Theatres Trust announces host and honours Julie Hesmondhalgh with the Great British Theatres Lifetime Achievement Award 2026

Monday 2 November 2026, 7.30pm
Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, London SW1H 9NH

As it marks its 50th anniversary with the launch of the Great British Theatres Awards, Theatres Trust has awarded acclaimed actor **Julie Hesmondhalgh** the Great British Theatres Lifetime Achievement Award 2026. Alongside this, West End and Broadway star **Marisha Wallace** has been announced as host of the awards.

This award recognises Hesmondhalgh as an important advocate for theatre, an exceptional performer whose contribution reaches far beyond the stage. A passionate champion of regional theatres and the communities they serve, she has continued to use her platform to protect the places, people and opportunities on which the future of theatre depends. Hesmondhalgh played a leading role in the high-profile campaign to save Oldham Coliseum from permanent closure following its initial shutdown and is now helping shape its next chapter as Guest Curator. She has also spoken out in support of reopening Oswaldtwistle Civic Arts Centre and Theatre, highlighting its longstanding importance as a place for local people to experience and participate in the arts.

Her advocacy reflects a firm belief that everyone should have the opportunity to experience theatre, make work and see their lives represented. Through co-founding Manchester's award-winning Take Back Theatre Collective and supporting RTYDS's *Fair Play* programme and young people's charity Arts Emergency, she has championed socially engaged work and challenged the barriers facing working-class theatre makers. Her support of arts education and belief in the value of culture to communities reflect that same commitment.

Joshua McTaggart, CEO of Theatres Trust, comments, *T*he concept for the Lifetime Achievement Award is to recognise someone who shares Theatres Trust's belief that everyone should have access to theatre and live performance no matter where they live or what their background is. There is no one in the public eye who embodies this spirit more than Julie Hesmondhalgh. Julie has used her platform as one of the country's most beloved actors to bang the drum for inclusive and equitable access to

the performing arts and champion important community theatres. We are thrilled that she is going to accept this award.

Alongside the announcement of the Great British Theatres Awards' Lifetime Achievement Award is the announcement of powerhouse performer Marisha Wallace as host, leading the evening to give these theatres the acclaim they deserve. Twice nominated for an Olivier Award, Marisha's acclaimed credits include *Guys and Dolls*; *Oklahoma!*; *Dreamgirls*; *Waitress*; *Hairspray*; *Cabaret*; and *Something Rotten!.* Having performed on stages across the UK and the USA, from regional venues to the West End and Broadway, she brings a firsthand appreciation of the varied stages and theatre communities these awards celebrate.

The Great British Theatres Awards ceremony will be held at Central Hall Westminster on Monday 2 November 2026. The 10 open award categories range from awards recognising particular types of buildings to categories celebrating how those buildings are used. Winners will be selected by an esteemed judging panel, which will also award The Great British Theatre 2026.

Notes to Editors

Title	Great British Theatres Awards
Date	Monday 2 November 2026
Location	Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, London, SW1H 9NH
Website	https://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/great-british-theatres-awards

Open Award Categories

Great New Build

Great Renovation

Great Amateur Theatre

Great Found Space

Great Community Connection

Great Use of Space

Great Placemaking Partner

Great Green Theatre

Great Public Space

Great British Theatres Shining Star

Judges Awards Categories

Great British Theatre 2026

Great British Theatres Lifetime Achievement Award

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Theatres Trust

Theatres Trust is the national advice and advocacy body for the UK's theatres supporting all forms of theatres, whether old or new, commercial, subsidised or community-run.

We protect theatres and champion the future of live performance by advising and supporting our nation's theatres to develop best practice in design and management following the four principles of resilience, environmental sustainability, inclusivity and placemaking.

All enquiries, high res images and further information:

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