

In 2002 he was appointed Artistic Director of the Almeida Theatre. His productions at the Almeida include: *The Mercy Seat* by Neil LaBute, *Five Gold Rings*, a new play by Joanna Laurens, *Brighton Rock*, a new musical by John Barry and Don Black, *The Late Henry Moss* by Sam Shepard, Gorki's *Enemies*, in a new version by David Hare, *There Came a Gypsy Riding*, a new play by Frank McGuinness with Eileen Atkins and Imelda Staunton, *Big White Fog* by Theodore Ward, *Awake and Sing!* by Clifford Odets, *The Homecoming* by Harold Pinter, *In a Dark, Dark House* by Neil LaBute, *When The Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell, Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure*, which was nominated for three Olivier Awards and was the winner of an Evening Standard Theatre Award, Ingmar Bergman's *Through A Glass Darkly* in a new adaptation by Jenny Worton, which transferred to New York, *The Knot of the Heart*, a new play by David Eldridge, which was nominated for two Olivier Awards, two Evening Standard Awards and won the Award for Best New Play in the Offies, *Reasons To Be Pretty* by Neil LaBute, *Filumena* by Eduardo de Filippo in a new version by Tanya Ronder, and his final production, *King Lear*, with Jonathan Pryce as Lear.

Under Michael's leadership as Artistic Director, the Almeida produced twenty eight premieres, ten new versions of foreign plays, ten new plays for young people and four major festivals.

Michael is the the recipient of two Honorary Doctorates, from the Universities of Leicester and Sussex, where he is also Honorary Professor of English.

In April 2012, Michael was presented with the Award for Excellence in International Theatre by The International Theatre Institute.

Michael stepped down as Artistic Director of the Almeida in April 2013. His freelance work since then has included productions of *Macbeth* in Australia and *As You Like It* in Washington, a national tour of Priestley's *Dangerous Corner*, new plays by Rebecca Gilman and Deborah Bruce at the Hampstead Theatre, the UK Premiere of Neil LaBute's *Reasons to be Happy* at the Hampstead Theatre and Frank McGuinness' *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* at the Chichester Festival Theatre.

In June 2013 he was awarded the CBE for services to theatre and in November 2016 Michael was appointed to the honorary post of Director Emeritus at RADA.

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