

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Theatre Charter aims to get audiences to turn off their phones

- Stephen Fry supports new theatregoer-led initiative

Stephen Fry has lent his support to a new theatregoer-led campaign to ban mobile phone usage during theatre performances.

Fry, who was Tony-nominated for his recent return to the stage in *Twelfth Night* at Shakespeare's Globe, in the West End and on Broadway, asked his Twitter followers: "How many times has a mobile gone off when you're at the theatre?" He urged them to sign the new Theatre Charter to encourage audiences to #SwitchItOff.

Since launching online in early July, over 1,700 fed-up theatregoers have signed the Theatre Charter at www.theatre-charter.co.uk. They have committed to switching off their smartphones – from calls, texts, tweets, filming and any other use – while at the theatre and to the Charter's overriding principles to:

- Be fully aware of other audience members and their right to uninhibited enjoyment of any production
- Respect those on stage
- Follow UK etiquette in UK theatres
- Encourage good behaviour in others

The Theatre Charter was founded by Richard Gresham, a regular theatregoer who works as an advertising sales consultant in the theatre industry and has been organising large group excursions to shows for 15 years.

Gresham says: "Fellow theatregoers have been asking for years that something be done. I go to the theatre up to four times a week, and it's now more common that a performance is spoiled by bad behaviour than it isn't."

Recent press reports, including Kevin Spacey reprimanding a phone user during his performance of *Clarence Darrow* at the Old Vic and filming of naked actors at the Jermyn Street Theatre, spurred Gresham to action.

Gresham stresses that the Charter is not intended to put off new or casual theatregoers, but to encourage appropriate behaviour in audiences across the board in order to improve the experience for everyone...

And that includes the actors, many of whom have also been championing the Charter. Theatre commentator Terri Paddock, who has been helping Gresham spread the word about Theatre Charter on Twitter, adds: “The actors have the best view of the audience. If you think they can’t see you checking your smartphone, you’re wrong. That illuminated screen puts the spotlight on you rather than what’s happening on the stage. And, if your phone rings, that breaks everyone’s concentration. You really are making the actors’ jobs harder.”

Gresham’s goal is to make it as socially unacceptable to light up your phone as it would be to light up a cigarette in the auditorium. “The more people who sign the Charter, the more we can show producers and house managers that most people want to enjoy their visit to the theatre without mobile distractions.”

He has already been in touch with several theatres about the Theatre Charter. With enough theatregoer signatures, he hopes to persuade theatres to adopt a stricter policy of ejecting people who deliberately use mobile phones during a performance. He says: “That would send a clear message that this kind of inconsiderate behaviour will not be tolerated.”

**** Richard Gresham is available for interviews. ***

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