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PRESS RELEASE

TV casting shows encourage theatregoing

Reality TV shows featuring the search for a star for West End musicals have encouraged theatregoing amongst television viewers, although audiences for productions featured on TV remain demographically similar to those for other West End shows.

These are the main findings of two pieces of research into the so-called 'Saturday Night TV Effect' in Theatreland. In the first, Ipsos MORI, working on behalf of The Society of London Theatre (SOLT), questioned theatregoers about their views on TV casting shows. In the second, SOLT worked with the Arts Council of England (ACE) to analyse audiences for West End productions which have and have not been featured in such TV shows.

Among theatregoers who have actually watched a theatre-based reality TV show, almost half (47%) of those surveyed by Ipsos MORI said that watching the TV show had made them more likely to see the musical production featured on TV, with 34% saying it had made them more likely to go and see a musical in the West End in general.

In addition, 23% were more likely to see non-musical productions such as plays or comedies as a result of watching a reality-based theatre show on TV.

The 'TV casting show' phenomenon was pioneered by Lord Lloyd Webber with the BBC, whose hugely successful *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?*, to find the lead for the subsequent stage production of *The Sound of Music*, set the template for later TV shows, featuring the casting of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Grease* and *Oliver!*

The SOLT/ACE research analysed the socio-economic make-up of audiences of several West End musicals by comparing postcode data from ticket purchasers. The fact that the profile of audiences in shows featured on TV casting shows was almost identical to that of audiences for shows not featured, suggests that such TV shows have not particularly encouraged new socio-economic groups to purchase tickets.

Sir Cameron Mackintosh said:

"There is no doubt that searching for the star of a musical on prime time Saturday night TV has had a tremendously beneficial effect on the West End, not only for promoting a particular show but, just as importantly, exposing new talent who find great opportunities in other productions in the West End and around the country. So the theatre industry has every reason to be grateful to Andrew Lloyd Webber and the BBC for putting musical theatre centre stage and the current buoyant state of the West End is living proof of the benefits."

Richard Pulford, Chief Executive of the Society of London Theatre, commented:

"The last two years have seen record attendances for London theatre. It is of obvious interest whether these high-profile TV shows have contributed in some way to ticket sales. The research seems to confirm that major television exposure for West End shows stimulates ticket demand both for the theatre productions featured and - to a lesser though still significant extent - for other productions too."

Phil Cave, Director, Public Engagement at Arts Council England, said:

"It's good to see that the television link increases audience numbers, but even more encouraging that those theatregoers are interested in seeing other shows. Clearly, TV coverage on its own is not going to turn harder to reach people into regular theatregoers and that's why the Arts Council, SOLT and theatres across the country are constantly working on a whole range of initiatives that tackle the many other reasons why people may feel theatre is not for them."

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact **Julia Hallawell**, Press and Media Relations at the Society of London Theatre 020 7557 6727 julia@soltma.co.uk

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Notes for Editors

- Research conducted by Ipsos MORI was carried out as part of the Society of London Theatre's 'The West End Theatre Audience' survey which is undertaken every 4-5 years and looks at trends and influences on theatre going. The survey was carried out between June and December 2008 via a self-completion questionnaire which was handed out to audience members at a number of West End theatre productions. Those completing the questionnaire who also provided an e-mail address, were additionally invited to take part in an online survey. In all, 4,586 theatre goers completed the main self-completion questionnaire, and of these 716 completed the additional online survey. The online survey specifically asked theatre goers about the influence of reality TV shows on their theatre going habits.
- The joint ACE (Arts Council England)/Society of London Theatre postcode data analysis took place in February 2009 and is based on postcode data from 4 shows that enjoyed TV exposure listed below and 4 shows that had no TV coverage (*Wicked*, *Chicago*, *Les Miserables* and *The Phantom of the Opera*). Postcode data was taken just after the show opened and then analysed a year or so later through ACE's audience segmentation tool.
- The West End Shows featured in TV programmes were:
The Sound of Music on BBC1's *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?*, broadcast 29th July - 16th September 2006
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat on BBC1's *Any Dream Will Do*, broadcast 31st March - 9th June 2007
Grease on ITV1's *Grease is the Word*, broadcast 7th April - 9th June 2007
Oliver! on BBC1's *I'd Do Anything*, broadcast 15 March - 31 May 2008
- The Society of London Theatre is the trade association that represents the producers, theatre owners and managers of the major commercial and grand-aided theatres in central London. It provides its members with legal, general and industrial affairs advice and support. It is funded by its members and its own commercial activities.

- The full quote from Sir Cameron Mackintosh is as follows:
“There is no doubt that searching for the star of a musical on prime time Saturday night TV has had a tremendously beneficial effect on the West End not only for promoting a particular show but, just as importantly, exposing new talent who find great opportunities in other productions in the West End and around the country. Of course finding a lead for a new production in this manner can only be the exception rather than the rule as the applicants, and indeed the voting public, have to know what the role requires by familiarity with old productions or films. It would be almost impossible with a new show that has yet to be created. The theatre will always thrive on craft. The winner’s natural charisma and personality need to fill the part so that lack of experience is not a drawback.

Ethel Merman was not the world’s greatest actress but she was one of the musical theatres greatest stars. Julie Andrews was Eliza Doolittle despite not going to drama school and Colm Wilkinson will always be the benchmark for Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*. So the theatre industry has every reason to be grateful to Andrew Lloyd Webber and the BBC for putting musical theatre centre stage and the current buoyant state of the West End is living proof of the benefits.”