



HACKNEY EMPIRE ANNOUNCES FIRST PLANS FOR LANDMARK 125th ANNIVERSARY YEAR AS **CEO CHRIS SUDWORTH SETS OUT **HACKNEY:CENTRAL** VISION**

The iconic East London venue will celebrate 125 years from autumn 2026 with a 16-month celebration of theatre, comedy, music, community and heritage

***Hackney:Central* sets out the vision for Hackney Empire as a theatre championing ambition, at the heart of its community, increasing production and becoming more central to London's cultural life**

Highlights include Talawa's 40th Anniversary Showcase, Theatre Re's internationally acclaimed *The Nature of Forgetting*, the launch of Empire Nights, Lenny Henry, Jo Brand and the recently announced 2027 world premiere co-production of *Nanny of the Maroons*

Hackney Empire also confirms support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund as the venue develops plans to celebrate, protect and share its extraordinary 125-year heritage

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

[Thursday 11 June 2026, London] **CEO Chris Sudworth** and the whole team at **Hackney Empire** are delighted to announce the first plans for the venue's landmark 125th anniversary year, as the much-loved East London theatre looks ahead to a major new chapter under the banner of **Hackney:Central** - supporting the ambitions of artists & young people, forging new partnerships, premiering new productions, and making Hackney more central to the local, London and national theatre landscape.

Since 1901, Hackney Empire has stood at the centre of its community, creating unforgettable experiences, championing global majority and under-represented creatives, igniting change with young people and communities, on and off its stage. As the Grade II* listed venue prepares to celebrate its 125th birthday in December 2026, a 16-month programme will celebrate the artists, audiences and communities who have shaped its story, and step into a new chapter as a cultural and creative home for Hackney, London and beyond.

The first phase of anniversary activity will begin with **a special launch weekend on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September**, with an **outdoor festival stage curated by the venue's Young Producers**; an exhibition celebrating iconic, pivotal and radical moments from Hackney Empire's 125 year-history; **the launch of a new football kit for Hackney Women's FC**, inspired by the theatre, in collaboration with London College of Fashion; and an invitation for residents and visitors to discover and rediscover "London's most beautiful theatre" (Time Out).

Chris Sudworth said, "*Hackney Empire is a unique and magical venue, delivering iconic experiences of theatre, comedy, music and cultural change with the people of Hackney since 1901. Our 125th anniversary is a moment of huge celebration, and a moment to look forward, imagining what is possible.*"



"Hackney:Central builds on our history and looks to the future - central to supporting the ambitions of artists and young people, central to the development of a more representative arts workforce, central to new partnerships, productions and collaborations, central to the lives of local people and ever-more central to the local, London and national arts narrative.

"I'm excited, proud and honoured to be leading Hackney Empire into its 125th year, alongside our committed, caring and talented team, and to share the first phase of plans for a year that will celebrate our history, our community and our future."

Following September's launch weekend, October is a month of shared celebrations. On Thursday 8 October, internationally acclaimed company **Theatre Re**, led by Hackney based Director Guillaume Pige, will open the 10th anniversary tour of its multi-award-winning global hit production [The Nature of Forgetting](#).

On Tuesday 13 October, Hackney Empire will host and partner on [Talawa's 40th Anniversary Showcase](#), celebrating four decades of the company pioneering Black excellence in British theatre with a star-studded line up, to be announced; reflecting Hackney Empire's own continued commitment to championing global majority creatives and communities.

Thursday 22 October sees Hackney Empire launch [Empire Nights](#), a new live series reimagining the venue's variety history, with some of the most exciting names in comedy, music and culture, curated by a special guest host. This first edition will be hosted by Jamali Maddix, whose handpicked line-up includes Guz Khan, Michelle de Swarte, Kyrach Gray, Manga St Hilare and DJ Lex Blondin, plus a very special music guest to be announced.

November celebrates Hackney Empire's status as an iconic comedy venue, and its influential role in the 1980s renaissance of alternative comedy, welcoming back early headliners [Lenny Henry](#) (Tuesday 3 November) and [Jo Brand](#) (Thursday 5 November).

The season culminates with the legendary Hackney pantomime, [Jack and the Beanstalk](#), featuring the return of Clive Rowe as Dame, who also directs following the success of his award-nominated 2025 production of *Cinderella*. There are promises of special 125th Anniversary content to be revealed later in the year.

Looking ahead to 2027, plans are well advanced for further exciting co-productions, signalling the ambition of this new chapter, with more details set to be announced in September. Already announced is [Nanny of the Maroons](#), a major new co-production from Belgrade Theatre, Hackney Empire and tiata fahodzi. Written by Corey Campbell and Lucia Haynes, directed by Corey Campbell and Justine Themen, with music and lyrics by Corah Fowles, *Nanny of the Maroons* will receive its world premiere at the Belgrade Theatre in June 2027 before playing Hackney Empire from Wednesday 7 to Sunday 11 July 2027; and will feature local ensembles alongside the touring company.

Hackney Empire has also confirmed 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)

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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 4,000 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

Noor-e-dastaan By Bhuwin

6 Sept 2026

Fatiha El-Ghorri: Cockney Stacking Doll

10 Sept 2026

Marine Leonardi: Mauvaise Graine

12 Sept 2026

Nish Kumar: Angry Humour From a Really Nice Guy

18 Sept 2026

Laughter to the Rafters

21 Sept 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

Fri 16 Oct & Sat 17 Oct 2026

TWAWSI: The World As We See It

20 Oct 2026

Susan Calman: Tall Tales

21 Oct 2026

Empire Nights

22 Oct 2026



[Seann Walsh: This Is Torture](#)

23 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

[Jack and the Beanstalk](#)

21 Nov-31 Dec 2026

[MC Hammersmith: Ice Ice Nepo Baby](#)

11 Jun 2027

[Nanny of the Maroons](#)

7-11 Jul 2027