



**For immediate release:**

## **LITERARY FESTIVAL SHOWS THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING**

Always looking to break boundaries and feature new and exciting events, this year's Stratford Literary Festival (24 April – 1 May) is most definitely a Festival of firsts.

Kicking off on the weekend when the world will be celebrating the Shakespeare400 anniversary, the Festival's biggest line-up yet includes a significant number that bring something totally new to festival goers.

Leading the way will be naturalist and BBC Spring and AutumnWatch presenter **Chris Packham**. The presenter of the BAFTA winning Really Wild Show will be launching his extraordinary memoir, *Fingers in The Sparkle Jar*, on 30<sup>th</sup> April, and talking for the very first time, five days ahead of publication of the book, about this very moving and uniquely written account of his difficult childhood and early adult life. The book, which tackles some distressing parts of his growing up and describes the bond he built with a kestrel, is already being raved about by booksellers and the press, and is sure to be a very big seller. The event is presented in partnership with Guardian Live.

The much acclaimed acting couple, **Martin Jarvis**, and his wife **Rosalind Ayres**, are joining composer **Richard Sisson** for a very special celebration of the life and work of Beatrix Potter. Jarvis and Ayres will be reading from the letters and the charming stories of this world famous writer, born 150 years ago this year, accompanied by music specially written for the event by Sisson, one half of the famous duo Kit and The Widow.

Brooklyn rapper **Devon Glover**, AKA The Sonnet Man, will be attempting a feat untried by anyone before him: reciting all of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets non-stop in a hip hop style. Devon, who specialises in making the Bard's work accessible to young people, will be making his world record breaking attempt outside Shakespeare's Birthplace on 24<sup>th</sup> April as the town celebrates the birthday of its most famous son in the Shakespeare400 year.

The Festival abounds with debut authors talking about their first pieces of work. These new writers include **Andrew Michael Hurley** whose stunning debut, *The Loney*, a gothic novel set in a wild part of the Lancashire Coast, scooped this year's Costa First novel Award. **Joanna Cannon** will be discussing *The Trouble with Goats and Sheep*, already a best-seller, and **Janet Ellis**, better known as an actress and Blue Peter presenter, will be bringing her first novel, *The Butcher's Hook*, to Stratford, a dark story set in Victorian London and already published to critical acclaim.

The Festival will also be giving debut local writers the chance to talk about their work in the series, New Voices, which are free, and festival goers are encouraged to come and support them.

*'We have always tried to break new ground', says Festival Director, Annie Ashworth, 'and have been the first festival to commission a novella, publish a book every year of the best poems and short stories entered into our creative writing competition, and the first to run a global on line poll*

*to find the most popular book anyone would take on a journey. This year is no different in the number of firsts we're presenting, and it makes for a very exciting programme.'*

The Festival, which is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year and is in media partnership with The Week, runs from 24<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May and the full line-up can be found at [stratlitfest.co.uk](http://stratlitfest.co.uk). Tickets can be booked at the Box Office on 01789 207100 or online at [stratfordartshouse.co.uk](http://stratfordartshouse.co.uk).

**For further press information, including interviews and hi res images:**

**Tamsin Williams**    [tamsin@wigwampr.com](mailto:tamsin@wigwampr.com)    +44 (0)1483 563562 +44 (0)7939 651252

**Carmel Rosato**    [carmel@wigwampr.com](mailto:carmel@wigwampr.com)    +44 (0)1483 563562 +44 (0)7557 357782