



TM

**Theatres
Magazine**
Summer
2019

Congress Theatre Eastbourne
Shop theatres
Higher education theatres
Nesta's social impact investment funding

Adapting spaces

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**

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Theatres Trust Magazine Issue 58

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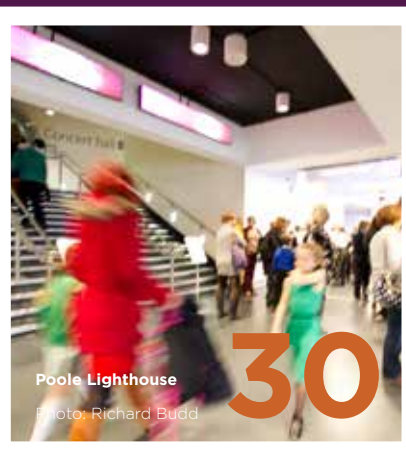
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Director's welcome

**Theatres Trust Director
Jon Morgan introduces
this issue of TM, which
looks at how theatres
and other spaces are
being adapted.**



**Congress Theatre
Eastbourne reopening
performance**

Photo: Peter Gurr

Welcome to the Summer 2019 issue of Theatres Magazine.

At the Theatres Trust we help to create, adapt and save theatres. The previous issue of TM was very much focused on the 'save' part, launching the Theatres at Risk Register 2019 and looking at the issues surrounding reviving theatres. This edition, by way of contrast, mainly looks at performance venues that have been adapted to meet changing audience, artistic and operational needs, whether they are existing theatres or other spaces.

The showcase feature (pg 9) is the Congress Theatre in Eastbourne, which has recently reopened following a major refurbishment project. Like many theatres built in the post-war period, it needed an update to meet the expectations of modern audiences while respecting the original modernist aesthetic. Theatres Trust was involved at the start of the project as part of the stakeholder steering group, so we are particularly pleased to see how well it has turned out.

Nesta explains how social impact investment can help theatres with transformative capital projects (pg 18), with case studies from two very different organisations, Earth, a former Art-Deco cinema in Hackney and Titchfield Festival Theatre, a volunteer-led venue in a 1960s warehouse.

Our grant-giving programmes also help theatres to adapt, supporting theatre operators to make small interventions

that will have a big impact. There is a round-up of the recipients of the latest rounds of the UK and London schemes and the Wolfson Foundation Theatre Improvement Scheme. These schemes are always oversubscribed (currently we receive an average of four applications for every grant we can give), and we are hoping to address this through our fundraising.

Of course, funding is always an issue for theatre companies but as a sector, we are remarkably resilient and inventive – and that spirit is demonstrated by the operators who've made their homes in empty retail units (pg 2). The venues may be a world away from traditional playhouses, but the dedication to putting on a great show and connect with audiences is just the same.

Again not the average theatre building (if there is such a thing) but there has been a flurry of higher education institutions updating or rebuilding their facilities – we round-up some of these projects on page 5. University and drama school theatres are where many performers and artistic directors start to develop their craft – which brings me onto the theme of this year's conference. Centre Stage, at Battersea Arts Centre, will ask how we ensure serving the needs of artists and audiences sits at the centre of our theatre buildings. I explain more about why we've chosen this topic on page 17.



Shop-portunity knocks

Accidental Theatre in Belfast, The Small Space in Barry, Wales, and Theatre Deli in Sheffield talked to us about their experiences of turning retail outlets into performances spaces.

The idea that creative organisations could be a major part of the answer to saving some of the UK's ailing high streets is taking hold. The Housing, Communities and Local Government committee report *High Streets and Town Centres in 2030* recognises theatres as 'cultural anchors' and we hope that some of the £62m Heritage on the High Street Fund (part of the £675m Future High Streets Fund) will go towards cultural buildings that help make high streets a destination. But even before the government announced this scheme, performers and theatre companies had started to move into the spaces left behind by shops and banks, driven by a mixture of creativity and practicality.

Necessity is the mother of invention

Rather than seeing themselves as saviours of the high street, it is empty retail spaces that have been a godsend for small independent theatre organisations. **Theatre Deli** believes that the best way it can support artists is by running a venue, but as Venue Manager Seb Chew points out it is an expensive business, especially for an unfunded charity, so found spaces have become the answer. Its first Sheffield venue was a disused Woolworths in the main shopping centre. It was one of the few shops open on the street during the area's redevelopment project and was a huge success story, establishing the organisation as part of the city's arts scene.



Accidental Theatre, Belfast

Theatre Deli has now moved into another shop – an ex-Mothercare store in a less prominent place, but that gives the organisation space to programme eclectic work.

Against a backdrop of falling investment in the arts, **Accidental Theatre** first took on an office space in central Belfast as a pop-up theatre. When that lease ended, it was make or break time, according to Richard Lavery, Artist Director, with the company facing "the choice of heading to pastures new or going bigger with our ideas for a new type of theatre for the city". It was at that time that he came across an old bank in Belfast's Shaftesbury Square, which had been disused for around 10 years but provided a great space with manageable overheads that would allow the company to grow.

"We wanted to make this area Belfast's Place de la République, in the much longer term, and I believe the heart of this hurt and divided area could be an amazing little theatre."

Accidental Theatre

Location, location, location

12-13 Shaftesbury Square was the perfect place for a pop-up theatre – between two of Belfast’s busiest roads, overlooking the heart of the former Golden Mile of the city and directly between two contentiously divided communities. Richard said “We wanted to make this area Belfast’s Place de la République, in the much longer term, and I believe the heart of this hurt and divided area could be an amazing little theatre.” Work programmed here is diverse to attract locals and visitors to the city alike, but where the location has really come into its own is in enabling Accidental Theatre to facilitate meetings and classes for groups ranging from local business start-ups running dance classes to the Red Cross working with refugees and socially-isolated people.



Theatre Deli, Sheffield

The Small Space, which bills itself as the smallest magic theatre in Wales and possibly the world, is a partnership between two Magic Circle magicians, Jasper Blakeley and Bryan Gunton. Due to the lack of multi-purpose venues where they could perform, the pair took on the challenge of developing their own quirky and unique theatre. They were aware of the shop on Island Road off High Street in Barry because it had been home to Jasper’s wife’s gift shop, so they understood the potential of the site. The Small Space’s neighbours are mainly by-appointment only businesses such as beauty salons and hairdressers and it isn’t the best spot for traditional retail, but Barry’s shopping area is a far cry from the national picture of deteriorating high streets. It has been named in the top five independent UK high streets and has a vibrancy that The Small Space team wanted to be part of. Bryan talks about how the venue is bringing people together, especially those who are lonely but might not feel comfortable travelling into Cardiff. Making local links has also been vital, with partnerships formed with local restaurants and businesses, including the ingenious idea of working with a local brewery to create a branded alcohol-free lager for the drivers in the audience.



Theatre Deli, Sheffield

Making the space work

The Small Space’s unique design – it has raked seating and a 92 inch cinema screen in a space small than the average living room – attracts audiences from further afield as well as locals and is loved by the acts that play there. But it hasn’t been an easy process – not least persuading the local planning department to grant permission to convert an A1 shop into a D2 theatre. The protected high street area meant it could never just be a night-time venue with shutters down in the daytime. “Luckily we are magicians we believe everything is possible” says Bryan.

Similarly, Accidental Theatre had to work through various planning and certification issues but Belfast City Council has been patiently supportive. The building was still very much



Theatre Deli, Sheffield

“...we attract audiences from lower income groups, who seem to feel comfortable here”

Theatre Deli

a bank on the inside, complete with till counters, corporate colours and bank vaults (which have been kept) and a lot of work has gone into the restoration. It has recently received its first major building investment with the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland funding the lift that will make the whole building accessible.

Theatre Deli's space was already perfectly accessible, being entirely flat and complete with accessible doors and accessible toilets. It is a vast space, ideal for immersive shows, room for rehearsal spaces and provides the flexibility to move things around – attributes operators of more traditional theatres may envy. But it is not without its downsides; namely the skylights that prevent total blackouts at the start of any shows after the clocks change in spring and the absence of soundproofing that means corporate hires during show runs are out of the question. But all artists working here are made aware of these limitations and work around them.

Still the advantages outweigh the challenges – being in an old shop has attracted a younger more diverse audience than is traditional. Theatre Deli's customers are increasingly diverse – something which happened organically. "Our average audience is aged 21-30 and coupled with keeping ticket prices low, we attract audiences from lower income groups, who seem to feel comfortable here" says Seb.

What the future has in store...

Theatre Deli will move on from Mothercare in about a year but is keen to stay in Sheffield city centre. A five-year lease on its next home would open up additional funding streams and justify investment in any modifications needed (currently any investment in the building must be portable, whether it is the toilets or the flat-pack box office). But nothing is being ruled out and Theatre Deli is looking for developers to work with on a short or long-term basis.

The Small Space is 'over the first year hump' and has extended its original one-year lease for a further two. With a programme that has expanded beyond magic shows and film screenings to include comedians, Britain's Got Talent acts and award-winning folk musicians, it has in Jasper's words 'evolved into something special that we are rightly proud of.'

Accidental Theatre is no longer talking about 12-13 Shaftesbury Square as a pop-up, but as a developing arts space. Comprising a black box theatre on the ground floor, a bar and office spaces on the first and rehearsal rooms on the second floor, it is already a whole ecosystem within one building. The next stage will take it further, developing the basement, replete with bank vaults, into recording studios and reworking the attic into more office space to house more artists. "After that there are much grander plans for the whole building's redevelopment but that's under wraps for now" says Richard.

Impressed by the energy and ingenuity, we look forward to hearing more from all three organisations in the future.

**"Luckily
we are
magicians
we believe
everything
is possible"**

The Small Space



The Small Space, Barry



The Small Space, Barry



The Small Space, Barry

Focus on: higher education theatres

Many of the training facilities that nurture future arts industry talent have been improved and transformed in the last two years. We invited the people behind some of these projects to describe what makes each space special.

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University

The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire is the first purpose-built conservatoire in the UK for 30 years. Designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, it opened to students in September 2017 and hosted its inaugural season in March 2018. One of nine purpose built conservatoires, it is the only one that's also a faculty of a university, and includes over 10,000 square meters of musical education space, expanding the capacity for performing arts within Birmingham.

The new centre boasts five new public performance spaces, including a 500-seat concert hall, designed acoustically for both full orchestral and smaller groups, and to suit all manner of performance with full audiovisual and stage lighting

infrastructure installed to suspend touring truss and heavier equipment; a 150-seat recital hall with a retractable seating system, and a 100-seat organ studio.

It also includes The Lab, the 80-seat Eastside Jazz Club, a flexible black-box studio, the first permanent jazz space in any UK conservatoire, private rehearsal rooms, dedicated teaching spaces for musicians, and over 70 teaching practice rooms.

“We believe it’s one of the best equipped and thoughtfully conceived spaces for musical education in Europe and a new landmark for Birmingham.”

Charcoalblue, theatre consultants



Photo: Hufton+Crow



Photo: Ian Ritchie

Susie Sainsbury Theatre and Recital Hall, Royal Academy of Music, London

Ian Ritchie Architects was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Music to design a theatre for students and the public, while delivering the ambience, aesthetics and environmental credentials befitting the Academy's status as one of the world's premiere musical academies. It opened in March 2018.

The theatre, intimate and epic, is designed for opera and musical theatre and forms the heart of the Academy, and sits within the shell of its 70s auditorium. The addition of a balcony provides 40% more seating while a larger orchestra pit, stage wing and flytower expands repertoire choice from early to modern opera and musical theatre. The 309-seat cherry-lined theatre has been acoustically refined to deliver excellent sound qualities. The lighting deconstructs the

traditional chandelier into an exploding theatre-wide galaxy of light through 600 fibre-optic crystals.

An epiphany during a discussion about the potential of creating new rooftop spaces over the theatre led to the development of a 100-seat public Recital Hall suitable for professional recording. And so above the theatre sits the tranquil feeling and acoustically-isolated Recital Hall. Entirely lined in pale, limed oak, it provides additional space for student rehearsal, performance, public events and recording.

“We took inspiration from string instruments: their curved shapes, construction, finishing and tuning mechanisms.”

Ian Ritchie Architects

Photo: Patrick Baldwin

North Block, Royal Central School of Speech & Drama (RCSSD), London

RCSSD's new North Block, designed by Tim Ronalds Architects, opened in March 2019. Students will benefit from a new performance space and more rehearsal space, and it also creates an asset for the local community.

The 2,200 square meter building houses five large, double-height studios including a movement studio with sprung floors, a sound studio with facilities to prepare students for work in broadcast, film and digital media, two rehearsal studios, a workshop space, a full range of ancillary spaces including dressing and teaching rooms, and a galleried Courtyard Theatre.

The facilities are equipped with a range of sustainable, LED lighting and professional audio equipment, as well as state-of-the-art digital infrastructure, allowing students to engage with the fast-developing worlds of integrated show-control, and video and audio networking. The acoustically-isolated, two story Sound Stage expands media production capability, providing a facility for students, staff and industry to explore and develop the intersections between digital and live space, and between theatre, dramaturgy, gaming and virtual reality.

“The North Block now gives us facilities at the forefront of the specialist drama sector of Higher Education in the UK.”

Gavin Henderson, RCSSD Principal

Bloomsbury Theatre, University College London

The Bloomsbury Theatre reopened in March 2019 following a Nicholson Hare restoration and revamp of the 60s Brutalist landmark – known for its innovative comedy, theatre, music and dance.

The three and half year renovation was the first major investment in the building, aimed at reimagining the theatre's technical and audio-visual features, while maintaining the aesthetic and historic fabric of the theatre and its 541-seat auditorium. The stage and flytower have been upgraded and the interior has been fully refurbished and features new timber and brass finishes that complement the original Brutalist design. The building is also on track to achieve a RICS SKA Gold, the highest possible sustainable fit-out rating.

“The modern makeover now provides student societies and productions additional performance time and the full benefits of a 21st century theatre.”

Nicholas Hare Architects

St Cecilia's Hall: Concert Room and Music Museum, University of Edinburgh

St Cecilia's Hall houses Scotland's oldest purpose-built concert hall, complete with refurbished and expanded gallery spaces to create a new home for the University of Edinburgh's collection of musical instruments and hosting a range of concerts and public events. The building, designed by Page\Park Architects, reopened in March 2018.

The university wanted to increase awareness, function and amenity of St. Cecilia's Hall by improving visibility, access and visitor and staff facilities, and the vision was to create a centre for excellence for the display and preservation of its collection and to breathe new life into the gem at the centre – the Concert Room.

The acoustic properties of the Concert Room were carefully preserved, and the space was refurbished with new perimeter fixed seating and a moveable staging platform, allowing the space to be reconfigured in many formats. The room is supported by foyer space in the original entrance and education space.

Demolition of the 60s extension to the north of the original building unlocked the opportunity to create a new public entrance in a sensitive yet bold new piece of civic architecture. This extension houses the ancillary facilities to run a contemporary museum and concert room facility, including entrance and reception, plant room, green room, office space, and importantly a new lift and stair. The existing building was carefully opened up to reveal a new journey through the instrument collection, making visitor orientation intuitive.

“We imagined St. Cecilia's Hall as an old instrument that needed a new mouthpiece.”

Page\Park, architect



Photo: Jim Stephenson



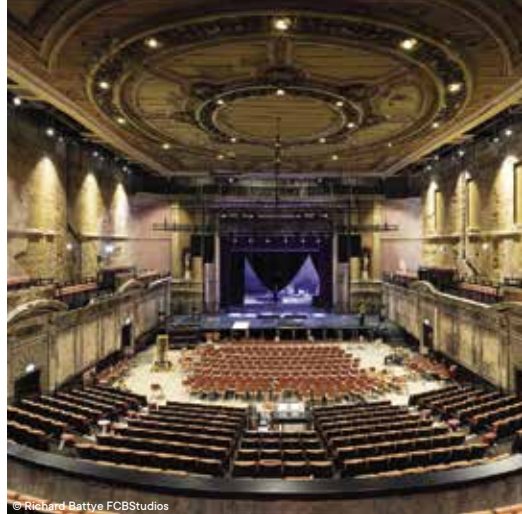
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We are so proud to have been involved on these projects with amazing architects and extraordinary clients. All the above recognised this year for their innovation, sensitivity and outstanding architectural quality.

Perse School with Haworth Tompkins; Royal Opera House Open Up with Stanton Williams; East Wing, Alexandra Palace with Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios; Battersea Arts Centre and Bristol Old Vic both with Haworth Tompkins; LAMDA with Niall Mclaughlin, Rogers Theatre, Malvern School with Squires and Brown; Preston Bus Station with John Puttick Associates; Darlington Hippodrome and Hullabloo - 2019 Selwyn Goldsmith Award.

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Congress Theatre, Eastbourne

After a two-year refurbishment the Congress Theatre in Eastbourne reopened in March 2019 with a sell-out performance by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, who performed at the official opening in 1963. We talked to the team at Levitt Bernstein, the architects behind the project, about the works that have transformed the audience experience at the Grade II* listed theatre, which - as part of the wider regeneration of Devonshire Park - are set to position Eastbourne as a top cultural, sporting and conference destination.

History

Designed in 1958 the Congress Theatre sits alongside two other listed buildings, the Winter Garden and Devonshire Park Theatre, to form a remarkable cultural attraction on the south coast.

Eastbourne Corporation, the former municipal operator for the area, commissioned the Congress Theatre primarily as a conference venue, but also for orchestral concerts, musicals, variety, opera and ballet. The architect, Bryan and Norman Westwood & Partners, was known for theatre work, including the post-war foyer rebuild of the Queen's Theatre on Shaftsbury Avenue in London.

The 1,680 capacity Congress sits on a shallow site between Carlisle Road and the tennis lawns. The auditorium is unusually wide, located at first floor level and day lit to help overcome conference claustrophobia and subsequent fatigue.

The design featured state-of-the-art technology for its day, including a mechanical orchestra pit and forestage lift, adjustable proscenium and sophisticated integrated acoustic design. There were also innovative modernist architectural design flourishes, such as randomised lights and grilles above the forestage, curvilinear recessed lighting, bar-code motifs and impressive foyer chandeliers with futuristically shaped lanterns.

The refurbished Congress Theatre, and the new Welcome building.

Photo: Matt Kutcha

Showcase



A refreshed auditorium.

Photo: Matt Kutcha

Showcase

Today it has national significance, being one of only five post-war theatres distinguished with a Grade II* listing or higher – the others being Chichester Festival Theatre, Nottingham Playhouse, the Royal National Theatre and the Grade I listed Royal Festival Hall.

Devonshire Park revitalisation

By the millennium, the Devonshire Park theatres were beginning to look tired. In response, Eastbourne Council commissioned a new attraction in the Towner Art Gallery, which opened in 2008. It was built with flexible exhibition and gallery space abutting the west façade of the Congress Theatre, to which it is linked at ground floor level.

Shortly afterwards, Eastbourne Borough Council, DCA Consultants and Focus Consultants devised a masterplan and business case offering a new vision for the site: “The transformed Devonshire Park will be one of the UK’s most distinctive and talked-about cultural places, and will celebrate and care for its unique heritage.”

Ambitious proposals were sketched out for a new Welcome Building, with two large conference halls

and studios on its upper floors. However, these design proposals were not well-received by English Heritage (now Historic England), as they reduced the visual impact of the theatre. In 2014, the council tendered for a multidisciplinary design team to deliver their vision.

Levitt Bernstein won the commission with an inventive approach to the Welcome Building and an understanding of the latent potential of the historic buildings and park. They turned the proposals upside-down, placing the new halls in a semi-basement with a public terrace and glazed entrance pavilion above. The visual impact on the Congress Theatre was significantly reduced and the scheme won the support of Historic England.

Levitt Bernstein’s overall design concept for the site is simple. The theme of ‘pavilions in the park’ summarises the strategy of defining individual buildings with their own characteristic architectural language, set in a beautiful park; the Congress Theatre’s façades, stylish foyers and auditorium are restored to their 1960s heyday, the Welcome Building takes a more contemporary yet sympathetic approach, and the Winter Garden will revert to its Victorian form.

Congress Theatre capital project

Eastbourne Borough Council was keen to involve local people and businesses, particularly hospitality – vital to the town’s economic success – in the development of the proposals. A partnership group was established to empower local businesses, amenity groups, neighbours and community leaders to become involved. Levitt Bernstein and DCA Consultants led another working group with the theatre’s operational and artistic teams to define the detailed brief for improvements. Finally, a heritage group including Historic England, the Theatres Trust, Levitt Bernstein and local conservation officers, was established to balance the improvements needed to secure future viability and investment in repairs with conservation objectives.

Improvements to the Congress Theatre were prioritised according to business case drivers. Improving the audience experience – comfort, accessibility and production quality – was key, as was operational efficiency.

The capital scheme sought to deliver the new business plan and address inadequacies within the original design, while preserving and enhancing the theatre’s special architectural and heritage interest. Building fabric repairs were carried out to remedy historic defects and all external finishes were refurbished.

Front of house

Paint analysis was undertaken to establish the original white/mustard/black/grey colours and rare archival colour film showed a mottled brown carpet was used. The original interior design has been recreated as far as possible, the stylish chandeliers reconstructed from historical photographs and reinstated, and mid-century inspired furniture selected.

Like many theatres of its era, the Congress Theatre was under-provided with WCs, particularly for women and people with disabilities. Working with Eastbourne’s Disability Inclusion Group, it was decided to convert the very limited stalls level WCs into four accessible WCs, with general provision being in expanded ground floor and refurbished balcony level facilities.



Top – The foyer, including original futuristic lighting.

Bottom – The box office.

Photo: Matt Kutcha



“From a tired 1960s building, the Congress Theatre has been transformed through love and care into one that is fit for purpose now, and will be long into the future – meaning it can continue to serve Eastbourne for many years to come.”

Gavin Davis, General Manager,
Eastbourne Theatres



The bar.

Photo: Matt Kutcha

Another deficiency of the original design was over-heating in the foyers. As the façade had recently been painstakingly renewed under Historic England's guidance, it was not possible to add more opening windows or solar control glass. However, building services engineers, Max Fordham, was determined to improve natural ventilation because of limited space for mechanical plant and to conserve energy. Opening windows are therefore incorporated in the new ground floor entrance screens and a large dampered outlet is provided above the balcony bar to reduce foyer summertime temperatures – all with very little impact on the listed building.

Improving accessibility was a key design driver, especially since in the Congress Theatre's original design, all visitors needed to use the foyer staircases, or a single small goods lift located backstage, to reach the auditorium. Levitt Bernstein's new adjoining Welcome Building cleverly addresses this problem. It provides an entrance level with the stalls, an accessible central box office, and two 26 person lifts to the balconies and new multipurpose conference halls/studios below.

Auditorium

Replacement auditorium seating is given mid-century style by Race Furniture. Permanent spaces for up to 28 wheelchair users and companions are available, with another ten possible via removable seats. There is also a phased array induction loop to provide high quality sound for people with impaired hearing.

Construction of the Towner Gallery had blocked the auditorium's western windows, and the eastern windows had been blacked-out. Acoustician, Neill Woodger, wanted to introduce a degree of acoustical variability to offer greater clarity during amplified productions as well as enhancing the Congress Theatre's excellent reputation for orchestral music. Levitt Bernstein devised a system of hinged panels to replace the old venetian blinds that, when open, reveal sound absorbing material to control reverberation.

The original cork floor has been replaced, the teak panelling repaired and refinished, while the shaped plaster balcony fronts and sweeping ceilings have been given a fresh coat of paint. Much of the original cove lighting had failed and has been renewed in linear LED to great effect.

The auditorium also overheated. Max Fordham has renewed the entire ventilation system, reduced background noise and added cooling. The original polluting oil boilers have been replaced by cleaner and more efficient gas condensing boilers that also serve the new Welcome Building.

Theatre technology

The technical demands of touring productions have increased significantly since the 1960s and several ad-hoc improvements had been made, including inconvenient lighting trusses suspended over the stalls. On grounds of long-term sustainability, Historic England was persuaded to accept a new permanent lighting bridge with apertures in the auditorium ceiling. This, along with additional balcony-front lighting bars, is a very significant improvement for lighting all kinds of productions.

Elegant and efficient LED lighting systems respect the history of the unique spaces and evoke the atmosphere that was originally intended, but with new technology that allows flexible use, lower energy costs and fewer heat gains as well as an integrated system of control. All

lighting within the Congress Theatre both front and back of house has been replaced with LED light fittings. In the auditorium, this has allowed for the original 60s lighting positions to be reinstated, but with more efficient light sources. The original downlight housings, which previously had tungsten bulbs, have been reused and fitted with new GDS LED fittings, which can be smoothly dimmed down to 0%.

The fact that theatre productions were not the priority in the 1960s brief led to some compromises in the original design of the flytower. Upgrades to the stage machinery have been made by Centre Stage Engineering, including a new easier to load counterweight flying sets and high-speed power-flying hoists upstage. The over-stage grid, which has low headroom, has been completely cleared of pulleys and counterweight lines by moving them all below the floor. This dramatically improves access and flexibility for touring productions to install temporary hoists.

The proscenium canopy was reconstructed with an accessible loft to house new hoists, comprising two advance lighting bars and five

loudspeaker bars to speed up operations and ensure safe working conditions above the stage.

Lighting Systems International provided theatre sound and comms/AV, which replaces an almost non-existent infrastructure largely unchanged since the original building opened. There are now 384 dimmer channels, new work-lighting and an extensive system of digital control circuits.

A high-quality house sound system was also supplied and installed by The Entertainment Department. This comprises line arrays, subs and fills that address long-standing concerns of poor amplified sound.

Back of house

The original 1960s accommodation was sufficient for most productions, but a shortage of showers has been addressed, WCs refurbished, and an accessible dressing room added at stage level. Previously, touring wardrobe equipment, including washing machines, had to be carried downstairs to the wardrobe room and laundry, whereas there is now a dedicated platform lift for safer handling.

Showcase

L-R, The lighting bridge and flytower.

Photos: Sam Levine



Project review

The total cost for the transformation of Devonshire Park is £54m, including all three venues, the new Welcome Building, new show and practice tennis courts, new players' village, landscape, highways alterations, improved site drainage, client costs and professional fees.

The Congress Theatre has been thoroughly refreshed, updated and equipped to compete with the best UK theatres. Some have suggested that it looks and feels better now than when it first opened in 1963. It has been beautifully restored and exudes a richness of materials, inventive design and quality of construction rarely found in today's new regional theatres.

Audiences and artists have been very positive in response to the changes, and a full programme of popular events is already scheduled for the coming year. Many have also commented that the building does not look very different since the works have completed, which is a huge compliment considering the extensive technical adaptations and environmental improvements that have been made without negatively impacting on its Grade II* qualities.

Once all three venues are operational, the opportunities for theatre from new in-house productions to national touring shows, music of all genres, festivals, exhibitions and conferences become many and varied. The council's

“Eastbourne Borough Council, South East Local Enterprise Partnership and the Lawn Tennis Association should be highly commended for their investment in theatre, tennis, and the cultural heritage of their town.”

Mark Lewis, Associate Director,
Levitt Bernstein

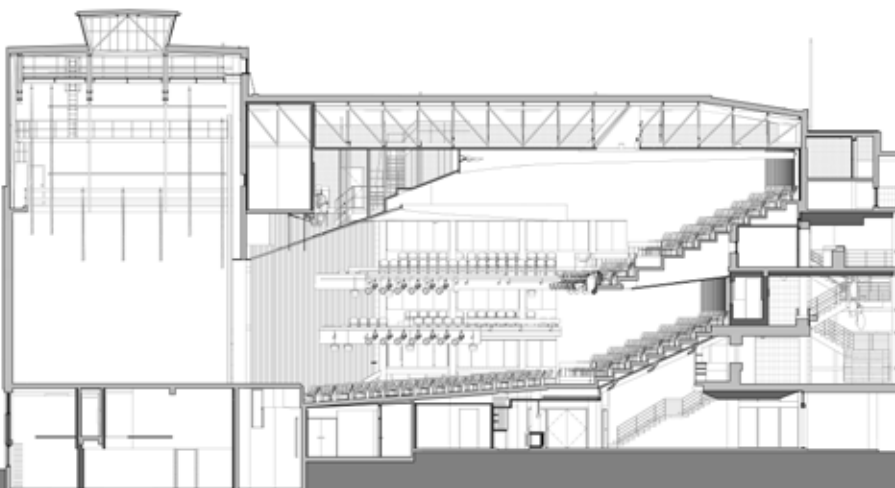
vision for the cultural and sporting development of Devonshire Park, re-branded the Devonshire Quarter, is well on the way to being realised.

On completion, the park will create around 100 new full-time jobs, an additional £4.6m spend every year by visitors from a site that already generates £18m through spend in the local economy, plus the economic boost from conferences worth £10m per year.

The Congress Theatre opened in March 2019; the Welcome Building in May 2019 and The Winter Garden will reopen in 2020. Performances coming up over the next few months include The Drifters, Annie and Ben Elton.

Section through the Congress Theatre.

Drawing: Levitt Bernstein



Project team

Client

Eastbourne Borough Council

Architect, masterplanning & principal designer

Levitt Bernstein

Conservation & landscape architect

Levitt Bernstein

Project manager

Focus Consulting

Quantity surveyor

Huntley Cartwright

Structural engineer

Edge

Services engineer

Max Fordham

Theatre consultant and acoustician

Neill Woodger Acoustics & Theatre Design

Access consultant

All Clear Design

Fire engineer

Exova

Business planner

DCA Consultants

Construction team

Main contractor

Vinci Construction

Façade contractor

Triton

Mechanical and electrical

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Stage engineering

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We are equally proud to have provided and installed the production lighting, audio, paging, and intercom systems for the refurbished Congress Theatre, and the new Welcome Building at Eastbourne's **Devonshire Park**.



Royal Central School of Speech and Drama



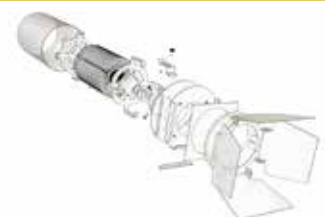
Congress Theatre Eastbourne

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COMPACT LOUDSPEAKERS... REDEFINED





Centre Stage: artist and audience at the heart of theatres

Battersea Arts Centre

Photo: Fred Howarth

Theatres are so much more than bricks and mortar. Theatres are about people. People who want to create and communicate and people who want to participate in a shared experience which is unique to those artists and that audience on that evening.

Our theatres are living working factories; Joan Littlewood imagined them as fun palaces, which facilitate that artistic expression, exchange and engagement. Needless to say how and where we build and adapt our theatres needs to reflect the way artists want to work and audiences want to experience theatre.

It is fashionable in some circles to say that 'traditional' theatre buildings are not suitable for contemporary artistic practice and that by their nature they are a barrier to wider audience engagement and inclusion. However, it's time to move on from that false assumption.

Just as there are many new artistic voices who prefer to make their work in found or pop-up spaces so there is also an exciting young generation of artistic directors now running many of our long-established theatre buildings.

And while it is true that street performance, site-specific or immersive performance and pop-up venues in shopfronts can often reach a wider

demographic, there is still a significant appetite for shows presented in more traditional spaces where theatres are working hard to welcome the diverse communities around them.

Artists and audiences are not rejecting the 'old' in favour of the 'new', but rather artistic practice and audience engagement are widening to accommodate a whole range of theatrical forms and spaces for presenting work.

At **Centre Stage** some of the exciting new generation of artists running our theatre buildings will talk about how they respond to their spaces and how they push the boundaries of what is possible. We will also hear about the artistic and audience possibilities of found or pop-up spaces from artists and companies who prefer to create work in these settings.

We will get an update on some of the key recently completed and ongoing capital projects from the architects and theatre operators delivering them and explore how they have built the

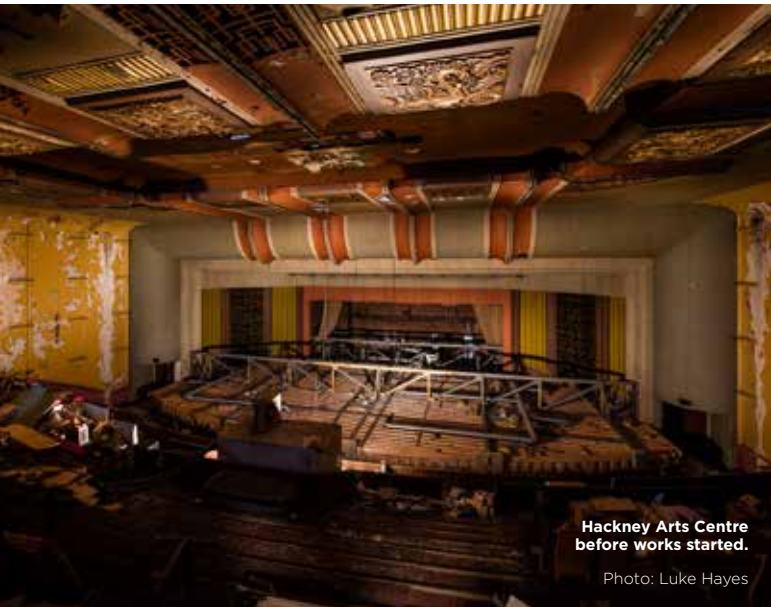
needs of artists and audiences in to their plans.

Reaching wider audiences also means responding to the different cultural expectations and practical needs of different demographics by changing both physical aspects of our theatres and how we manage our spaces. We will explore how theatre operators are creating more welcoming and inclusive spaces and also hear from theatres who are embracing the concept of human-centred design, engaging audiences and communities in planning and scoping capital projects.

Centre Stage will challenge us to place people at the heart of theatre buildings. There's nothing as magical as a full theatre where artist and audience together are engaged in the collaborative process of storytelling. Our theatres are an essential ingredient that make that magic happen.

Theatres Trust Conference 19: Centre Stage will take place at Battersea Arts Centre on 15 October 2019. Tickets will go on sale shortly.

Industry insight: Nesta and social impact investment funding



Hackney Arts Centre
before works started.

Photo: Luke Hayes



Earth, Hackney, after
works completed.

Photo: Wyatt Dixon

More and more arts organisations, including theatres, are turning towards a newer form of repayable finance, social impact investment, to support their projects. Seva Phillips, Head of Arts & Culture Finance at Nesta, explains more about this type of funding and how theatres can benefit.

The funding conundrum

It can be challenging to raise finance for cultural projects. Applying for grant funding is typically a long and uncertain process, not to mention increasingly competitive. And raising repayable finance from high street banks – typically in the form of loans – can be equally tricky but for different reasons: commercial lenders don't always understand the business models involved in the arts and may charge prohibitively high rates of interest with inflexible terms.

What is social investment funding?

What makes social impact investors different from traditional lenders is that they're interested in both financial and social returns on their money. They want to see how people, especially those that come from underserved communities, can benefit from funded projects, in addition to getting their loans back with some interest. This might sound like a lot, but it often aligns with borrowers' aims and visions, particularly in the arts and cultural sector where so many organisations do invaluable work in their communities, from introducing schoolchildren, to drama to tackling loneliness in older people through creative practice.

Where does Nesta come in?

We are a global innovation foundation backing new ideas to solve the big challenges of our time, we lead the way in making social impact

investment accessible to the arts and cultural sector. Since 2015, our Arts & Culture Finance team has supported 25 organisations across England with unsecured loans of £25,000 to £600,000, repayable over a period of up to five years. The projects we've backed are diverse, not only in terms of art form but in how they've used the money too. We've backed start-up ventures, helped organisations grow and expand, provided cash flow support and have financed capital acquisitions and refurbishments.

What theatres have benefitted from social investment funding?

Nesta's first loan through the £7m Arts Impact Fund in December 2015 was to support the complete overhaul of **Titchfield Festival Theatre**, based just outside Portsmouth. A highly prolific and entirely volunteer-run theatre housed in a former warehouse built in the 1960s it needed £500,000 to install more energy-efficient infrastructure and make better (and more modern) use of its vast space. This included purchasing a better insulated roof complete with solar panels, installing a biomass boiler and rearranging the internal layout to create new dressing rooms, toilets and a drama studio. As a result of the funded works, the theatre generates its own energy, which has helped to cut costs, while the more comfortable interiors have attracted a bigger audience – all of which makes the theatre a more financially sustainable and resilient community asset.



L-R: Titchfield Festival Theatre, after the capital project completed, and before.

Photos: Titchfield Festival Theatre.

Titchfield Festival Theatre had already received an offer of a £350,000 loan secured on the premises from Unity Trust Bank, another social lender, prior to work commencing. Nesta's Arts & Culture Finance team was approached to provide the £150,000 balance on an unsecured basis, with repayments of both loans coming from theatre box office revenues. Our due diligence focused on the volunteer-run nature of the organisation: on the one hand, this meant a low wage bill for the theatre, but on the other, we had to be satisfied that appropriate financial controls and supervision were in place, particularly at board level.

In the end, this has been a highly successful project and investment. Over the course of our loan, the number of community groups benefiting from the theatre's facilities grew, including the local history society and schools, and Fareham Men's Shed, which operates from the site. Our Arts Impact Fund loan was repaid nearly one year ahead of schedule due to a better than expected season and cost savings, demonstrating that social impact investment can work for all manner of organisations - volunteer-led and fully professionalised; big and small.

The Arts Impact Fund also invested in a new, multi-purpose arts centre in East London, **Evolutionary Arts Hackney**, more commonly known as **EarthH**. It occupies a grand, former art-deco cinema that showed its last film in 1984. The space was then abandoned for over 30 years, until the opportunity it presented was seized upon by the team behind Village Underground, a landmark music venue in Shoreditch. The team wanted to turn the cinema space into a 750-capacity performance venue, hosting everything from intimate live music gigs, to talks, debates and stand-up comedy shows. In addition to this,

other spaces in the former cinema site would be turned into a restaurant and a further 1,250-capacity multi-use venue. In all, it would cost over £2m to take on the leases and extensively remodel and refurbish the site. Arts & Culture Finance, alongside social investors Big Issue Invest and Triodos Bank, provided loans of £2.1m, with the deal signed in November 2017. A year later, EarthH opened its doors to the public for a diverse first-season programme including performances from Lianne La Havas, a launch party for the Beastie Boys Book and comedy from Simon Amstell.

The programming was not the only thing we were excited about. Within this renewed piece of community heritage, EarthH will be providing a base for the music education charity Community Music to deliver training and practical experiences to young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Working with around 200 young people every year, the venue will have a dedicated education space complete with state of the art computers and equipment, as well as access to EarthH's technical staff so that these development opportunities can be grounded in professional reality. While Community Music benefits from a free resource, the partnership will allow EarthH to live out its values as a community asset and have access to a pipeline of up-and-coming talent. As part of the terms of our investment, the Arts Impact Fund will monitor progress of this scheme and explore the extent to which this model can be replicated in other venues.

Where can theatre organisations find out more?

Visit artsculturefinance.org to find out more or contact info@artsculturefinance.org or call **020 7360 1218**.



STAGE BUILD & REFURBISHMENT EXPERTS

Royal & Derngate Theatre

The Royal & Derngate Theatre is a multi-purpose space which can be configured for a variety of performances. Harlequin's stage refurbishment project was the first restoration undertaken since 2005 when the theatre was first re-developed.

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“ I would like to pass on our gratitude for the work that Harlequin have done on the project. The teams tireless commitment, sheer graft and willingness to work with us is greatly appreciated. ”

David Reeve
Technical Manager, Royal & Derngate

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The National Theatre paintframe.
Photo: Philip Vile

Blurred lines

A collective of theatres, international architects, and a few curious theatre consultants took part in a recent Charcoalblue roundtable discussing theatres across the globe and the changing nature of designing for artist use. Jerad Schomer, the New York Studio Principal, summarises the discussions.

The provocation from the extraordinary Stephen Daldry CBE, director and producer:

“A theatre with a foyer that is not connected to the work is over.

There is no foyer. There is no front of house...

There is no distance between artist and audience.

There is community. There is shared space.

Everything we understand about the relationship between audience and artist needs to be re-discovered.

That’s it.

Good luck.”

Anyone who has been to more than a handful of shows in the last several years will recognize something from those words in a production they’ve seen – theatre artists are pushing to engage their audiences from the minute they step off the street, blurring the lines between what used to be foyer and theatre. Theatres from Broadway and the West End to former industrial lofts in Australia and reclaimed factories outside Paris are responding to that push, allowing artists to craft detailed immersive experiences that can be used to acclimatise, surprise, educate, and disorient theatre-goers – all in the service of life-altering art.

From that provocation, the assembled group initially focused on a few significant examples.

The recent Broadway production of *The Great Comet of 1812*, designed by Mimi Lien, fully transformed their formal Victorian **Imperial Theatre** foyer into a Soviet era bunker, complete with concrete walls and fluorescent lighting, with the intent of audiences ‘turning their senses on’ from the minute they stepped inside.

The UK band The XX performed a series of shows, first at the Manchester International Festival, next at the **Park Avenue Armory** in New York, where they led audiences to a side entrance, through tunnels and back staircases, and into a tiny white room, where the band was already waiting. Only when the walls of the room dropped and the ceiling flew away, was it revealed that the audience was actually in the immense space of the Armory’s Drill Hall.

Taylor Mack’s *24 Decade History of American Popular Music*, performed for an audience of 700 by more than 100 performers continuously over a 24-hour period, took over the entire building at **St. Ann’s Warehouse, Brooklyn** – emptying storage spaces, turning seating risers into a sleeping area, an adjacent garden into a comfort tent, and the foyer into a gallery where costumes and props used earlier in the show were added and displayed.

These examples drive more questions than answers. How do you permit this for assembly? How do you give audiences transitional and comfortable space? How should the architecture serve the flexibility desired by artists without becoming a lost space most of the time? How do you create an immersive environment for one show when the public space might be shared with other venues?



The Cut Bar at the Young Vic.

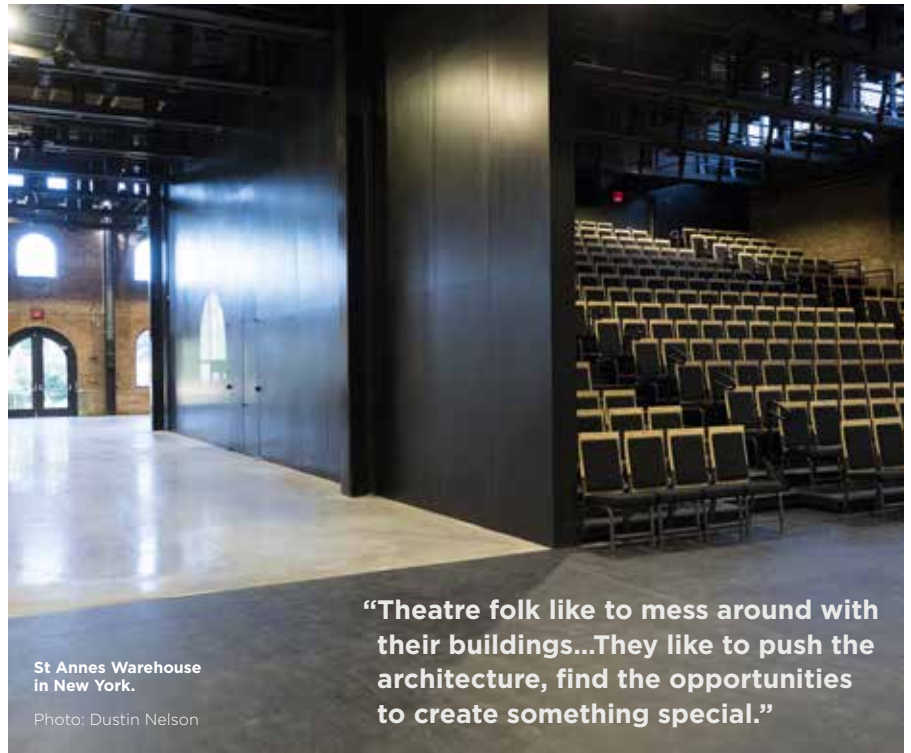
St Annes Warehouse
in New York.

Photo: Dustin Nelson

“Theatre folk like to mess around with their buildings...They like to push the architecture, find the opportunities to create something special.”

Maybe most importantly, who should the architecture serve, the artist or the audience, and can it do both?

What we know is that theatre folk like to mess around with their buildings as much as they like to mess about on stage. They like to push the architecture, find the opportunities (usually in a nook, or a cranny) to create something special, to surprise their audiences, to challenge their audience and inspire them to return. As much as absolute freedom is a necessity for some artists, others produce their most interesting work responding to physical, and of course, budgetary constraints.

London’s Young Vic is always a benchmark for us – a compact and highly flexible theatre with a bustling foyer, bar, and good restaurant. But even at the Young Vic, there are certain boundaries.

Within the confines of each theatre space, the artists are given the freedom to craft the audience-to-actor relationship, but the secret to success is endowing the opportunity for change. After all, it can be a financial burden – no one should claim that flexibility comes cheap – but companies like the Young Vic find that it’s worth it.

With that lesson learned, how can we apply the concept of flexibility and the need to allow ample opportunity for change to the foyer?

The discussion moved to the other side of the blurry line, those traditionally private back of house spaces where it’s rumoured all the magic happens. In recent years, institutions like the **National Theatre** and **Leicester Curve** have opened their back of house, providing the public glimpses into scenery studios, construction and costume shops, and even rehearsal spaces. The **Theatre du Soleil at the Cartoucherie**, **Paris** divides their space to benefit the show, with auditorium, foyer, and even dressing rooms at times occupying the same essential volume. St. Ann’s Warehouse and The Park Avenue Armory in New York often employ the same trick.

But the feedback from theatre practitioners was that shared space doesn’t work for all, and sometimes the

surprise and privacy that controlled access provides are essential (you can’t watch the performers getting dressed!).

As inclusive designers, we have to allow for a generational change towards more openness while at the same time respecting boundaries of function, spirit, and societal norms.

The power of the inclusive over the exclusive is the source of great magic. When a building has the elasticity to stretch those boundaries to defy function, alter original spirit, and challenge societal norms, and still return to stasis, perhaps then it can truly be called a great theatre building.

So, how do we achieve that? The collective agreed a few helpful hints for the future.

Theatre buildings need personality and character, and over time they’ll develop a soul.

A theatre requires an extremely high level of functionality, but sometimes unprogrammed space is also really important – this means generous allowances, enough space for tweaks and temporary incursions, and also front and back stage areas for audience and artists to be social and relax.

It’s not glamorous, but we need some wires in the walls. The increasing use of digital technology in performance demands a response within the public space as well. This is not about investing in large screens – it’s about designing infrastructure to allow artists to tell their story, enhance a visit, and generally mess about.

Impermanence – can venues be designed with future renovations in mind? We shouldn’t make it so expensive to take down a wall or alter the size and shape of a bar, but we should maintain the ability to blur the lines between audience and performer. These fabulous buildings will (and must) evolve with time and we shouldn’t create architectural barriers which prohibit this change.

And finally, say yes to artists! But understand that sometimes saying yes means also setting boundaries.

Friends and Corporate Supporters

Thanks for your support

Our Supporters

We'd like to thank all of our Friends and Corporate Supporters for your generosity and ongoing interest in our work protecting theatres for future generations.

New supporters

We'd like to welcome the new Friends who have joined us this year:

Daniel Ambler
Brian Capron
Jacqueline Capron
Neil Inker
Johanna Thomson
Natalia Vartapetova
Richard Voyce

Thanks also to the following organisations who have recently joined us as Corporate Supporters:

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In memory

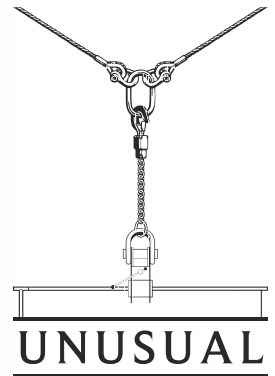
Sadly, the following supporters have passed away in recent months:

John Charles Fields, Friend
Clinton Greyn, Save London's Theatres Campaign Founder
John Standen, Life Friend
June Whitfield DBE, Life Friend, Theatres Trust Founder Member

We remain grateful for their contributions to our mission.



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In conversation with Theatres Trust Ambassador **Siobhan Redmond**

We spoke to actress *Siobhan Redmond MBE* about the theatres close to her heart, and the vital relationship between space, actor and audience that can make lasting memories.



What is your favourite theatre to perform in?

This is a dead heat between the **Citizens** in Glasgow and the **Royal Lyceum** in Edinburgh. Both are Victorian proscenium arch houses of less than 1,000 seats, both have good acoustics and smell like theatres should. I have a sentimental attachment to the **Tron Theatre** in Glasgow too: I started my working life there when all shows were performed in the bar. And dinosaurs walked the earth.

What is your favourite theatre to see a show in?

The Swan in Stratford upon Avon: it's a warm space with lots of wood which works well acoustically and although it's a thrust stage the sightlines are really good. It's also a pleasure to play there, for exactly the same reasons.

What is the relationship between an actor and the audience and how does the auditorium affect this?

The relationship between audience and actor is that the story is happening between them in the same time and space: that's expedited in houses which are rounded and where the architects have ensured that actors can be heard from the stage. And/or seen. It continues to amaze me that there are theatres where both sound and vision range from dodgy to random.



Siobhan Redmond, on the right, in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* at the Glasgow Tron in 1993.

Photo: Tron Theatre, Glasgow

What role do you see theatres playing in society now?

Theatres have always seemed to me to be places where we enter into a contract with each other to go as far as we can into a space outside the bounds of real time to see what we can discover about ourselves for good and ill. Now, as ever, we value imagination, good stories and the possibility of transcendence. Tastes in and fashions for particular theatrical styles will of course change but theatre itself will always offer the opportunity for something alchemical to happen. We go into the dark with a lot of strangers and hope something rare and beautiful will result: when it does, it's particular to those people who were there on that day and it can stay with you forever.

Find out more about our Ambassadors and why they support us by visiting: theatrust.org.uk/about-us/our-ambassadors

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Our Work

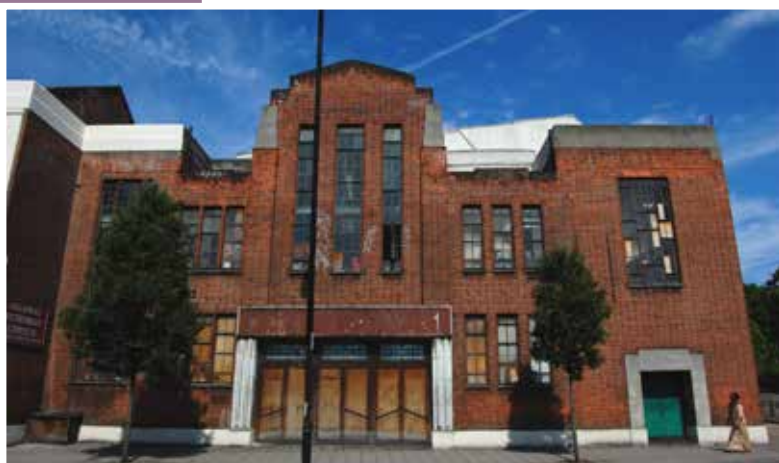
We provide advice on the planning and development of theatres.

New theatres

Theatres Trust actively supports theatre owners and operators who plan positively for cultural use, and much of our advice is around ensuring proposals offer the most viable solution. We are increasingly seeing planning applications come through for theatre and performance venues within vacant spaces of different types, particularly in town centres.

We supported a change of use to convert the vacant former **Brookdale Club, Catford** into a multi-purpose arts space offering theatre, live music and other performance along with a restaurant, bar and recording studios (DC/18/109877). If approved, the new venue will add diversity and positively enhance the attractiveness and vitality of Catford town centre.

We were consulted on and supported a **proposed theatre at Spencer Mill in Soham**, Cambridgeshire (19/00505/FUL) converting the former mill into a community hub for the town. We suggested the applicants take on a specialist theatre consultant to refine plans to ensure the best layout – with the right guidance the proposed space could enhance the social and cultural well-being of local people, while restoring and bringing the heritage asset back into use.



Islington's Archway
Methodist Central Hall

The Trust welcomed plans for a **new arts centre in Islington's Archway Methodist Central Hall** (P2018/1427/S73), recommending revisions to service and get in/out management to ensure the future sustainability of the building. We also recommended the approval

of plans for a **proposed Coastal Schooner Centre in Saundersfoot**, (NP/18/0687/FUL) a reconfiguration of an Events Deck in the harbour, to provide an events space for theatre and live performance, as well as other functions and events. These new spaces have the potential to improve the cultural offer for local people and visitors.

Redevelopment and refurbishment

The Trust actively encourages theatre owners and operators to invest in their buildings to ensure they meet the expectations of modern audiences, staff, and performers. We also support the diversification and more effective use of theatres to improve their sustainability and viability and increase their social and cultural value for local communities



Bradford Odeon

In January a major planning application was submitted by Bradford Live, the campaign group fighting for **Bradford Odeon**, for its repair, renovation and extension (18/05130/FUL) – we welcomed and supported these exciting plans, the next step in the transformation of the Theatre at Risk into a live entertainment and events venue. In March 2019 the council gave the go-ahead to convert the Odeon into a 3,800-capacity live music venue, as well as approving new signage on the building. We are delighted to see the former Odeon being restored back to active use, as this will have tremendous benefits for Bradford.

We are supportive of proposals by **Leicester's Little Theatre** to demolish a vacant neighbouring building and construct a five-storey extension to provide a new studio theatre, rehearsal space, meeting rooms, an enlarged foyer, increased toilets and expanded café

Contact us if you are planning a capital project or want advice and guidance on maintaining your theatre building: advice@theatretrust.org.uk.

(PL/LL/20182727). The Little Theatre is a community-orientated theatre with a strong local membership. The plans will substantially expand the theatre's facilities and offer greater potential to bring money in through external hires.

The Trust was consulted and recommended approval of plans by **Malvern Theatres** to extend its building to provide new rehearsal studios and meeting rooms, along with increased office space and other improvements (18/01512/FUL). Primarily, the extension creates a studio for rehearsals and education, helping the theatre expand its role as a social and cultural asset for the area. It will also provide a new meeting space and a new Changing Places toilet facility.

We also responded positively to proposals for a major refurbishment of **Paisley's Town Hall**, a Category A listed building of great architectural, historical and social significance (19/0039/PP). It contains a large main auditorium, and a number of other smaller rooms, and has already been used for concerts and a degree of theatre use. The intention is for this to become a flagship venue for theatre and live performance and the plans improve the flexibility of the auditorium to make sure it can be adapted for different types of events with greater ease and speed. Works proposed include improving sightlines, seating, and front and back-of-house arrangements, ensuring a higher level of audience comfort. The plans also restore parts of the Town Hall to its previous grandeur

Our aim when responding to planning applications is to help create theatres that will give audiences a great experience – and enough toilets, in the right places and accessible to all, has been a big part of that recently. Theatre operators are aware of this issue and major refurbishment when they do happen will look to tackle this, but there are challenges particularly in Victorian and Edwardian theatres.

We recently supported proposals by the following theatres for toilet improvements: an application for the creation of additional toilets at the **Queen's Theatre, London** (18/06714/FULL & 18/06715/LBC) will result in an additional 33



WCs being provided. London's **Phoenix Theatre** will upgrade and refurbish the theatre's Dress Circle toilets (2019/0804/L), which will provide two additional cubicles and make one accessible for ambulant users and one including baby changing facilities. The capital's **Duke of York's Theatre** will convert the current manager's office and staff locker room/store room into a female washroom – this is at basement level, which currently has no loo provision (19/01002/LBC). The **Lyceum Theatre** will refurbish all public and one back of house washroom (19/00532/LBC).

We urge caution where residential development is proposed in proximity to theatres and other similar noise-generating cultural venues because the two uses are not necessarily compatible; this can result in detrimental restrictions on theatres and/or compromised amenity and living conditions for future occupants.

The Trust wrote with concerns regarding a proposal for a new hotel with a basement casino, night club, restaurant, bar and events space opposite the **Liverpool Playhouse**, (18F/3056). While we did not object to the development, we requested conditions to protect performances from disturbance.

There is residential development planned adjacent to **York's Grand Opera House**, (18/02811/FUL). While not objecting to this proposal because the principle of residential use at the site has already been established, we made it clear that conditions and mitigations to protect the theatre from noise-related complaints must be included within any permission.



Oxford Playhouse

Photo: Geraint Lewis

There are many ways for theatres to mitigate against noise interferences from adjacent uses, and we recently supported soundproofing works at **Oxford Playhouse** (18/02795/LBC) – it is a positive and pragmatic approach that which will provide acoustic protection to the theatre from disturbance generated by the neighbouring pub's beer garden. In line with the 'agent of change' principle, costs would be met by the pub.

Non theatre use for former theatre buildings



Regent, Deal

Photo: FLICKR Nick

The Trust was consulted on and welcomed proposals to restore the **Regent, Deal** as a cinema (18/01395). Originally built as a theatre, the Regent converted to a cinema and was most recently in use as a bingo hall but has been vacant for around ten years. We consider the proposed design and restoration to be sensitive to the building's historic character and will help enhance the building's setting. The provision of a new café/bar will draw more visitors to the area which should help benefit surrounding businesses and the overall strength and vitality of the town centre

Improving policy

The Core Cities UK independent **Cultural Cities Enquiry** was published in February. The report explores the vital question of how we continue to invest in culture in our towns and cities in a challenging economic environment. It clearly states that our cultural buildings are an important part of placemaking but also that the availability and affordability of space for cultural performance and production are central concerns for many cultural organisations. To address this, it suggests ways in which we might leverage much needed additional investment as well as new ways in which we might manage our cultural assets more effectively to promote long-term viability. These include City Culture Compacts, Business Improvement District bodies and the use of portfolio asset management models. We will engage with the various bodies behind the report and will contribute our experience of working with theatres, local authorities, developers and other stakeholders.

Theatres Trust advisers supported the Greater London Authority (GLA) in developing the **Cultural Infrastructure Plan**, which was launched in March. We support its demand for both increased capital investment and the strategic use of planning and placemaking to ensure all Londoners can access and take part in the city's rich cultural offer. London's smallest theatres are at an increased threat of redevelopment or eviction and it is our hope that the Cultural Infrastructure plan will empower local authorities, and their planning departments, to give priority to cultural projects that give Londoners the ability to create and enjoy great

theatre. We will continue to work with the GLA to deliver on the actions of the plan.

In May, details of the Heritage on the High Street Fund were announced – an action from the Housing, Communities and Local Government committee report on the future of the high street, **High Streets and Town Centres in 2030**. The £62m Heritage on the High Street Fund will be used to bring old buildings back into use and turn them into offices, housing and creative spaces. The funding includes £44m to create High Street Heritage Action Zones overseen by Historic England; £15m overseen by the Architectural Heritage Fund for The Transforming Places Through Heritage Programme, and £3m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support a cultural programme to engage people in the life and history of their high streets. We look forward to working with local authorities, theatres and companies across the UK who are interested in investing in culture on the high street.

Better protected

The first stages of any project provide the vital foundations for both project and organisation and as our Theatres at Risk Register 2019 was announced in January we launched our **Capacity Building Programme**, a fund set up specifically to help our Theatres at Risk campaign groups commission expert advice and acquire the skills and knowledge to push forward capital projects to help save their theatres.



Burnley Empire

Photo: Ben Hamlen

The successful theatres are Burnley Empire, Morecambe Winter Gardens, Peterborough New Theatre, Salford Victoria, Spilsby Theatre and Swindon Mechanics' Institute, who each received up to £25,000 for projects ranging from a ceiling void inspection to governance training to viability studies. We will work closely with the successful applicants to develop the project proposal, assist the groups with selecting experts, attend key meetings and monitor the outcome. With this support, these theatres will be able to make real progress.

With thanks to Historic England, The Pilgrim Trust, Swire Charitable Trust and individual donors for supporting the programme.

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Photo: Manu Palomeque

Grant-giving: improving the theatre-going experience

From improving accessibility to addressing urgent repair work, we have awarded £150,000 already this year through our Theatres Protection Fund. Here is a roundup of the awards.

We launched our Theatres Protection Fund in 2012 as a lifeline to local theatres in need of vital support for capital projects, thanks to a cash injection of £125,000 from the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation. Partnering with funders such as the Mackintosh Foundation, Soho Estates, Charles Michael Holloway Charitable Trust, and most recently the Wolfson Foundation, we now run three grants schemes that support theatres around the country with projects that improve their physical condition, accessibility and operational viability.

In February we were delighted to award £100,000 across seven Improving Accessibility projects through our Theatre Improvement Scheme. The first round of the scheme, run in partnership with the Wolfson Foundation, provided up to £20,000 each to theatre projects that remove barriers to participation and make theatre-going more accessible.

Manchester's HOME, working in partnership with the **Royal Exchange Theatre, The Lowry, Z-Arts, Contact, Oldham Coliseum** and **Bolton Octagon** will purchase and share captioning equipment to provide deaf and deafened audiences across Greater Manchester comprehensive access to

captioned productions and performances. This consortium of theatres received our 100th grant awarded through the Theatres Protection Fund.

Assistive listening systems are being installed at the **Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough** and **Gulbenkian, Canterbury**, to allow customisation as well as audio description of performances.

Wheelchair users and those with pushchairs will soon have independent access to **Pitlochry Festival Theatre**, whose heavy front door will be fitted with an automatic opening device. While audiences at the historic **Newcastle Tyne Theatre and Opera House, London Old Vic** and **Oxford Playhouse** will benefit from works that open up previously inaccessible spaces around their building, including box offices, meeting rooms, and toilets.

Improving Environmental Sustainability is the theme for the next round of the Theatre Improvement Scheme and is now open for applications.

We awarded a further £50,000 from our London and UK small grants schemes to 11 theatres for projects that introduce environmental improvements and enhance the performance areas, and address access and urgent repairs around the building – demonstrating how even a small grant can do much to improve the theatre experience for theatre-goers, staff and performers.

Left and middle: HOME, Manchester and the consortium of Manchester theatres who received our 100th award from the Theatres Protection Fund.



Photo: Manu Paromeque

Lyth Arts Centre in the Scottish Highlands will replace its old storage heaters and install an innovative Biomass boiler system. More energy efficient heating throughout the centre will allow it to host year round residencies, open up the foyer as a second space, and run a winter programme - of benefit to visiting artists, local audiences and ensuring the theatre's viability.

The off-west end **Omnibus Theatre** will broaden its programme and stage shows in a second performance space, created by installing a technical gallery in one of its current rehearsal rooms. While Islington's **The Big House**, which is converting an old frame factory into a new youth theatre and community space for care leavers, will install acoustic screens to soundproof the theatre. This will not only acoustically separate the theatre space from the offices, it will limit noise disturbance to the next door residential building, allowing the theatre to function throughout the day without interference.

Four theatres will use small grant funding to enhance accessibility. Automatic swing doors will improve the theatre-going experience for disabled patrons and wheelchair users at the **Lighthouse, Poole**, the largest regional arts centre outside London. **The Queen's Theatre Hornchurch**, purpose built in 1975, will complete a package of accessibility works front and back of house to better support audiences and performers. **Hackney's Tower Theatre**, one of London's major amateur dramatics groups, will install a stair lift to allow those with limited mobility access to the theatre space on the first floor of the converted Methodist chapel. **Soho Theatre**, in the heart of the west end, will install an automatic sliding front door to ensure easy access to the box office for everyone.

Our small grants also play a key role in helping four theatres protect their buildings from further deterioration, and add to their long-term economic sustainability.

The Grade II listed **Shoreditch Town Hall** will complete urgent external and internal repairs to the North East Tower of the largest theatre space. **The Poly, Falmouth** will be able to



embark on repair work to the ceiling of the main gallery and the roof above its Grade II* listed Polytechnic Hall. The exterior of **Theatr Gwaun** will be repaired and repainted by the friends group, who acquired it through a Community Asset Transfer from the council in 2018. While **Chipping Norton Theatre**, a former Salvation Army citadel, will complete comprehensive roofing repair work critical to protect future theatre use.

Middle: Newcastle Theatre Royal

Bottom: Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch

Photo: Gary Summers

Visit our website for up-to-date information on the grants schemes currently open for applications: theatretrust.org.uk/how-we-help/grants-funding



Watercolour of the London Coliseum

Drawings: John Higgins

Book review: West End in Watercolour: a portrait of London theatre

Reviewed by Tom Stickland, Theatres Trust Theatres Adviser

John Higgins
ISBN 9781904031925
£28.95
Entertainment Technology Press
Paperback, 254pp

The title of this study of London's theatres is misleading. While it does include gorgeous watercolours of many of the West End's glittering gems, the book goes much further recounting the histories of the theatres and spreading its focus far beyond what we might consider theatreland to capture the diversity of theatre buildings that exist across the capital.

Clearly a passion project of the author and artist John Higgins, more than 150 beautifully crafted pictures accurately document the theatres. The paintings mostly cover external views of each theatre's frontage but some particularly lavish interiors have been included along with select intricate details. The project has spanned many years and this collection freezes the theatres in time, some have changed names since they were painted and the marquees list shows now closed but the images hold them still for that moment.

The accompanying theatre histories are not limited to information of the theatres original architects and architecture but also their social and theatrical past with the important shows, people and historic events that shaped them. Some of the included theatres have flitted in and out of use interrupted by the war and the growth of cinema. Some are no longer theatres but retain many marks of their theatrical origins like the Hippodrome Casino. This book serves as a useful companion for any enthusiast curious about how London became a city of so many theatres and how this has shifted over the past 200 years.

Seeing the theatres in watercolour has a different effect from seeing a snapped photograph. The painting elevates them and makes you consider their place in London's history. To see the same care given to the converted car park that is Southwark's Bunker Theatre as the embellished facades of Her Majesty's Theatre shows that John Higgins truly treasures these buildings and all they stand for. This book would be a charming addition to the library of anyone with an interest in theatres and theatre architecture and will undoubtedly uncover a new theatre for you to visit.



Coming Soon

Shanghai Grand Opera House

Theatre Projects are proud to be part of the Snøhetta team for the design of the new Grand Opera House in Shanghai. Scheduled to open in 2023, the Opera will house 3 principle halls for grand, baroque and experimental opera.

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