

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE USE



Stars of stage and screen call for the reawakening of Streatham Hill's 'sleeping beauty' theatre.

The bid to rescue one of the country's biggest theatres has been boosted with the launch of a crowd-funding campaign.

The move to bring the magnificent Streatham Hill Theatre back into use got the backing of actor Simon Callow when he came to cut the "birthday cake" celebrating the 90th anniversary to the day of the south London venue's opening.

"In one way or another its spirit and physical integrity must be preserved so that the whole community can use it", he told the gathering.

Streatham-born Callow recalled the first time he went to the 2,800 capacity venue aged five and being amazed by its splendour. He has recently written a book on London's grand theatres and recounted that the Streatham Hill Theatre was the last work of "one of the greatest British theatre architects", W.G.R. Sprague, designer of the Aldwych, the Ambassadors and many other important theatres.

"I'm sure all sorts of marvellous things can be done with this building," he said, "it's very versatile and flexible, so long as its essential character is preserved because that is what makes it splendid, it's not just because it's big".

Joining Callow in cutting the cake was Holby City star and Streatham resident Catherine Russell who said that if the building could be brought back into use and used for live theatre it would invigorate nearby bars, restaurants and local businesses.

It would "stir people's imagination" she said "to come into something so magical and wonderful."

"It would be brilliant if we can get the crowd funding started for the viability study to see if it's going to be possible."

Chair of The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre, David Harvey, said it was the group's aim "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 an 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.”

To support the Friends’ campaign, please go to www.streathamhilltheatre.org to contribute to our crowd-fund and to join our mailing list, and please also follow The Friends on Facebook and Instagram as *StreathamHillTheatre* and Twitter *@StreathamHillT*.

[ENDS]

Press enquiries, including photos and video:

David Harvey, Chairman, Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre

07770 843030 | pr@streathamhilltheatre.org

The Friends website www.streathamhilltheatre.org has press resources, including photographs of the event and the theatre.

Notes for editors:

1. Streatham has a long history in theatre and entertainment and was known as “the West End of South London” - and due to the wealth of talent living in the area - as “The Beverly Hills of London”. Arts and cultural activity of all kinds continues in modern day Streatham.
2. Simon Callow was born in Streatham and went on to become a famous star of stage and screen, as well as an author. His most recent book is *London's Great Theatres* with photographer Derry Moore.
3. Catherine Russell was also born locally and lives in Streatham. She has extensive stage and screen experience but is currently best known for her role as Serena Campbell in the BBC medical drama *Holby City*.
4. Streatham Hill Theatre (SHT) was opened in 1929 as the Streatham Hill Playhouse. It was bombed in WW2 but was rebuilt and reopened in 1950. It closed to theatre in 1962, becoming a bingo hall. Much of the original theatre and its equipment remain. Small scale theatre returned via Streatham Theatre Company from 2013 to 2016. Bingo ceased in 2017, leaving only a small 24/7 slot machine lounge operated by leaseholders Praesepe plc.
5. The theatre was granted a Grade 2 listing in 1994 as “an unusually lavish example of a theatre built in the short-lived revival of building in 1929-30; as a suburban example of this date the building may be unique”. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1244564>
6. The theatre is at seven on the Theatres Trust list of at-risk theatres, with much of the building unused, and the risk of development or splitting off parts of the building a concern. <http://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/484-streatham-hill-theatre>

7. In 2018, Lambeth Council approved The Friends' nomination of Streatham Hill Theatre as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), which was then appealed by the owners. After a flashmob demonstration of support by over 1000 people in November 2018, ACV status was confirmed in early 2019. More on our website www.streathamhilltheatre.org.
8. The Streatham Society has published a book about the theatre, written by John Cresswell www.streathamsociety.org.uk