

About the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a grade two 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 Bogarde, Vanessa Redgrave and 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 1980 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.

The theatre has two auditoria, the main house seating 586 and the Mill Studio seating 80. The Mill presents work by emergent and local artists and is home to the Creative Learning Programme. On an average year around 128,000 people attend a performance or event at the theatre. The theatre is a charity limited by guarantee.

Our 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.

Creative and cultural industries- The cultural and economic agenda

The theatre is a significant place maker for Guildford and Surrey, a destination venue for audiences and others across the South, driving tourism to the borough and making a significant contribution to the local economy. Over 40% of our audience spend an additional £28 per head locally on every visit, directly contributing £1.5 million to local hospitality and commerce. 87% of audience would not have come to Guildford if they had not been coming to the theatre.

The theatre's wider importance to the infrastructure of the South East is demonstrated by the opportunities we provide for entry and progression in the creative industries that are critical to the cultural ecology of the region. We employ over 140 people and 80 freelancers a year; we provide a pathway from work experience and careers workshops in schools, through the youth and participation programme, running apprenticeships with FE colleges, giving first jobs to graduates on our own productions and employing young makers in the Creative Learning department. This culminates in employment for national and established artists in our own work who are the inspiration for the young people we first engage with.

Our own work enriches the national touring infrastructure, our critically acclaimed pantomime, with a diverse company plays to 28,000 people each year, gives many their first introduction to theatre reaching a family audience not traditionally engaged in theatre. The Mill Studio hosts emergent local artists and is a key local resource. We provide advice, mentoring, rehearsal, meeting space and resources, enhancing local creative skills and enable people from all backgrounds across the South to access arts.

The theatre works in partnership with many organisations in the region, including Surrey University, Watts Gallery, Southern Pro Música and Guildford Book Festival, all of whom use our resource to supplement their own. "The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is an integral part of Guildford, not just in its ability to bring the community together, but the value to the local economy in additional activities undertaken by those who attend their productions" - Angela Richardson MP, Guildford.

Community and Creative Learning- Theatre for All

The theatre is a home and safe space for many individuals and groups in our community. In addition to our performances, currently over 1000 people participate in opportunities for learning, creativity, personal and social development through our programme of arts activity and creative learning, including social knitters, adult learners, mother and baby groups, the elderly and vulnerable. We work in association with other providers including Surrey Young Carers, Voluntary Action South West Surrey to reach underserved groups across Surrey.

Ambitions to increase the theatre's work in this area have been hampered recently by the buildings closure due the COVID and the lack of accessible space in the building to house the work. However, the launch of a new Creative Learning strategy and restructure of the previous youth department puts the theatre in good place to expand this critical work in 2021 and onwards and broaden the reach and depth of our offer.

The challenge/current position

Like all arts venues, YAT has been devastated by the impact of Covid 19 on its audiences, finances and operations but the theatre has weathered the pandemic period as well as possible. The theatre has been dark for most of the last 15 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 were curtailed temporarily 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 in the process of rebuilding the day-to-day operation of the theatre. The Board are confident the executive can rebuild the organisation and the ambitions of the company will get back on track.

We received support from Arts Council/DCMS via the Cultural Recovery Fund Rounds One and Two, which has supported costs and overheads and rebuilding reserves in the management company. The theatre is a going concern and its pragmatic recovery plan will support its move to full operational and artistic capacity.

The theatre has received little in the past fifty years to its estate. Its fabric is dilapidated and unsustainable, while the experience it offers is unwelcoming and, in most areas, inaccessible. These threats are existential. If Guildford and Surrey's theatre is to survive, it must regenerate so as to secure its future and fulfil its potential in Guildford and Surrey's cultural life. The impact of the Covid and the theatres' enforced closure for most of 2020 and 2021 has accelerated the degeneration of the building and put a fresh spotlight on the importance of the theatres role and potential in enabling the many diverse communities of Surrey to gain from the theatres' role as a community hub and civic building.

THE 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 established as the high point of our work and a lively, thriving and diverse large audience for our work. Our Creative Learning Programme will work with disenfranchised young people, those from a low socio-economic background, the elderly and vulnerable across the county, enabling their engagement in theatre and arts activities. 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 and participation programme.

The Plan

Under the leadership of Director Joanna Read and a newly established executive team, the theatre is adopting a strategic/business plan that intends to reverse the organisation's decline and establish the theatre once again at the forefront of regional theatre, engaging and serving its many communities and taking a leading role in the town and county.

Central to the strategy is a programme of capital refurbishment that will act as a catalyst to revitalise the theatre's offer to the public. The Board sees this a transformational project, using investment in infrastructure to make radical change to the operation model and enabling the theatre to diversify and increase income from other areas of the operation thus supporting its core offer of theatre and fulfil its vital community role.

Our revitalised and refurbished estate will become a destination venue for audiences and others across the South. Maximising our glorious location on the banks of the River Wey and a beacon for the town, the jewel in Guildford's crown. The master plan for the works, created by architect Paddy Dillon focuses the project on the following objectives:

Placemaking: The project will reconnect Yvonne Arnaud Theatre with the town, create new public space as a setting for the theatre, and restore its extraordinary riverside setting. The foyers will be made fully accessible and regenerated so as to reconnect theatre and community.

Sustainability: The masterplan will transform Yvonne Arnaud Theatre's sustainability, setting it on the path to net zero carbon operation. Critical upgrade of services and infrastructure addressing future sustainability and energy footprint of the building.: insulating the roof, solar panels and low-cost lighting.

Operation: The masterplan will streamline and enhance Yvonne Arnaud Theatre's operation, creating access for performers and enhancing facilities backstage, Substantial improvement to access issues front of house, including the instillation of an internal lift and toilets.

Community engagement: the plan facilitates the creation of an accessible community and participation room in the main building that will enable growth in our creative learning programme, as well as reconfiguration of café and restaurant and outdoor spaces to maximise daytime use.

The project and master plan will enable the organisation to:

- Increase and diversify its audience, thereby increasing box office revenue.
- Maximise income from other sources (specifically catering, bar and events/room hire).
- Revitalise its fundraising and philanthropic activity.
- Increase the reach and offer of its participation and creative learning programme.
- Improve its partnership and service offer to other organisations in the region.

- Increase the role and contribution the organisation can play in Guildford's plan.

FUNDRAISING OVERVIEW

The theatre has an established small individual giving scheme (The Guardian Angels) and a supporters' scheme (The Vanbrugh Supporters Scheme) which is a tiered theatre supporters scheme. Higher level Members of the Vanbrugh scheme give between £300 and £5000 a year, both managed by the Individual Giving Manager with administration support from Box office and Administration Assistants. Currently the theatre raises around £110k each year from these schemes plus irregular one off donations. Individual giving has had been identified as an area for potential development as there is strong local support for the theatre for a loyal core audience.

Prior to Covid, the theatre had a small group of corporate supporters, who have been in abeyance due to Covid. During the closure period the theatre received donations in lieu of ticket sales from audiences totalling around £40k.

A development committee was established pre-Covid to support the theatre's fundraising ambitions with a particular focus on supporting the capital campaign – Play Your Part. The committee members act as ambassadors for the theatre and are asked to build the theatre's networks and connections within Surrey.

Planning has been granted for phase one of the capital programme, which includes internal works, addressing accessibility. The total cost of phase one of the project is £13 million; however, the project has been conceived so that it can be delivered in a chunked approach, determined by success of fundraising. A start date and timeline for delivering the capital project is yet to be agreed by the board. Play your Part is in the quiet fundraising period. An expression of interest has been made to Your Fund Surrey for substantial support of the scheme. A recent legacy of £300k has been designated to the campaign and has been matched by the theatre's reserves in order to start the campaign with £600k.