

Chairman's Remarks

20th Nov 2019



Hello, I'm David Harvey, Chairman of the Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre. I'll be saying a few words of introduction then will hand over to our VIP guests. At the end, we will take a few questions then be available for interviews.

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Thank you all for coming along on a cold autumn day to our 90th birthday celebration for a sleeping beauty here in Streatham Hill.

Thanks to representatives from the press, Theatres Trust, Lambeth and thanks to our 'Streatham Stars', Simon Callow and Catherine Russell (who both have strong local connections) for taking timeout of their busy schedules to be here.

We would also like to thank Praesepe, the owners of Beacon Bingo, for inviting us into this beautiful foyer out of the cold, and proving welcome refreshments.

It was 90 years ago this very day in 1929 that Streatham Hill Theatre opened with the appropriately named show "*Wake Up and Dream*" – it had been due to open two days earlier on the Monday but wasn't quite ready!

Built in the revival period in 1928-29, this Grade 2 listed theatre has been described as "unusually lavish" and with a capacity of around 2800 is one of the largest in London. During its operation, many famous names performed here in plays, variety, opera and ballet, with shows regularly transferring here to and from the West End. The theatre's slogan was "West End shows at provincial prices".

In the early 1960's the new-fangled TV and a new game called bingo helped lead to its closure as a theatre. However, that new game went on to help save the building as Mecca took over the building in 1962 as their flagship Bingo Social Club. Since then, under a number of operators, bingo continued right up to 2017, ensuring the survival of the building.

Although now largely unused, much of the original architecture and décor remain, including a large stage with some original equipment, a 5-storey dressing room block, several bars and foyers, and the grand auditorium itself with its two balconies, as well as this lovely entrance we are standing in.

When bingo closed in 2017, Praesepe began a search for a new entertainment-based user for the building so it could continue its long life of providing arts, culture and entertainment to South London. Around the same time The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre was formed as a focus for the community and their interest in the future of the building – the aim of the Friends is to reawaken this sleeping beauty for the benefit of the community.

Streatham and the surrounding area has always been a creative place, with many artists starting out here, living here and working here – Simon and Catherine being prime examples. There is also a wide range of community organisations bringing arts and culture to the people on an ongoing basis. But we are lacking the space, facilities and a focal point for these creative activities.

So, we see a window of opportunity to bring this grand building back to life, as a multi-purpose creative centre, preserving its heritage of architecture and activity, through working with the owners, with Lambeth, with the Theatres Trust, and with other stakeholders.

The Friends have workshopped community needs, identified potential options and are formulating our own proposals for the future. We have help from Theatres Trust, the ABTT and Lambeth amongst others, plus a volunteer panel of professionals, including architects and consultants, who have all given their time freely.

However, we now need to commission a viability study for the future of this place which will need to be funded. So today as well as celebrating 90 years of the theatre's contributions so far, we are launching a crowd-funding campaign to set us off on our journey to its centenary and beyond.

We call on our friends, colleagues, the creative industries, and everyone, to join our campaign, and support our cause through the crowd-funder, by going to our website www.streathamhilltheatre.org.

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Thank you all very much, now I'm going to hand over to Simon and Catherine...
Happy 90th birthday, Streatham Hill Theatre.