Royal Shakespeare Company awarded Lottery grant for Swan Wing redevelopment

29/11/2013

For the first time, the company will be able to showcase the very best from its internationally significant archive and give visitors a hands-on opportunity to experience the theatre-making process for themselves with a new interactive exhibition.

The RSC will now seek matching funds to support the project, with the aim of completing the work and opening up the exhibition to a global audience in time for the anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016.

Key elements of the project include:

- the restoration of Grade II* listed features of the Swan Wing, the only remaining element of the 1879 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, which burnt down in 1926. The wing originally housed a library, reading room and picture gallery and it currently includes the façade and entrance, hallway, bar area, staircase, current exhibition room and the bridge which links it to the Swan Theatre auditorium;
- modernisation to create an appropriate environment to showcase the RSC's unrivalled Archive and Collection. This includes costumes spanning the history of the theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, paintings dating from the 18th century onwards, sculpture, theatrical props, accessories and memorabilia, currently held in off-site premises that are not accessible to the public. The paper archive holds a wealth of records, designs, drawings and information about the company's performance history and is looked after by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust;
- ?the creation of a major new behind-the-scenes exhibition uncovering the RSC's process and history of creating theatre. Created by the RSC and Amsterdam based architects, Kossmann de Jong, this exhibition will spread across all of the public spaces in the Swan Wing, combining physical objects from the RSC's history alongside interactive technology. People will be able to go on a journey through the theatre-making process and try their hand as a theatre artist or technician in a unique visitor experience.

Gregory Doran, RSC Artistic Director, said: "We're delighted that the HLF have chosen to support our Swan Wing project allowing us to conserve and restore elements of this beautiful Stratford landmark. Many of the original elements have been lost over time and we want to bring these back for the local community and visitors.

"We know that people of all ages relish the chance to discover how we make our productions. Our new exhibition will be of interest to everybody and will include activities for children and families as well as providing resources for students and schools. It will be a fun and exciting way to find out how theatre has been made in Shakespeare's home town over the centuries."

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of HLF, said: "The Royal Shakespeare Company is one of the world's most prestigious and admired theatre companies: a by-word for excellence. The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to be supporting the Swan Wing Project which will enable the company to tell the story of how it developed its craft over the past 130 years and also set it within the wider historical context of Stratford-upon-Avon.

"We have an amazingly rich tradition of theatre in the UK and these ambitious plans will not only celebrate that heritage but also add another strand to the RSC's already strong appeal as a major tourist attraction."

Notes to editors

Restoration of original building elements - examples of this work include:

- three bas reliefs by Eric Kennington, English sculptor, artist and illustrator, and an official war artist in both World Wars
- a series of gargoyles representing the Mechanicals from A Midsummer Night's Dream
- red canopies will be erected over the doorways, echoing those that were there when the theatre opened in 1879
- four empty statue niches that were never filled as imagined when the building opened, will be home to work created by community groups with artists, bringing the façade to life.

About the RSC Collection and Archive - Our Collection and Archive is an unparalleled record of Shakespeare in performance spanning over 130 years. The collection is an accredited museum of several thousand objects and is designated as being of national and international importance.

Further information

For more information, please contact Katie Owen, HLF press office, on 020 7591 6036 / 07973 613820.

Contact Jane Ellis, RSC Press Office on 07966 295032, email: jane.ellis@rsc.org.uk.
For RSC press images visit the RSC website. Images can be downloaded free of charge including photos of the exterior of the Swan Theatre showing the Swan Wing.