

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre & the Mill Studio Theatre

Introduction

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a regional theatre, presenting and producing vibrant, excellent drama for the people of Guildford, Surrey and beyond. With a thriving studio theatre and youth theatre, the Yvonne Arnaud is a culture hub and an artistic resource, a local theatre with a national reach.

Under Director Joanna Read the theatre is beginning a period of transformation which will see it reconnecting with its audience and its community and redefining its role as a regional drama and play house. Plans include creating its own slate of productions alongside the home produced pantomime, increasing the diversity of its audiences, presenting excellent work on the mainstage that will inspire, thrill and entertain, increasing work for families and young people and growing the national reputation of the theatre.

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a Grade II listed 1960s theatre designed by BrownRigg and built in 1965. The funds for the building were raised by subscription and philanthropy from the people of Guildford and Surrey. Actor Sir Michael Redgrave led the campaign to raise funds and build the theatre with support from many other leading actors of the day, including Dirk Bogard, Vanessa Redgrave, Susan Hampshire.

The theatre has a tremendous legacy, loved by artists and audiences alike for its intimate auditorium and generous well-equipped stage, in its heyday in the 1980s and '90s all major actors and directors worked here, on tour and prior to the West End. The theatre is an exceptional playhouse at its best when used as such presenting and producing drama that connects with its audience.

Alongside the Main Stage, which seats 586, the Mill Studio, capacity 80, presents work by local and emerging companies, contemporary small scale touring and work for children. The Theatre's Creative Learning department, including youth theatre is housed here. This work is currently suspended due to pandemic.

A restaurant, café, theatre bars and a riverside garden, recently used for outdoor concerts, complete the estate. A registered charity, the theatre receives support from Guildford Borough Council.



Vision

In five years' time the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre will be a powerhouse in regional theatre, with a national profile and a reputation for producing and presenting entertaining, thrilling and inspiring theatre. We will have an established production and touring arm, with the Summer Festival of Theatre established as the high point of our year and a lively, thriving and diverse large audience for our work. Our Creative Learning Programme will enable disenfranchised young people, those from a low socio-economic background, the elderly and vulnerable across the county to engage with theatre arts activity. Our revitalised and refurbished estate will be a destination venue for audiences and others across the South, a welcoming refuge for the community and provide a safe and inspiring home for our Creative Learning programme.

Mission

A regional theatre with a national reach - our mission is to produce and present vibrant, outstanding, entertaining drama for the many communities of Surrey and the South East. With a thriving studio space, creative learning and engagement programme, we are an artistic resource and a cultural hub; a safe space for our many communities. We enable people of all ages across the South to participate in the thrill and delight of live theatre benefitting their health and well-being and realising stronger, more meaningful social relationships and community cohesion.

The Plan

Under the leadership of Director Joanna Read and a newly established executive team, the Board are adopting a strategic plan that intends to reverse the organisation's decline and establish the theatre once again at the forefront of producing and presenting work, with a national profile and an enhanced offer to our community.

Like all arts venues, the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre has been devastated by the impact of Covid 19 on its audiences, finances and operations. The theatre has been dark for most of the last 12 months, resulting in a substantial reduction in its box office and catering income. The theatre has made significant changes to its operating model, both temporary and permanent, in order to safeguard the organisation during this period. Programming, production, catering, outreach and participation activity have all been curtailed whilst a small team was retained to staff the organisation through the dark periods and maintain contact with our audience and community. The theatre has a recovery plan in place for April '21-March '22 and is beginning the process of rebuilding the day to day operation of the theatre ready for a full reopening when permitted. The Board are confident the executive can rebuild the organisation and the ambitions of the company will get back on track.



Creative Learning

Prior to the pandemic, the theatre had begun a restructure of its Youth and Participation Department following a review of our youth and education offer. For a number of years, the theatre has run a youth theatre, well attended and popular with a section of Guildford's young people. The groups focused on productions in the Mill Studio and Main Stage. Additional groups were run for those with special needs (Discover Drama) and others. A programme of schools workshops was also offered to primary schools and work experience and careers sessions offered to secondary schools.

The theatre was keen to align its participation work with the artistic vision of the company and to create a Creative Learning Strategy and Programme that put emphasis on working with those groups and individuals across the county who are less well provided for and may be overlooked, as well as people from all ages who would gain from the positive benefits of engaging the arts. As the theatre navigates through the impact of the pandemic on its communities, this focus for the Creative Learning strategy will remain. Our Creative Learning offer will be critical in supporting and engaging with those affected by the pandemic and building lasting impactful relationships with communities we currently underserve.



Living in Guildford

Guildford is a vibrant, riverside town nestled in the beautiful Surrey Hills, offering the best of both worlds.

In the historic town centre, with its famous cobbled High Street, you will find a variety of heritage attractions, including its very own Norman castle, as well as a fantastic array of shops.

Foodies will rejoice in the numerous restaurants providing local and international cuisine, cosy cafés, cocktail bars and traditional pubs together with a host of entertainment and music venues and clubs. For nature lovers, within minutes from the town centre, you can enjoy idyllic walks or cycle rides by the River Wey and along the scenic North Downs where you can admire the views over the Surrey Hills (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). If you travel out further, you will also discover picture-book villages and a wide range of other attractions to visit.

There are a number of excellent vineyards, an award-winning gin distillery and stunning historic houses and gardens as well as an array of parks to explore. For sports fanatics there are walking, jogging and cycling trails and even a climbing centre, cricket ground and one of the few 1930s outdoor pools. Other diverse attractions include an old watermill and an award-winning Victorian art gallery.

Guildford is home to the University of Surrey and hosts a variety of annual events such as Jazzfest, the Beer Festival, Guildford Fringe, the Book Festival, a Cheese & Chili Festival and the Surrey County Show.

The A3 links Guildford directly to Portsmouth, London and the M25 (Junction 10), making it easily accessible. The M3 and A31 are also only a stone's throw away linking Guildford to the rest of the UK. Guildford benefits from two train stations, both only a short walk from the town's shops and attractions. Frequent train services operate from Guildford Station to London Waterloo, with an average journey time of 35 minutes.

Direct trains also run to and from other major hubs including Reading and Portsmouth.

Centrally located between two major airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, both of which have direct public transport links to Guildford.

