News

Montgomery Theatre reopens after 16 months

Sophie Layton (she/her)

Sheffield's Montgomery Theatre & Arts Centre has now reopened, after more than a year of closure due to capital redevelopment works. The independent theatre, which platforms children's theatre and dance productions, houses local community group meetings and stages a range of productions from tribute bands to pantomimes, has reopened its doors to the community with the Off The Shelf Festival event *Jackie Kay – May Day*.

In an announcement on social media on the morning of their reopening, the theatre thanked "partners, funders, regular users and audiences for [their] patience and understanding during this period. We kindly ask that you continue to bear with us over the next few weeks whilst we finish off the final touches between events."

"However, we couldn't be more thrilled to finally welcome you through out new glass doors and we hope you'll agree, it's already looking pretty special [...] From everyone at Team Montgomery we thank you and hope you enjoy your NEW Montgomery Theatre & Arts Centre".

The Montgomery Theatre and Arts Centre was first established in 1886. Having survived the Blitz and a fire in the building which forced its closure for two years until 1973, the theatre has become a centre for independent artists, local groups and touring shows, giving a voice to many who often struggle to access the performing arts. It is also a rehearsal space for many community groups, including the Carney Academy of Dance and SBC Theatre, as well as providing flexible employment for many within our city, including a contingent of University of Sheffield students.

Having secured funding towards the end of the 2022/23 academic year, the theatre closed its doors for redevelopment in July 2023, and faced significant challenges during its closure, including several delays. However, the theatre and community stepped up during this period, platforming productions in other venues, including local parks, as well as working with Sheffield Theatres.

The reopening is a welcome development in the rich and varied history of performing and creative arts in our city. As the theatre returns to full operation once more, our creative arts scene has regained a key element of its identity, ready to provide for the local community once more.

The Montgomery Theatre reopened on October 24th



Credit: The Montgomery



Credit: Performance Venues & Sheffield Students' Union

News

Fears of Drama Studio Closure as SU President suggests venue at risk

Sophie Layton (she/her)

Students' Union President Daisy Watson has raised fears as to the future of the University of Sheffield Drama Studio, the site of many student theatre productions, and the main venue of both the Sheffield University Theatre Company (SUTCo) and Sheffield University Performing Arts Society (SUPAS).

Speaking to Forge TV in the debut episode of This Week in Sheffield, hosted by Adam Husicka, Watson spoke about her upcoming projects for this year. She told viewers that the SU Officers are "... [seeing] how we can get more funding into the arts at university, ensuring the Drama Studio stays open & is looked after as much as possible..."

Watson's comments are the first that has been heard publicly regarding the state of the Drama Studio, leaving its future currently unclear to those who use the space. Both SUTCo and SUPAS are still dealing with the planned demolition of the Barber House Annexe, their primary storage space, which was revealed to them earlier this year.

Whilst initially no alternative provision was provided, the groups have recently been informed that their items can be moved into a "cozy" section of the Drama Studio site.

Neither group were aware that the future of the Drama Studio was in jeopardy. Forge Press has since reached out to President Watson, who attempted to clarify her comments on the show: "My mention of the Drama Studio was simply an example of the type of arts facilities on campus that we have and would like to see improved. I'm committed to advocating for the arts in general [...] continuing to engage with relevant stakeholders to support these spaces".

Activities & Development Officer Anna Campbell has also spoken out about the future of the site, and is "having conversations" with the managing body Performance Venues, which also oversees Firth Court and the Octagon. Campbell has highlighted that the Drama Studio is "one of the only dedicated performing arts spaces we have on campus" and has spoken about the need to keep arts provision in local areas.

"I am passionate about ensuring the performing arts and the incredible work our student group's are doing receive more recognition [...] One of my goals for this year is to ensure the University better values the performing arts. I am committed to ensuring all of our societies feel supported to do their activities despite the challenges we're navigating"

Should the Drama Studio be facing an uncertain future, it would be the latest on an ever-growing list of performance spaces closing across the country, with 40% of theatre spaces at risk of closure in the next year, according to the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre's Capital Investment in Theatre Buildings study.

This includes Sheffield's Abbeydale Picture House, which was a new entrant onto this year's 'Theatres at Risk' register, compiled by Theatres Trust in January, due to "significant deterioration" over the past year. This was followed by Sheffield's Theatre Deli closing its doors in May, days after the University of Sheffield Light Entertainment Society (USLES) performed their summer show in the venue.

Speaking recently in an interview with Forge Press Arts & Theatre, the new Chair of the Parliamentary Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee, The Rt. Hon. Dame Caroline Dinenage MP, warned that when it comes to the creative arts: "successive leaders have undervalued their importance"

President Watson's 'example' has raised concerns as to the future of performing arts at the university. If the Drama Studio was to close, at least seven annual productions created by students in SUTCo and SUPAS would be forced to find new venues. Given the rate of closure in Sheffield and beyond, this would leave the performance societies with very few remaining options.