

PRESS RELEASE
EMBARGOED UNTIL 20th Nov 2019



South London's 'Sleeping Beauty' reaches 90 but remains at risk.

Stars of stage and screen celebrate its 90th birthday and call for its reawakening.

Stars of stage and screen are coming together to wish "Happy 90th birthday" to the disused Streatham Hill Theatre. **Sir Simon Callow** and **Catherine Russell**, both with strong connections to Streatham, are supporting our campaign to see it brought back to life as an arts, entertainment and community hub for South London. To start that journey to provide new opportunities and inspiration for those who live in the area, we are also launching our crowd-funding campaign today.

We are celebrating the birthday on Wednesday 20th November, 90 years to the day since the Streatham Hill Theatre opened in 1929 with the appropriately titled "*Wake Up and Dream!*". Simon and Catherine will be cutting a birthday cake for a small gathering of campaigners outside the theatre building - the cake has been especially hand-made by a campaigner.

The 2,800 capacity former theatre has been described by the Theatres Trust as one of London's most lavish "sleeping beauties" and "one of the best-equipped in London outside of the West End". The building suffered extensive damage from a German V1 flying bomb on 3rd July 1944, but reopened in 1950 after repairs. The theatre closed on 9th June 1962, quickly reopening with the up and coming new game, Bingo. The bingo closed in 2017 leaving most of the building disused (apart from a 24/7 slot machine lounge), but the stage and auditorium remain preserved, waiting for a new generation of arts and culture lovers to take it forward to its centenary and beyond.

The stars of today who are backing the campaign follow in the footsteps of a galaxy of stars of yester-year who have performed there, including the likes of Paul Robeson, Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Frankie Howard, Sir Michael Caine and Dame June Whitfield, who was also raised in Streatham. Other well-known Streatham residents, past and present include David Harewood, Naomi Campbell and rapper Dave.

The Friends of Streatham Hill Theatre have been ceaselessly campaigning to breathe a new lease of life into the Grade II listed building. In 2018 they secured its addition to the Theatres Trust 'Theatre at Risk' register and its listing as an 'Asset of Community Value' (ACV) by Lambeth Council.

In January 2019, following a flashmob event last November attended by 1000 local people, an appeal by the owners against that ACV decision was rejected. Then in June 2019 Lambeth Council consulted on plans to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and

rejuvenating the old Streatham Hill Theatre as a multi-use venue. The Friends look forward to working with Lambeth to progress rapidly this opportunity.

To help The Friends develop their own proposals for future use of the building, we have formed a panel of professional advisors including architects and consultants, who are providing free help and advice. However, to carry out a viability study to determine how best to proceed The Friends will need to raise funds, so today we are announcing our crowd-funding campaign through Space Hive. Please help us make the first steps towards reawakening this sleeping beauty as an arts and cultural centre for the community.

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

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Press enquiries, including photos and video:

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The Friends website www.streathamhilltheatre.org has further press resources.

Notes for editors:

1. **You are invited** to send reporters and photographers to the event at **11am on Wednesday 20th November outside the theatre (now Beacon Bingo) at 110 Streatham Hill, London SW2 4RD**. Please don't publicise the exact time in advance. We will also make quotes, photos and video available after the event.
2. 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.
3. Sir 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.
4. 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 in the BBC medical drama *Holby City*.
5. 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.

6. 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>
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