

Theatre Royal restoration receives boost from Heritage Lottery Fund

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The project, costing £4.75 million in total, will include extensive restoration of the auditorium and conservation measures to protect the external fabric of the building, including the famous Portico on Grey Street.

The Grade I Listed theatre, opened in 1837, is regarded by many as the UK's most beautiful theatre building and was once named by Sir Ian McKellen as his personal favourite. It is one of only seven Grade 1 listed theatres in England.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said: "The Theatre Royal is a historical gem in the heart of the city and has been putting on show-stopping performances for throughout the decades. Our investment will contribute to a vital project which will conserve and transform the fabric of this fantastic building and through its new learning programme, teach visitors about the Theatre's fascinating history, ensuring it remains at the centre of the local community."

Extensive work will be carried out in the auditorium, including new seating at all levels, new lighting and ventilation systems, a new Stalls entrance and reinstatement of lost historic features including light fittings and gold leaf decorative work. The aim is to recapture the grand style of Frank Matcham's 1901 design (much of which has been lost over the last century) while at the same time creating twenty first century standards of comfort.

A new heritage exhibition will be developed in partnership with the V&A Theatre Collections Department aiming to introduce new and existing audiences to the rich heritage of the theatre. Volunteers will help to lead tours of the site and develop and maintain the archives.

In parallel with these developments the theatre is creating a Heritage Learning Programme and a new fully resourced History Room where the heritage of the theatre can be studied by members of the general public. The Learning Programme will feature a series of history projects and a 175th anniversary history book.

Philip Bernays, CEO of the Theatre Royal, said: "This grant is great news for us, and we are over the moon. In an age when competition for funding is at its most fierce, we are delighted that the HLF have recognised the critical importance of this project. This is our biggest single donation so far and will form an important part of the overall funding package."

Funding for the project is coming from a number of different sources including both private and public, and a financial plan to support the project was endorsed by the Theatre Royal Board in December 2009.

As the theatre is an independent charitable trust and its future depends on public support, a Heritage Fund has been set up to enable members of the public, businesses, and charitable foundations and trusts to contribute to the restoration. A limited number of patron packages are available, offering seat dedications, invitations to exclusive patron events and various other benefits. Every theatre ticket purchased also includes a contribution to the fund.

The Theatre Royal will have no performances from 14 March to 11 September 2011 while the restoration is taking place, though the other parts of the theatre will remain open.

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 30,000 projects allocating £4.5billion across the UK with £214 million in the North East alone.

Opened in February 1837, Theatre Royal Newcastle is one of the finest theatres in the UK and a key date in the touring calendar of some of the world's leading theatre companies; performances include the biggest and brightest West End musicals, thought provoking drama from the world's leading playwrights, contemporary dance from internationally acclaimed choreographers - not to mention the North's favourite pantomime, attracting more than 78,000 people.

www.theatreroyal.co.uk

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