

THE DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE TRUST

Trustee
JPMorgan Chase Bank

345 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10154

PETER SELLARS, A LEADING FORCE IN MODERN OPERA, TO BE HONORED WITH ONE OF THE LARGEST PRIZES IN THE ARTS

THE 2005 DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE September 29, 2005, New York City

Renowned theater, opera, and festival director Peter Sellars has been selected as this year's recipient of the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, one of the largest awards in the arts. Sellars will be presented with a silver medallion and approximately \$250,000 at a ceremony to be held September 29, 2005, at the Hudson Theatre, Millennium Broadway, New York City. Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison will be on hand to pay tribute and deliver remarks. A special performance of *Lúa Descolorida* by Osvaldo Golijov and *Magnificat (from El Niño)* by John Adams will be presented by Dawn Upshaw and Gilbert Kalish and the evening will conclude with a reading by Poet Iraj Anvar.

A visionary force in modern opera, Sellars is known for his re-interpretations of classic works, coming to prominence with his radical staging of Mozart operas. He is also the driving force behind the creation of new productions such as *Ainadamar*, about the life and death of Spanish poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, which premiered in July with the Santa Fe Opera. In October, Sellars will present the debut of John Adams' *Doctor Atomic*, about the development of the bomb, with the San Francisco Opera, and in November, his new production of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* will open with the Paris Opera.

"In these times in America I am very moved and grateful that the Gish Prize has chosen to support diversity, controversy, complexity, and non-conformity," says Sellars. "I am a collaborative artist, and I accept this recognition on behalf of the courageous artists who have opened and challenged new worlds and old, in a body of work that has created shared spaces on a divided planet."

Now in its 12th year, the Gish Prize recognizes outstanding talents from a spectrum of disciplines in the arts. Recipients are trailblazers who have redefined their art and pushed the boundaries of excellence in their field, shaping the cultural landscape in drama, music, dance, art, architecture, lighting design, film, and publishing. **Peter Sellars** is the latest to join the select assembly of Gish Prize winners that includes jazz innovator **Ornette Coleman** (2004), dancer/choreographer **Bill T. Jones** (2003); theater director **Lloyd Richards** (2002); lighting designer **Jennifer Tipton** (2001); dancer/choreographer **Merce Cunningham** (2000); author/playwright Arthur Miller (1999); author **Isabel Allende** (1998); singer/songwriter **Bob Dylan** (1997); artist/director **Robert Wilson** (1996); film director **Ingmar Bergman** (1995); and architect **Frank Gehry** (1994).

(more)

A graduate of Harvard University, Sellars studied in Japan, China and India before becoming artistic director of the Boston Shakespeare Company in Massachusetts. At age 26, he was appointed to the helm of the American National Theatre at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, D.C. Since then, Sellars has worked with companies all over the world, and has guided numerous arts festivals including the 1990 and 1993 Los Angeles Festival, a large-scale, international, intercultural, and interdisciplinary initiative mobilizing the arts; the 2002 Adelaide Festival in Australia; and the 2003 Venice Biennale International Festival of Theater in Venice, Italy. He is currently the artistic director of New Crowned Hope, a festival in Vienna celebrating the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Among his numerous honors are the McArthur Prize and the Erasmus Prize.

In a career spanning three decades, Sellars has reshaped modern opera with his bold direction. He is responsible for some of the most innovative reinterpretations of classic works being staged around the world today. Whether it is Mozart, Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Sophocles, or the 16th-century Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu, Sellars is able to strike a universal chord with audiences, engaging contemporary social and political issues that resonate. He has also established a reputation for bringing 20th-century operas to the stage, including works by Olivier Messaien, Paul Hindemith, and György Ligeti, and for guiding the creation of new productions that have expanded the repertoire of modern opera.

With composer John Adams, a longtime collaborator, Sellars has presented *Nixon in China* with the Houston Grand Opera in 1987 and the English National Opera in 2000, taking the production to numerous venues in the U.S. and around the world, including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. and the Edinburgh Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. A 1988 television production of the Sellars-directed opera for *Great Performances* on PBS earned an Emmy for Outstanding Classical Program in the Performing Arts. Other works by Adams that Sellars has helmed include *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) with the Opera National de la Monnaie, Brussels, Belgium; the nativity oratorio *El Niño* (2000) with the Théâtre du Châtelet, and the upcoming *Doctor Atomic* with the San Francisco Opera. This year alone, Sellars has collaborated with video artist Bill Viola and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen on a new production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with the Paris Opera, and with composer Osvaldo Golijov and librettist David Henry Hwang on *Ainadamar* for the Santa Fe Opera.

(more)

Other recent projects include Tan Dun's composition *Peony Pavilion*; a Chicano version of Stravinsky's *The Story of a Soldier*; the premiere production of Kaija Saariaho's opera *L'amour de loin*; Antonin Artaud 's radio play coupled with the poetry of the late June Jordan, *For an End to the Judgment of God/Kissing God Goodbye*, staged as a press conference on the war in Afghanistan; and a new production of the Euripides play *The Children of Herakles*, focusing on contemporary immigration and refugee issues experience, which has been presented in eight countries.

The Gish Prize has no application process and is not determined through a competition. The Gish Prize Selection committee, a group that changes every year, chooses each recipient. Composed of leaders in the arts community, the committee for this year includes chairman **David Henry Hwang**, playwright, screenwriter, and librettist; **Ken Brecher**, executive director, Sundance Institute; **Red Burns**, chair, Interactive Telecommunications Program, Tisch School of the Arts at New York University; **Joel Conarroe**, former president, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation; and **Adam Weinberg**, Alice Pratt Brown director, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Established in 1994 by the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust and administered by JPMorgan Chase Bank as trustee, the prize is given annually to “a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind’s enjoyment and understanding of life.” In her will, Lillian Gish stated: “It is my desire, by establishing this prize, to give recipients of the prize the recognition they deserve, to bring attention to their contributions to society and encourage others to follow in their path.” Lillian Gish died in 1993 and Dorothy Gish, also an actress, died in 1968.

* * *

September 2005

A Portrait of Peter Sellars – theater, opera, and festival director – is available digitally.

Press Contact: PJA, Inc., (212) 721-5585, administrator@gishprize.com