Press Contact:

David Clarke, The WNET Group, 212.560.3005, clarked@wnet.org

Press Materials: [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pbs.org/pressroom) or [thirteen.org/pressroom](http://thirteen.org/pressroom)

*American Masters* Documentary Pulls Back the Curtain on the Career, Social Vision and Impact of The Public Theater’s Joe Papp June 3 on PBS

Features Meryl Streep, James Earl Jones, Larry Kramer, Martin Sheen, Mandy Patinkin, George C. Wolfe and more

Ahead of the 60th Anniversary Season of Free Shakespeare in The Park at New York City’s Delacorte Theater in Central Park, ***American Masters: Joe Papp in Five Acts*** tells the story of this indomitable, street-wise champion of the arts. As founder of The Public Theater, Free Shakespeare in the Park and producer of groundbreaking plays like *Hair*, *A Chorus Line* and *for colored girls…*, Papp believed great art was for everyone, not just a privileged few. A cultural change agent for more than fifty years, Papp’s stages held up a mirror to society with work that reflected the reality of people’s lives. Directed, produced and written by Tracie Holder and Karen Thorsen, ***American Masters: Joe Papp in Five Acts*** premieres nationwide Friday, June 3 at 9 p.m. ET on PBS ([check local listings](http://www.pbs.org/tv_schedules/)), <http://pbs.org/americanmasters> and the [PBS Video app](https://www.pbs.org/pbs-video-app/) as part of #PBSForTheArts.

More than perhaps any other cultural figure in recent history, Papp worked to expand public access to the arts. “We have public libraries,” he would argue, “Why not public theaters?” Papp recognized the role artists could play in building a more democratic, inclusive society. At a time when theatre was largely the domain of white men, he was convinced that women, LGBTQIA+, BIPOC and other marginalized communities, denied power elsewhere in society, could develop it on the stage. His goal was a “theater of inclusion” on-stage, backstage, and in the audience.

Featuring rare footage from the 50s to Papp's death in 1991 and up-close scenes from the performances themselves, ***American Masters: Joe Papp in Five Acts*** tells his story without narration. His great accomplishments and his own, often tumultuous, personal history are told by the artists he helped create—and, in some cases, tried to destroy—including **David Hare** (*The Hours*, *The Reader*, *Plenty*), **James Earl Jones** (the *Star Wars* trilogy, *The Lion King*), **Kevin Kline** (*Dave*, *A Fish Called Wanda*), **Larry Kramer** (playwright, *The Normal Heart, The Destiny of Me*), **Mandy Patinkin** (*Sunday in the Park with George*, *Homeland*), **Martin Sheen** (*Apocalypse Now, West Wing*), **Meryl Streep** (*Sophie’s Choice, Mamma Mia*), **Christopher Walken** (*The Deer Hunter*, *Pulp Fiction*) and **George C. Wolfe** (director *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, former Artistic Director of The Public Theater), among others.

Using his life and work as its prism, ***American Masters: Joe Papp in Five Acts,*** aims to keep the legacy of this larger-than-life visionary alive and spark a national conversation about what it means to be American and the role of art in a democracy for a new generation.

#PBSForTheArts is a multiplatform campaign that celebrates the arts in America. For more than 50 years, PBS has been the media destination for the arts, presenting dance, theater, opera, visual arts and concerts to Americans in every corner of the country.

Now in its 36th season on PBS, ***American Masters*** illuminates the lives and creative journeys of our nation’s most enduring artistic giants — those who have left an indelible impression on our cultural landscape — through compelling, unvarnished stories. Setting the standard for documentary film profiles, the series has earned widespread critical acclaim: 28 Emmy Awards — including 10 for Outstanding Non-Fiction Series and five for Outstanding Non-Fiction Special — two News & Documentary Emmys, 14 Peabodys, three Grammys, two Producers Guild Awards, an Oscar, and many other honors. To further explore the lives and works of more than 250 masters past and present, the [***American Masters*** website](http://pbs.org/americanmasters) offers full episodes, film outtakes, filmmaker interviews, the podcast American Masters: Creative Spark, educational resources, digital original series and more. The series is a production of The WNET Group.

***American Masters***is available for streaming concurrent with broadcast on all station-branded PBS platforms, including [PBS.org](http://pbs.org/) and the [PBS Video App](https://www.pbs.org/pbs-video-app/), available on iOS, Android, Roku streaming devices, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung Smart TV, Chromecast and VIZIO. PBS station members can view many series, documentaries and specials via [PBS Passport](https://www.pbs.org/passport/videos/). For more information about PBS Passport, visit the [PBS Passport FAQ](https://help.pbs.org/support/solutions/5000121793) website.

***American Masters: Joe Papp in Five Acts*** is a production of The Papp Project, LLC in association with American Masters Pictures. Directed by Tracie Holder and Karen Thorsen. Produced by Tracie Holder and Karen Thorsen. Susan Lacy and Michael Kantor are executive producers for ***American Masters***.

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**Websites**: [http://pbs.org/americanmasters](http://pbs.org/americanmasters%2C), [http://facebook.com/americanmasters](http://www.facebook.com/americanmasters), [@PBSAmerMasters](http://twitter.com/pbsamermasters), <http://youtube.com/AmericanMastersPBS>, <http://instagram.com/pbsamericanmasters> #AmericanMastersPBS

**About The WNET Group**

[The WNET Group](http://wnet.org/) creates inspiring media content and meaningful experiences for diverse audiences nationwide. It is the community-supported home of New York’s [THIRTEEN](http://thirteen.org/) – America’s flagship PBS station – [WLIW21](http://wliw.org/), THIRTEEN PBSKids, WLIW World and Create; [NJ PBS](https://www.mynjpbs.org/), New Jersey’s statewide public television network; Long Island’s only NPR station WLIW-FM; [ALL ARTS](http://allarts.org/), the arts and culture media provider; and newsroom [NJ Spotlight News](https://www.njspotlightnews.org/). Through these channels and streaming platforms, The WNET Group brings arts, culture, education, news, documentary, entertainment and DIY programming to more than five million viewers each month. The WNET Group’s award-winning productions include signature PBS series ***Nature***, ***Great Performances***, ***American Masters***, ***PBS NewsHour Weekend*** and ***Amanpour and Company***and trusted local news programs ***MetroFocus*** and ***NJ Spotlight News*** ***with Briana Vannozzi***. Inspiring curiosity and nurturing dreams, The WNET Group’s award-winning Kids’ Media and Education team produces the PBS KIDS series ***Cyberchase***, interactive ***Mission US*** history games, and resources for families, teachers and caregivers. A leading nonprofit public media producer for nearly 60 years, The WNET Group presents and distributes content that fosters lifelong learning, including multiplatform initiatives addressing poverty, jobs, economic opportunity, social justice, understanding and the environment. Through Passport, station members can stream new and archival programming anytime, anywhere. The WNET Group represents the best in public media. Join us.

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