# Union Chapel looks forward to organ restoration thanks to HLF

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The Union Chapel's Henry Willis organ, Grade I listed on the National Pipe Organ Register, was completed in 1887 and is the only organ of its type in England with its original hydraulic machinery intact. As such, it is considered to be one of the finest unaltered Willis organs in the country. Now, in a poor state of repair, it is estimated that the organ has a mere 2-3 years of playable life left.

In addition to the restorative work – which will include a complete restoration of the organ's machinery, pipework and enclosure – the project will involve a three year programme of education activities, volunteering opportunities and community outreach work. The project aims to break down barriers to the learning and enjoyment of organ music, something the Union Chapel hopes to achieve given its excellent reputation as a venue widely known for promoting secular music. Targeting underrepresented groups such as the homeless, those on low incomes and the deaf community, the project will feature three strands of activity: education – working with local schools and colleges; music and the arts – working with local communities; and heritage activities – working with local volunteers.

With a long established musical tradition the Grade II* listed Victorian Gothic congregational church was built in 1876-7 by James Cubitt and was at the forefront of choral singing in the nineteenth century. Today it holds three regular church services a week, and attracts 15,000 – 20,000 people a year as one of London's most atmospheric gig venues promoting old and new alternative pop, folk and electronica. The organ itself has been played on numerous occasions by such heavyweights as the American Carlo Curley and our own Michael Laurence Nyman, perhaps best known for his multi-platinum soundtrack album to Jane Campion's The Piano.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for London, said: "The Union Chapel Willis organ is a rare and beautiful instrument at the heart of one of the most loved community venues in North London. This money will mean that this precious heritage asset can be conserved and restored to full working order, so that it can once again entertain and engage audiences young, old and new."

Philip Walker, Chair of Union Chapel Project said:  "On behalf of the Project, we are thrilled, if not slightly overwhelmed, with the HLF Grant which will go a long way towards fully restoring this fine and wonderful instrument which has loyally served and delighted generations of worshippers and concert-goers. We hope the restoration will continue and strengthen this happy tradition for generations to come."

Emily Thornberry, MP for Islington South and Finsbury, also expressed her support for the project and the benefits it will bring to the community: "The Union Chapel is a great place and I am delighted that the Willis organ will be restored with an HLF grant so that future generations can enjoy its music.

As well as having a very important place in Islington's rich cultural and architectural heritage, the Union Chapel is a focal point for the community.  I hope the new programme of activities that is being funded will bring fresh audiences to the Chapel and allow more of Islington's residents to hear some fantastic music in this unique building."

**Notes to editors**

The HLF grant to Union Chapel Organ Project is for £470,000 (75% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

**Union Chapel**
For further information about the Henry Willis Organ or the Union Chapel's history as a non-conformist congregational church please visit: http://www.unionchapel.org.uk

**Further information:**
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