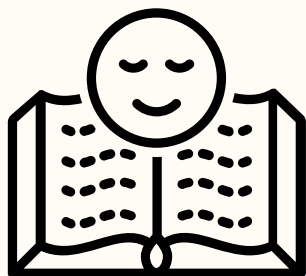
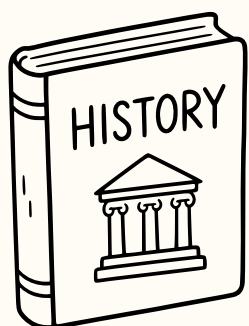


Hackney Empire

125 Iconic Years

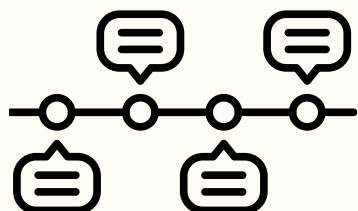


This Easy Read will tell you about
Hackney Empire 125 Iconic Years



It is an exhibition that tells the story of
Hackney Empire

It looks at the people and performances
from the last **125 years**

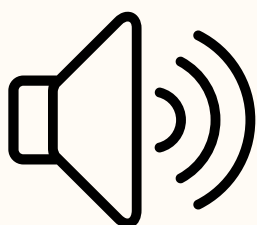


The exhibition is **divided into different parts**

Each part is about a different time in Hackney
Empire's history



The exhibition is funded by the **National
Lottery Heritage Fund**



An **audio version** of the exhibition is available

1901 Building "London's Most Beautiful Theatre"



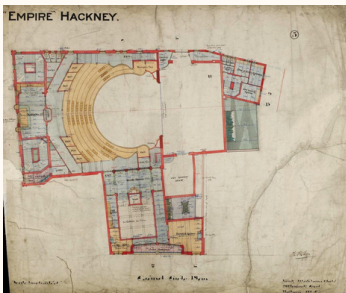
Hackney Empire was built in **1901**



It took just **38 weeks** to build



Famous theatre owner **Oswald Stoll** paid
for Hackney Empire to be built

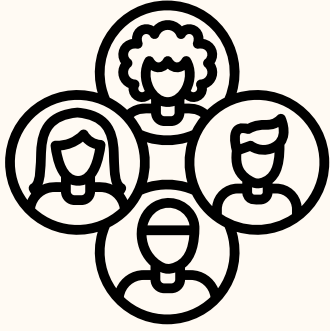


Famous theatre designer **Frank Matcham**
designed Hackney Empire



It opened on **9 December 1901** as a music
hall and variety theatre

1900s - 1920s Music Hall and Variety Pioneers



Hackney Empire was doing **new and different things from the start**

It gave performers from many different backgrounds the chance to be on stage



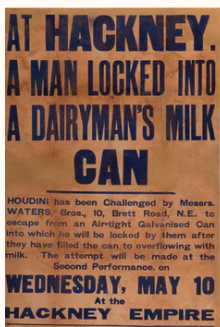
Belle Davis performed on the opening night

She was the first Black woman to record and sell her music



Marie Lloyd performed at Hackney Empire

She was known as the Queen of Music Hall and fought for the rights of women and working-class performers



Harry Houdini was a famous magician

He first performed his Escape from a Milk Can act at Hackney Empire



Charlie Chaplin was a famous silent film star who performed at Hackney Empire

A film about his life was partly filmed at Hackney Empire in 1992

1930s - 1940s Jazz Icons and Post-War Stars



Louis Armstrong performed at Hackney Empire

He was a Black American jazz trumpet player and singer



Duke Ellington performed at Hackney Empire

He was a Black American jazz musician who played piano and wrote music for big bands



Laurel and Hardy performed at Hackney Empire

They were famous performers and film stars known for clowning and physical comedy



During **World War 2** the Britannia Pub next to Hackney Empire was almost destroyed

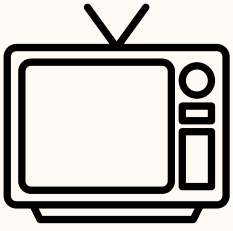
Hackney Empire was not damaged



Julie Andrews performed at Hackney Empire in 1949 when she was a teenager

She became famous for *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins*

1950s - 1960s Rock'n'Roll, Hollywood Royalty and the TV Years

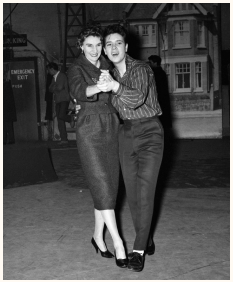


In the 1950s Hackney Empire was **owned by a TV company** called ATV



Winifred Atwell performed at Hackney Empire

She was the first Black performer to have a number one song in the UK



Britain's first rock'n'roll superstar **Billy Fury** and **Cliff Richard and The Shadows** performed at Hackney Empire



There is a rare film of **Morecambe and Wise** performing at Hackney Empire in 1958



Hackney-born singer **Helen Shapiro** and famous singer **Shirley Bassey** also performed at Hackney Empire



Orson Welles made a film at Hackney Empire

He also recorded the only film of an important local building called Spurstowe Almshouses

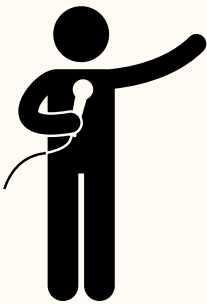
1963 - 1984 Mecca Bingo



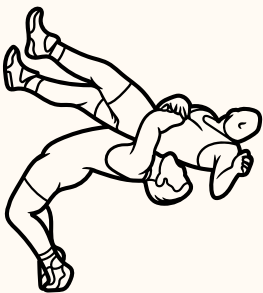
From 1963 to 1984 Hackney Empire was a **Mecca Bingo Hall**



Tables were put in the theatre and **local people came together** to play bingo



The bingo callers became the performers on stage to entertain audiences



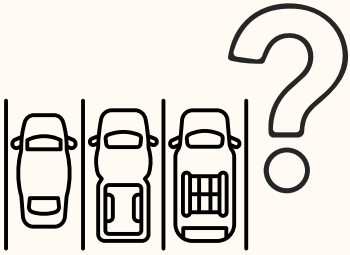
Hackney Empire also held **wrestling matches** with stars like Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks



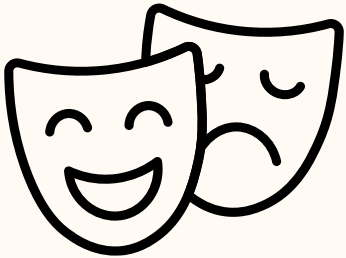
In 1984 Hackney Empire became a **listed building**

This meant it had to be looked after carefully
Mecca could not afford the repairs so **they decided to sell it**

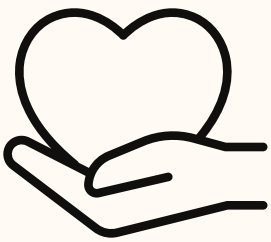
1986 Reclaiming Hackney Empire



Hackney Empire was **at risk of being knocked down** and replaced by a **car park**



In 1986 **Roland and Claire Muldoon** and their theatre company helped **stop Hackney Empire from closing**



They helped turn Hackney Empire into a **charity** so it could be protected for the future



They raised money to **repair the building**



Hackney Empire **reopened as a theatre on 9 December 1986**

This was exactly 85 years after it first opened

1980s New Variety, Comedy, Music and Politics



Lenny Henry became one of the first big comedy stars at Hackney Empire in 1987

He has returned to perform at Hackney Empire many times



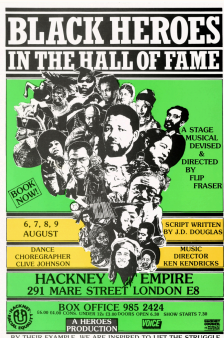
Jo Brand performed shows to raise money for Hackney Empire

Other famous comedians performed in the 1980s like **Dawn French** and **Jennifer Saunders**



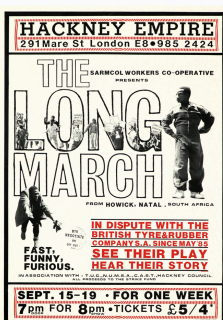
Poet and activist **Benjamin Zephaniah** led groups that worked to save Hackney Empire

He wanted the theatre to be open and welcoming to everyone



The musical **Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame** first opened at Hackney Empire in 1987

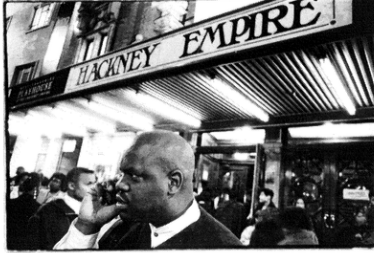
It later became successful around the world



In 1987, there was a protest theatre show called **The Long March**.

Hackney Empire held lots of protest concerts and charity shows in the 1980s

1990s Turning Up The Volume, The 291 Club, Stage Stars and New Act of The Year



In the 1990s Hackney Empire became a **very popular music venue**

Many musicians performed at Hackney Empire like Queen Esther Marrow and The Harlem Gospel Singers, Aswad, Spiritualized and Asian Dub Foundation, Kirsty MacColl, and Ms. Dynamite

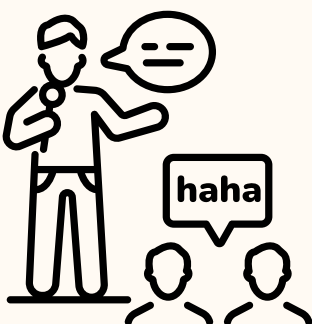
Sharon D Clarke first performed at Hackney Empire in 1991 with the group Nomad



Billy Bragg performed at Hackney Empire many times in the 1990s



Paul O'Grady hosted Saturday night shows as Lily Savage



Bill Bailey, Julian Clary, Eddie Izzard, Alan Davies, Jack Dee, Steve Coogan and Jenny Éclair **performed comedy at Hackney Empire**

The King of Caribbean Comedy **Oliver Samuels** first performed at Hackney Empire in 1990 and came back many times with his shows



In 1991 **Sarafina** first opened at Hackney Empire

It was a **South African musical** about the fight against apartheid



Slava's Snow Show is a mime and clown show, **STOMP** is a music and dance show and **Men In Coats** is a comedy act

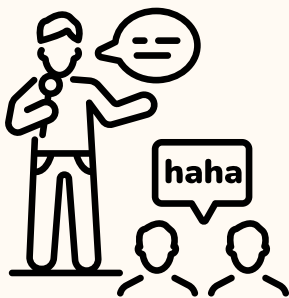
They all started at Hackney Empire before becoming famous around the world



The **291 Club** became a very **popular show** at Hackney Empire

It was **shown on TV** and helped make Hackney Empire famous in the UK

It was especially popular with **Black British audiences**



New Act of the Year was a popular **comedy and variety show** at Hackney Empire

Many winners and finalists later became famous on stage and TV

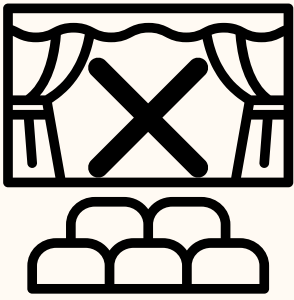


In 1998 Hackney Empire started making **pantomimes**

Susie McKenna wrote and directed them for over 20 years

Clive Rowe has been the Dame since 1998 and now also directs the shows

2001 - 2003 Restoration and Reopening



From 2001 to 2003 Hackney Empire **closed** so the **building could be improved**



Famous people, local people and artists helped **raise £15 million** by putting on shows and asking people to give money

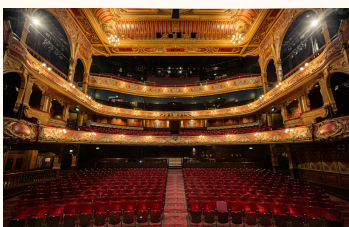


Hackney Empire celebrated its **100th birthday** during this time



Hackney Empire added a new backstage area and new equipment

The theatre was also repaired and made easier for people to use



In 2004 Hackney Empire **reopened with a big event** with famous people like Rowan Atkinson, Brian May and Meera Syal

2002 The Birth of Creative Futures



Creative Futures is Hackney Empire's programme for young people

It helps young people **make new friends, learn new skills** and **get creative jobs**



The **Artist Development Programme** started in 2002

Over 50 young people take part every year



The **Alter Ego Showcase** started in 2011

It gives young artists from East London a place to share their work



Creative Futures has **helped many people have successful careers**



Joseph Roberts and Sharon D Clarke founded the **Hackney Empire Community Choir** in 2011

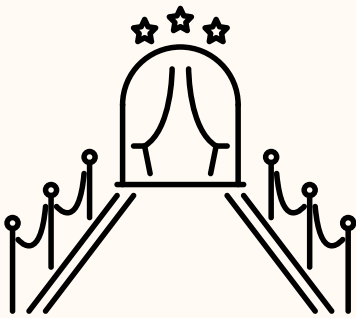
The choir meets every week and performs at Hackney Empire and local events

2000s - 2010s Music and Theatre Take Centre Stage



The 2000s and 2010s were **a very exciting time** for Hackney Empire

The theatre welcomed famous musicians, big theatre shows, film productions and famous comedians



In 2004 Hackney Empire hosted the **UK Music Hall of Fame** show

Queen and Paul Rodgers, Robbie Williams and Beverley Knight performed at the show

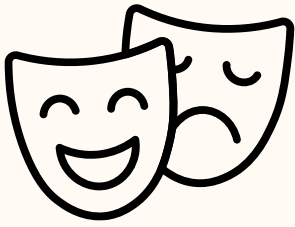


Many **musicians performed** at Hackney Empire like Shakira, Leona Lewis, Madness, Arcade Fire, Mark Ronson, FKA Twigs, King Crimson and Florence and the Machine

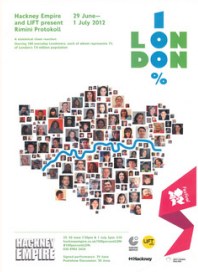


English Touring Opera first performed at Hackney Empire in 2004

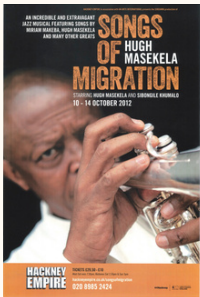
It still brings new opera shows to Hackney Empire today



Hackney Empire put on **many new plays and musicals** like **Anansi** with Talawa Theatre, **Hamlet** with the Royal Shakespeare Company and **Rudy's Rare Records** with Birmingham Rep



Hackney Empire made the show **100% London** for London 2012 which included 100 local people



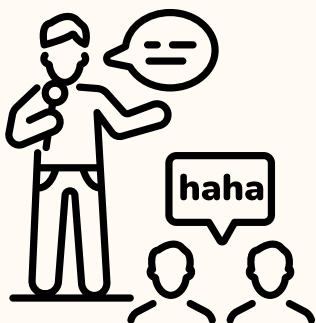
Hackney Empire put on the theatre show **Songs of Migration** starring Hugh Masekela



The theatre show **Blues in the Night** starred Sharon D Clarke Clive Rowe and Emi Wokoma
It was so popular it came back for more shows



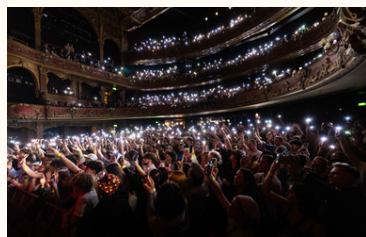
Films were made at Hackney Empire like the film **The Dresser** that starred Ian McKellen and Anthony Hopkins



Mo Gilligan recorded TV comedy shows at Hackney Empire

John Bishop, Dave Chappelle and **Tan France** also performed at Hackney Empire

2020s Modern Heavyweights



Famous musicians and comedians continue to perform at Hackney Empire like Nish Kumar and Hackney-born Paloma Faith



Michael Palin joined Hackney Empire's **120th birthday celebrations**



The TV series **Bridgerton** was partly filmed at Hackney Empire

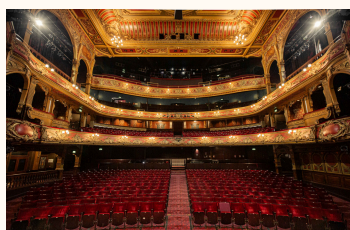


Carlos Acosta performed the ballet **Nutcracker in Havana** at Hackney Empire

Ballet Black made Hackney Empire their East London home



The Rolling Stones came to Hackney Empire to announce their album Hackney Diamonds



In 2025 the magazine Time Out called Hackney Empire **London's most beautiful theatre**

2026 The Story Continues



In 2026 Hackney Empire welcomes **famous people, new shows and new artists**

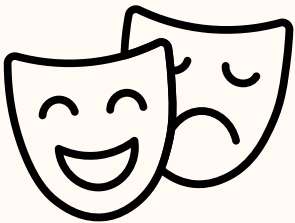


Alexandra Burke performed in the first show of **I'm Every Woman: The Chaka Khan Musical**



Musicians **Robyn, Jocelyn Brown, María Zardoya** and **David Byrne** performed at Hackney Empire

DJ Spoony and Hackney-Born Trevor Nelson hosted the BBC show **The Music Is Black**



Talawa Theatre returned for its 40th anniversary

Jamali Maddix was the first host and guest curator of the variety show **Empire Nights**



Comedians **Aries Spears** and **Michelle de Swarte** performed at Hackney Empire



Lenny Henry and **Jo Brand** return to help celebrate Hackney Empire's **125th birthday**