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Press Release

STRATFORD LITERARY FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES ITS BIGGEST LINE UP EVER FOR THE 2016 FESTIVAL

As the eyes of the world are turned on Stratford-upon-Avon for the Shakespeare 400 celebrations in April, the ninth Literary Festival is putting on a packed programme that confirms Stratford as one of the most significant cultural towns on the planet.

Heading a line-up of over 100 events this year will be the naturalist and Springwatch presenter, **Chris Packham**, launching his very moving new autobiography; multi-million selling writer **Julia Donaldson** performing her favourite stories; Masterchef's **John Torode** and champion of the high street, **Mary Portas**; Coast presenter **Alice Roberts** will be exploring the Celts, one of the most mysterious ancient civilisations, and music broadcaster **Paul Gambaccini** will describe the traumas of being under suspicion in Operation Yewtree. Veteran writer **Hunter Davies** will share memories of growing up in Cumbria, and journalist and broadcaster, **John McCarthy** will be giving his personal view of events in the Middle East 25 years after his release as a hostage.

The BBC's security correspondent, **Gordon Corera**, will be giving an insight into espionage in the internet age, and biographer **Sir Anthony Seldon** and Today editor **Peter Snowdon** will be looking at the achievements – or otherwise – of David Cameron in *Cameron at 10*. A strong selection of history events will be headlined by the award-winning **Simon Sebag Montefiore** exploring the legacy of the Romanov Empire, and historian and TV presenter **James Holland** explaining how a rag-tag bunch of British soldiers defeated Japan's finest infantry in WW2. The leading scientist and writer **Professor Steve Jones** will be describing how a generation of geniuses was wiped out by the French Revolution.

The programme, which features over 100 events, includes an extensive selection of fiction with Costa First Novel winner **Andrew Hurley**, Pulitzer prize-winner **Rod Norland**, former Blue Peter presenter **Janet Ellis** with her first novel, and a return of the free events series, *New Voices*, which gives a platform for new and self-published authors.

Strong as ever is the Festival's selection of writing workshops starting off with a residential writing weekend at the Three Ways House Hotel in Mickleton in March. A series of masterclasses in fiction, poetry, self-publishing and writing for business will run throughout the week, tutored by leading writers including **AL Kennedy** and **Kathryn Heyman**, and, new for 2016, will be a *Writer's Bootcamp* – an hour each morning of the Festival week for writers to get help and advice, with a free event at the end of the week with an editor from a leading publisher.

There's comedy too with the brilliant **Austentatious**, the Edinburgh Fringe-storming theatre group who improvise Jane Austen novels with ideas from the audience, and an evening with **Henry Normal**, the writer behind *Gavin and Stacey* and *The Sketch Show*. **LITTLE MACHINE** join the line-up too with an evening of poems put to music.

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To mark the 2016 festival theme, For All Time - Ben Jonson's elegy to Shakespeare - the programme also takes a refreshing look at the legacy of the town's most famous son, William Shakespeare, with a hip hop Sonnet Marathon, historical exploration of Anne Hathaway's garden, and an exploration of The Bard with **Michael Rosen**.

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 who will learn, rehearse and perform in just five hours one of Shakespeare's sonnets put to music by Juliet. This is a repeat of last year's hugely successful and moving performance-in-a-day.

The Festival will be marking some other notable anniversaries. Actor **Martin Jarvis** and his wife, **Rosalind Ayres**, will be reading from the works of Beatrix Potter, 150 years after her birth, in a sparkling performance with music by composer (and Widow of Kit and The Widow) **Richard Sisson**. Award-winning crime writer, **Sophie Hannah**, and Orange Prize shortlisted author, **Jill Dawson**, will have daggers drawn over who was the greatest crime queen, 40 years after the death of Agatha Christie, and biographers **Claire Harman**, **Paula Byrne** and **Valerie Dodds** will be slugging it out between Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen or George Eliot respectively as to which was the greater novelist.

For kids, the Festival has a full week of events in schools in March, and 1st May is given over entirely to children who will also be entertained by Gruffalo creator **Julia Donaldson** and illustrators **Tony Ross** and **Korky Paul**. There's hilarious goings on with Festival Guest Director, **Philip Ardagh**, creative pop-up bookmaking, fun with **Pip Jones** and **Squify McFluff**, drama with **Playbox Theatre** and the famous Dino That Pooped Show.

'This year's Festival is a real mix of new and old, with plenty to fascinate Shakespeare fans, but also a host of events around other topics from food to the economy, farming to psychology,' says director Annie Ashworth. 'Writers really enjoy coming to Stratford, which this year will be an even more special experience with the Birthday celebrations, and they appreciate the response from our Stratford audience. This is helping to make the Literary Festival one of the most important in the country.'

The Festival, which is a now charity and in media partnership with The Week Magazine, runs from 24th April to 1st May. A full programme of the week's events can be found at stratlitfest.co.uk from 1st February and tickets go on sale that day from the Box Office at Stratford ArtsHouse on 01789 207100 or online at stratfordartshouse.co.uk.

For further press information, including interviews and photography:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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

The Director, Annie Ashworth, and many speakers at the Festival are available for interview.