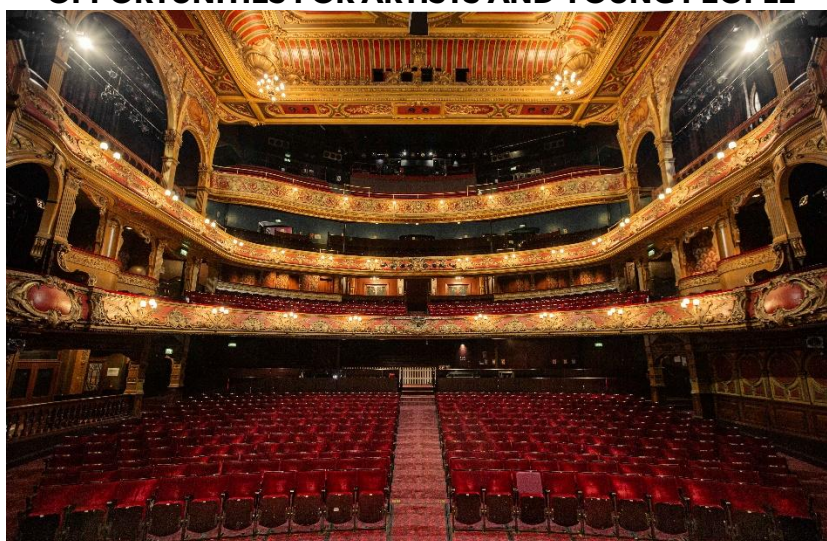




HACKNEY EMPIRE LAUNCHES ITS 125TH ANNIVERSARY, CELEBRATIONS BEGIN WITH A SPECIAL [OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND ON SATURDAY 19 AND SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER](#) AND A NEW EXHIBITION EXPLORING 125 ICONIC YEARS OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND CHANGE

NEW ANNIVERSARY [SEASON BROCHURE](#) CAPTURES THE FIRST TEN MONTHS OF AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAMME OF THEATRE, COMEDY, MUSIC AND DANCE, WITH AN INCREASED FOCUS ON NEW PARTNERSHIPS, PRODUCTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE



NEWLY REVEALED HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE TALAWA'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY GALA; [KURUPT FM](#) AS HEADLINERS OF THE FIRST [EMPIRE NIGHTS](#), WITH [LOU SANDERS](#) CURATING THE SECOND EDITION; NEW OPERA [YASUKE](#) FROM RENELL SHAW, [PUNK DAYS](#), [BIBI RUKIYA'S RECKLESS DAUGHTER](#) AND THE RETURN OF [BALLET BLACK](#).

THE ANNIVERSARY SEASON CONTINUES HACKNEY EMPIRE'S LONGSTANDING COMMITMENT TO CHAMPIONING GLOBAL MAJORITY CREATIVES AND COMMUNITIES

[Hackney Empire 125 anniversary event images](#) available to download here

[Thursday 17 September 2026, London] **CEO Chris Sudworth and the whole team at Hackney Empire are delighted to mark the beginning of the venue's landmark 125th birthday celebrations**, as the iconic East London theatre opens its doors for a special **Open House weekend on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September**, launches a new exhibition exploring **125 Iconic Years** of cultural history, and announces a new season with an **increased focused on partnerships and productions**, signposting the next chapter for the organisation.

Since opening in 1901, Hackney Empire has been a home for theatre, comedy, music and entertainment; a place where generations of artists, audiences, young people and communities have come together; a champion for global majority and under-represented creatives. Its 125th anniversary provides an opportunity both to celebrate that extraordinary



history and to look forward, as CEO **Chris Sudworth** develops **Hackney:Central**, a vision for an ambitious, equitable, progressive and genuinely diverse theatre, rooted in Hackney while becoming increasingly central to the London, and national arts landscape and cultural conversation.

OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND - HACKNEY EMPIRE: 125 ICONIC YEARS

At the heart of the launch weekend's celebrations is **Hackney Empire: 125 Iconic Years**, a new exhibition in the theatre's foyer telling the remarkable story of the building and the people who have shaped it.

Beginning with Hackney Empire's opening in 1901, the exhibition travels through the golden age of Music Hall and Variety, jazz, rock 'n' roll, Hollywood and television; its years as a Mecca Bingo Hall and the campaign to reclaim the building as a theatre in the 1980s; through New Variety, comedy, music and activism, *The 291 Club* and the birth of **Creative Futures**, Hackney Empire's uniquely impactful programme for young people.

Visitors will be able to explore the theatre during **Open House**, drop in to meet the CEO, discover the exhibition and take a closer look at a building described by *Time Out* as "London's most beautiful theatre".

Chris Sudworth said, *"Hackney Empire's 125th anniversary is an extraordinary opportunity to celebrate everything this theatre has meant to artists, audiences and communities over the past 125 years - but just as importantly, to engage with what it can mean for current and future generations."*

*"The **125 Iconic Years** exhibition has been a collaborative effort between professional and young researchers, and our brilliantly committed staff team, uncovering our unique history at the intersection of art, access and activism."*

"The first ten months of our 16-month anniversary programme builds on that: bringing together relevant and high-quality theatre, dance, comedy and music; developing new partnerships and productions; supporting the ambitions of artists and young people; continuing to make sure Hackney Empire is a place where our communities feel they belong, are seen and celebrated."

*"Further co-productions for 2027 will be announced soon, and through our new strategy, **Hackney:Central**, Hackney Empire will become ever more central to the local, London and national arts landscape."*

LOOKING AHEAD - 125th ANNIVERSARY SEASON BROCHURE

The newly published **season brochure** captures the first half of the planned 16-month programme celebrating the venue's 125th anniversary and launching its next chapter; combining major visiting artists with Hackney Empire-produced and supported work and new creative partnerships.

Among the newly revealed elements of the programme are further details of **Talawa's 40th Anniversary Gala** on **Tuesday 13 October 2026**, with performers including **Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE**, **Tameka Empson**, **David Webber**, **Laurence Ubong Williams**, **Doña Croll** and **Chineke! Orchestra**.



Kurupt FM are confirmed to headline the first edition of **Empire Nights** on **Thursday 22 October 2026**, and acclaimed comedian **Lou Sanders** will curate the **second edition** on **Friday 29 January 2027**. Following the launch of the new live series this autumn, Sanders will bring together her own line-up of artists from across comedy, music and modern variety, with further details to be announced.

Also newly revealed as part of the anniversary programme are new opera **Yasuke** by Ivor Novello Award-winning graduate of Hackney Empire's **Creative Futures** programme **Renell Shaw**, the return of **Ballet Black** with **Unbound**, a triple bill featuring Olivier Award-winner **Isabela Coracy** in **Nina: By Whatever Means**, alongside **Hassan Mahamdallie** & **Stef O'Driscoll's Punk Days**; **Amina Khayyam's Bibi Rukiya's Reckless Daughter**, a new dance-theatre production based on **Lorca's House of Bernada Alba**; with more exciting partnerships and co-productions to be announced in late November.

They join an already announced programme which begins in earnest on **Thursday 8 October**, when internationally acclaimed company **Theatre Re**, led by Hackney-based Director **Guillaume Pigé**, opens the 10th anniversary tour of its multi-award-winning global hit production **[The Nature of Forgetting](#)**. **Following more than 200 performances worldwide, the production returns to London for its landmark anniversary season.**

This is followed by **ACE Dance and Music's The World As We See It** on **Tuesday 20 October**: a double bill of contrasting visions of the world today, redefining dance from the African Diaspora, with works from choreographers **Serge Aime Coulibaly** and **Vincent Matsoe**.

On **Thursday 22 October**, **Kurupt FM** join **Empire Nights** curated and hosted by **Jamali Maddix**, alongside **Guz Khan, Michelle de Swarte, Kyrah Gray, Manga Saint Hilare** and **DJ Lex Blondin**.

Further autumn highlights include the return of key figures from Hackney Empire's story, **Oliver Samuels, Lenny Henry, Jo Brand** and **Nina Conti** and **[An Evening with David Byrne](#)**, while the season culminates with Hackney Empire's legendary pantomime, **[Jack and the Beanstalk](#)**, from **Saturday 21 November - Thursday 31 December**.

Olivier Award-winner and "panto royalty" **Clive Rowe** returns to direct and star as 'Dame Trot', alongside Hackney Empire stalwart **Kat B**, appearing in his 21st Empire pantomime as 'Simple Simon Trot', with **Marina Lawrence-Mahrre** as 'Jack Trot', **Summer Priest** as 'Jill', **Louise Cielecki** as 'Fairy Firethorn', **Andre Antonio** as 'Timothy Trot', and **Christopher Staines** as 'Stephen Fleshcreep'. Taking the theatre through its 125th birthday in December, the production will also feature further anniversary surprises and celebrations to be announced.

Looking ahead, February 2027 will see the next edition of London's most exciting showcase of new, diverse creative talent, **Alter Ego**. In July 2027, Hackney Empire will produce the world premiere of **Nanny of the Maroons** with **Belgrade Theatre**, co-produced with **tiata fahodzi**. Co-directed by **Corey Campbell** and **Justine Themen**, the production tells the epic true story of legendary 18th-century Jamaican freedom fighter Queen Nanny, blending music, dance, drama, folklore and magical realism.

Spring highlights from the presented programme include funk-fuelled dance production **The Brown Suite**, **City of London Sinfonia's** world premiere of Emily Levy's **REST**, and four



productions from **English Touring Opera**: Gluck's *Orpheus & Eurydice*, Langer's *Ariadne*, Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas* and Puccini's *Tosca*.

This 125th Anniversary Season includes a significant increase in the venue's provision of **access performances**: BSL Interpretation, Audio Description, Captioned and Relaxed. It also sees the first **skills development residencies for professional creatives**, with a week-long visual theatre training workshop with **Theatre Re**, and a Producer Boot Camp led by **In Good Company**.

CREATIVE FUTURES

Alongside its stage programme, Hackney Empire continues to put **young people at the heart of its future**. Its nationally recognised **Creative Futures** programme marks its own 25th anniversary in 2027 and provides free opportunities for young people aged 14-25 to perform, make work, develop creative and technical skills and find pathways into the arts. Programmes including Young Producers and Young Researchers are open to sign up now at <https://www.hackneyempire.co.uk/take-part/creative-futures>

As Hackney Empire celebrates **125 years of cultural significance**, the anniversary year will bring together its past, present and future: celebrating the generations of staff, artists, collaborators, creatives, audiences and communities who have shaped the theatre, while developing the new partnerships, productions, artists and young people who will shape what comes next.

Further announcements about Hackney Empire's 125th anniversary programme will follow.

Hackney Empire has also announced support from **The National Lottery Heritage Fund** for development work that will help plan the next stage of the building's story. Thanks to National Lottery players, this phase will support preparations for future capital works, audience and community consultation, and research into Hackney Empire's heritage, including the diverse artists, audiences and communities who have shaped the venue's story since 1901. This programme will also celebrate the extraordinary impact, artistic and skills legacy, and future of Hackney Empire's **Creative Futures** programme, **which will celebrate its own 25th anniversary in 2027**.

Further announcements about Hackney Empire's 125th anniversary year, including additional programme, heritage, community and fundraising activity, will be made in the coming months.

Website: www.hackneyempire.co.uk / Facebook [@HackneyEmpire](https://www.facebook.com/HackneyEmpire) / Bluesky-[@HackneyEmpire](https://bsky.app/profile/hackneyempire) / Instagram - [@HackneyEmpire](https://www.instagram.com/HackneyEmpire)

[ENDS]

For further information, press tickets and interviews please contact:
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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Hackney Empire



Since 1901 Hackney Empire has been creating unforgettable experiences for audiences and artists, young people and communities, on and off its stage.

The iconic venue is recognised nationally for its transformational work with young people, developing the future arts workforce; and its continued commitment to creating access, opportunity, nurturing and championing global majority creatives and communities. The theatre is proud to be an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

Each year more than 150,000 people are welcomed through its doors to watch theatre, comedy, music, opera and dance, in its Grade II listed building, recently named "London's most beautiful theatre" (Time Out); while more than 6,000 young people are provided a safe space to build their confidence and transform their aspirations.*

Hackney Empire's pantomime is legendary, and the 2025 production of Cinderella received nominations for Best Director and Best Sisters at the UK Pantomime Awards. Hackney Empire's co-production of Romeo & Juliet received two nominations at the 2025 Black British Theatre Awards; and in March 2026, the organisation signalled the ambition for its next chapter, premiering I'm Every Woman: The Chaka Khan Musical, starring Alexandra Burke.

As Hackney Empire approaches its 125th anniversary in December 2026, the organisation is excited to push forward again, making Hackney - and the Empire - ever more central to the UK theatre ecology and narrative.

Hackneyempire.co.uk

Chris Sudworth joined Hackney Empire as CEO in January 2026. He was previously Creative Director at Birmingham Hippodrome, where he led on a main stage and studio programme reaching over 500,000 audiences each year; and held executive responsibility for fundraising and all produced work, including the UK's first dedicated New Musical Theatre department, New Work & Artist Development, city-wide Festivals, Access, Learning & Participation. Chris was the first Director of The Core at Corby Cube from 2010-2015, opening and establishing a landmark new venue with young people and communities at its heart, and a bold contemporary programme; Executive Director of The Old Rep, Birmingham, from 2015-2017; and, prior to that, a freelance director, producer, facilitator and consultant, collaborating nationally and internationally.

LISTINGS, SEPTEMBER 2026 ONWARDS

[Nish Kumar: Angry Humour From a Really Nice Guy](#) 18 Sept 2026

[OPEN HOUSE GUIDED TOURS](#) 19-20 Sept 2026

[The Jack & Ash Show LIVE](#) 19 Sept 2026

[Laughter to the Rafters](#) 21 Sept 2026

[Chi Stand-up Comedy Special](#) 6 Oct 2026

[The Nature of Forgetting](#) 8 Oct 2026

[Simon Amstell: I Love It Here](#) 9 Oct 2026

[Adam Rowe: Fashionism](#) 10 Oct 2026

[The Worst Poets Club](#) 11 Oct 2026

[Talawa Iconic: 40th Anniversary Showcase](#) 13 Oct 2026

[The Drifters](#) 14 Oct 2026



English Touring Opera Autumn Season

[Gluck: Orpheus and Eurydice](#) 16 Oct 2026

[Elena Langer: Ariadne & Purcell: Dido & Aeneas](#) 17 Oct 2026

[The World As We See It](#) 20 Oct 2026

[Susan Calman: Tall Tales](#) 21 Oct 2026

[Empire Nights with Jamali Maddix](#) 22 Oct 2026

[Seann Walsh: This Is Torture](#) 23 Oct 2026

[Pioneers of Comedy meets Next Gen](#) 24 Oct 2026

[Henning Wehn: Acid Wehn](#) 25 Oct 2026

[Dexys Midnight Runners](#) 27-28 Oct 2026

[Maisie Adam: Whatsherface](#) 29 Oct 2026

[Tez Ilyas: Tez Things I Hate About You](#) 30 Oct 2026

[Oliver Samuels in 'Where Dere's a Will Dere's a Criminal'](#) 31 Oct 2026

[Lenny Henry: Still at Large](#) 3 Nov 2026

[Jacob Alon](#) 4 Nov 2026

[Decline and Falling Over with Jo Brand](#) 5 Nov 2026

[Live at the Empire with Nina Conti](#) 6 Nov 2026

[An Evening With David Byrne: Sleeping Beauties](#) 8 Nov 2026

[Jack and the Beanstalk](#) 21 Nov-31 Dec 2026

[Empire Nights with Lou Sanders](#) 29 Jan 2027

[The Crown Prince of Reggae Musical](#) 6 Feb 2027

[The Witch of Konotop](#) 10 Feb 2027

[Punk Days](#) 4-5 Mar 2027

[Touch of Class: Mother's Day Special](#) 7 Mar 2027

[REST: Borders and Belonging](#) 13 Mar 2027

["The Wardrobe"](#) 16 Mar 2027

English Touring Opera Spring Season

[Gluck: Orpheus and Eurydice](#) 19 Mar 2027

[Puccini: Tosca](#) 20 Mar 2027

[Bibi Rukiya's Reckless Daughter](#) 24 Mar 2027

[The Brown Suite](#) 19-22 May 2027

[MC Hammersmith: Ice Ice Nepo Baby](#) 11 Jun 2027

[Ballet Black: Unbound](#) 17-19 Jun 2027

[Yasuke](#)

24 Jun 2027

[Nanny of the Maroons](#) 7-11 Jul 2027

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

*Grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. Hackney Empire has initially been granted round one development funding of £301,173 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by the Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £1,680,197.

Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033. Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.



Over the next 10 years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to make a decisive difference for people, places and communities.

heritagefund.org.uk

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