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## Theatre director honoured for taking North East talent to global audiences

The director who brought Lee Hall's award-winning play, *The Pitmen Painters*, to the stage was honoured at Northumbria University, Newcastle today.

Max Roberts, Artistic Director of Newcastle's Live Theatre, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (Hon DLitt.) recognising the international profile he has created for the region through theatre.

Collaborating with many world-class writers including Lee Hall, Alan Plater,

Tom Hadaway, Peter Straughan and CP Taylor, Max's work has placed the region's distinctive identity, rich social history and vibrant culture at its heart and provided a springboard for the region's finest artistic talent.

In 2007, Max commissioned and directed *The Pitmen Painters* by Lee Hall – bringing to life a forgotten slice of the North East's social history. The play premiered at Newcastle's Live Theatre before enjoying three seasons at London's National Theatre and transferring to New York's Samuel J Friedman Theatre on Broadway. The play has also toured extensively nationally and enjoyed an extended run in London's West End. Max also directed the premiere foreign language production at The Volkstheater in Vienna and it has subsequently been performed all over the world.

Most recently, he commissioned and directed Northumbria graduate, Paddy Campbell's, first full length play, *Wet House* - another award-winning show which transferred from Live Theatre to London's Soho Theatre in October of this year to great acclaim.

And this week, Live Theatre will open the world premiere of *Flying into Daylight*, a new play written by Emmy Award-winning writer, Ron Hutchinson, and co-directed by Max.

Since graduating from Northumbria's Educational Studies degree course over 35 years ago, Max has made a significant contribution to the UK's theatre industry. Starting his career with Live Theatre as a performer and youth theatre director, he has nurtured and driven its artistic vision to establish the company as one of the region's most significant cultural assets. Today, Live Theatre is one of the country's leading new writing theatres with a national and international reputation.

Through his work with Live Theatre, Max has unearthed and inspired some of the region's finest talent, providing early opportunities for actors such as Robson Green, Denise Welch and Charlie Hardwick, as well as critically-acclaimed writers including Lee Hall, Peter Straughan, Michael Chaplin and recently, Paddy Campbell. Paddy has been mentored by Lee Hall who, during his time as Live Theatre's writer in residence, developed the screenplay *Dancer* (which went on to become the film and musical, *Billy Elliot*) and the West End hit play, *Cooking With Elvis* (directed by Max) which was revived last year as part of Live Theatre's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

Lucy Winskell OBE, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business and Engagement at Northumbria University said: “Max has been recognised for the significant contribution he has made to theatre in the region and beyond. He has shared our rich heritage with international audiences, created life-changing opportunities for our students and young people, and continues to produce world-class theatre for us all to enjoy, right on our doorsteps.”

In 2012, Northumbria University launched a strategic partnership with Live Theatre and many graduates have gone on to work with the company as actors and drama workers as part of Live Theatre’s education programme and youth theatre.

The recipients of honorary degrees are nominated by the University’s staff for their achievements, their links to the University, and their inspirational qualities.

Max received his degree during a ceremony held at Northumbria’s Sport Central arena alongside graduating students from Northumbria’s Business and Law programmes.

Ørnulf Opdahl, one of Scandinavia’s most significant landscape artists, was also recognised with the Award of Honorary Doctorate of Civil Law, (Hon DCL).

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