



## Press Release

### STRATFORD LITERARY FESTIVAL CELEBRATES THE BARD IN A SHAKESPEARE EXTRAVAGANZA FROM HERBACEOUS BORDERS TO HIP HOP

The Stratford Literary Festival 2016 will be taking a refreshing look at the legacy of the town's most famous son, as the world celebrates 400 years since the death of Shakespeare.

Launching on Sunday 24th April, during a weekend of celebrations in the town, the Festival's own Shakespeare strand – called 'For All Time' - will kick off with an exclusive Sonnet Marathon. Brooklyn-born Sonnet Man, **Devon Glover**, will attempt to recite all 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets in a hip hop fusion style from a special stage set up outside Shakespeare's Birthplace, bringing to young audiences a lively and engaging celebration of the Bard's work. It's the first time anyone has attempted this feat, and audiences will be encouraged to help him along as he gets into the final straight of this extraordinary attempt.

Marking the Hogarth Press's Project for which some of the world's most acclaimed writers have reworked Shakespeare's stories, the Man Booker Prize Winning author, **Howard Jacobson**, will be talking on Saturday 30th April about the challenges of reworking *The Merchant of Venice* in his novel *My Name is Sherlock*, while the day before the RSC's Rhetoric Coach **Benet Brandreth** (son of Gyles) will chair an exploration of the global reach of Shakespeare and the themes of his plays with the academics and writers **Edward Wilson Lees** and **Gabriel Josipovici**.

Keen singers are encouraged to join composer and BBC's *The Voice* coach **Juliet Russell** in her scratch choir to learn, rehearse and perform in just 5 hours one of Shakespeare's sonnets put to music by Juliet.

The talented gardening writer, **Jackie Bennett**, will be talking about Shakespeare's gardens, the subject of her latest book published in partnership with Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust, in the lovely surroundings of the garden at Anne Hathaway's Cottage, in full spring bloom. The audience can walk the garden with Jackie as she talks about the garden that the Bard knew so well.

*'Whilst the festival is featuring a wide and eclectic variety of other writers and topics in our programme,' says director Annie Ashworth, 'The theme for this year is For all Time (from the Ben Jonson elegy to Shakespeare) to mark the legacy of Shakespeare, and to complement the offering for the Shakespeare 400 celebrations being programmed around the country. For all Time is also the title of the Festival's annual Felix Dennis creative writing competition which is open to people aged from 7 years worldwide with a top prize of £1000. We've already received entries from as far away as Finland, Japan and Australia, and the best stories and poems will be published, as they are every year, in a Festival compilation.'*

*'Our extensive schools programme, which takes place in March, will also mark the anniversary with events in schools in Stratford, Kineton, Nuneaton and Birmingham, with Shakespeare writer for children, Marcia Williams and Tony Bradman whose book, The Boy and the Globe, imagines Shakespeare's childhood. We'll also be sharing the Shakespeare legacy with two schools in Nigeria that we're linking with again in 2016.'*

The Shakespeare strand at this year's festival, which has just become a charity and marks its 9th year this year, will sit alongside an exciting programme of events that includes Masterchef's John Torode, shop guru Mary Portas, broadcaster Paul Gambaccini, naturalist Chris Packham who will be launching his moving autobiography, Costa Debut Novel Winner Andrew Hurley, journalist John McCarthy and Pulitzer Prize winner, Rod Norland. Children will also be entertained by Gruffalo creator Julia Donaldson and illustrators Tony Ross and Korky Paul. A full programme of the week's events, which run from 24th April to 1st May, can be found at [stratlitfest.co.uk](http://stratlitfest.co.uk).

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

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#### **NOTE TO EDITORS**

The 9<sup>th</sup> Stratford Literary Festival runs from 24<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May with events in schools in the week of 14<sup>th</sup> March. The Festival is a charity, and is in media partnership with The Week Magazine.