

DSDHA completes major transformation of the National Youth Theatre's north London home





All photography
© Jim Stephenson

Watch an Open City
film by Jim Stephenson
to find out more



Architecture practice DSDHA has completed a major redevelopment of the National Youth Theatre's (NYT) north London home, transforming the building's visibility and accessibility from the street and doubling its capacity for professional studio space.

Conceived as a national 'Creative Production House' for young people, the work will allow the NYT to deliver on its 'open door' policy and vastly expand its existing track record of enriching the local community and beyond by providing cultural and social value, as well as enabling the charity's long-term sustainability. The work also introduces a 250-seat Workshop Theatre to the building for the first time, enabling NYT to welcome audiences from the local community and beyond. Early test performances by the NYT REP Company of *Animal Farm* and *Othello* in the Work-shop Theatre have received national critical acclaim.

Central to DSDHA's design concept is the introduction of a new pavilion for the building's main entrance, housing a reception area, members' hub and community studio space. Hosting a new accessible reception and "N7" community studio, the pavilion extends across

the existing building's fore-court, replacing the car park in line with the NYT's environmental strategy, opening up civic engagement with the street and providing a welcoming new entrance. Extensive glazing invites visitors in, while revealing backstage and teaching activities. The pavilion is clad in distinctive glazed bricks, a ro-bust and low-impact material which is both sympathetic to the historic build-ing's façade, and captures the character of local pubs and public buildings which also act as community hubs.





DSDHA's proposals for the NYT were designed with young people, for young people. The team embarked on a process of co-design and engagement with the company's members to create an environment that is fully accessible, welcoming and inclusive. Design responses to the input from the young people include creating a building with fewer boundaries, which increases the opportunity for chance encounters between young people and professional creatives, retaining the spirit and heritage of the old building, and encouraging spontaneous collaboration through the introduction of a series of informal social and workshop spaces throughout the building.



On the ground floor, the relocation of staff offices and structural alterations to the existing workshops have enabled the creation of new naturally-lit, flex-ible performance spaces, while new rehearsal studios and workshops for members and commercial hire will bring income to the charity and a diversi-ty of users to the building. The adaptation of the building has vastly increased the provision of professional studio space, allowing it to provide much-needed high quality rehearsal space close to central London and giving the NYT capacity to build on its strong links with West End theatres, and large pro-ductions touring the UK and internationally.

DSDHA's redesign involved making acoustic enhancements which separate the different spaces and enable a fully integrated digital strategy, the need for which was accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. These interventions mean that performances can now be recorded at high quality, bringing the work of the theatre to a vast new audience via online platforms and opening access up to young people who may face barriers accessing the arts.



In the spirit of the NYT's mission to be as accessible as possible to all users, integrated disabled accessible gender-neutral toilets and officially designat-ed, fully equipped Changing Places have been created for public use on the ground floor.

The upper floors of the existing building have been transformed with a new rehearsal space which opens up the first floor façade, as well as a redeveloped administrative space at the top of the building which allows views down Holloway Road from a dramatic new window. This will be further consolidated in the subsequent phase of work, which will add more back-stage space including an interactive archive for the NYT, hot desks for early career creatives and new digital recording suites. The first and second floors house further studio space, as well as offices, a green room, and design and production facilities.

Deborah Saunt, Director at DSDHA
comments:



We were thrilled to win the competition to design a radical redevelopment of the National Youth Theatre's London building, and to see it now delivered. We share this brilliant organisation's commitment to making a positive impact at grassroots level, and we're proud that our design will enable it to deliver its important work as a national creative incubator for young people in the performing arts on an even wider, more inclusive scale.



Established in 1956 as the world's first youth theatre company, the NYT's past membership includes internationally acclaimed actors including Dame Helen Mirren, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Zawe Ashton and Daniel Craig. The organisation has evolved into a vital part of the cultural infrastructure of the London Borough of Islington, the capital city, and the nation as a whole.





The redeveloped building will provide an important new civic presence within Holloway Road's largely commercial streetscape, and its completion represents a step forward in the widely held aspiration to bring improvements that will benefit all those who use the area. Along with the neighbouring Billiard Factory, the NYT forms part of a new 'cultural campus' in the area, with the historic Odeon cinema and Peabody Estate in close proximity.

The project is the recipient of a £2 million grant from the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund, a £70 million regeneration programme supporting growth and community development in London. This grant was match-funded with a generous donation by the Kirby Laing Foundation. Additional funding was provided by Arts Council England, London Marathon Charitable Trust, the Christina Smith Foundation and The City of London Corporation's charitable funder, City Bridge Trust.



NYT Artistic Director and CEO Paul Roseby OBE comments:



Over the past year we've all felt a 'culture of can't' but our building's resur-gence signals a renewed creative culture of can.

This epic and accessible redevelopment enables us to double the number of opportunities we deliver with our talented freelance associate artists and young people in the building and further expand our work around the UK and beyond.

We hope it will be a national and local beacon of accessibility and excellence, that inspires thousands of young people to engage with the arts for the first time and provides a much-needed injection of optimism for our community.





NYT member Shakira Newton said:



The new spaces will be brilliant in terms of allowing more young people to stage their own work in the building for local audiences. Taking part in activity in the NYT building has been really important to my own career development and personal growth. Making the building bigger, more welcoming and accessible is a brilliant idea and will allow lots more people to engage with NYT which can only be a good thing.



Workshop Studio



DSDHA

DSDHA are an architecture, urban design and spatial research studio, established by Deborah Saunt and David Hills. Known for their high-profile urban strategies, landscapes and innovative buildings, often in complex historic environments, as well as widely-acclaimed research, they have been recognised with 19 RIBA Awards to date, shortlisted for the RIBA Stirling Prize, and twice nominated for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award.

The studio's aim is to foster positive change, creating social value through collaboration and meaningful engagement with neighbourhoods and communities, as well as stakeholders and collaborators, to deliver projects that have the broadest impact. In considering the wider societal and cultural needs of the built environment, and how it evolves over time, DSDHA question our preconceptions of the city by making the best use of its latent spatial potential.

Recent and ongoing projects include: the redesign of the public realm around the Royal Albert Hall; the regeneration of a 600-home estate for London Borough of Southwark with a strong focus on engagement; a Collaborative Learning Environment and Music Centre for The Møller Centre at Cambridge University; the public realm framework for the West End, including the reimagining of Tottenham Court Road; the creation of Cundy Street Quarter, a new 2.4-acre mixed-tenure neighbourhood in Westminster; and a new park for the City of London above Liverpool Street Station.

National Youth Theatre

The National Youth Theatre is very grateful to all of the organisations who are supporting the redevelopment of our north London home to create a national Creative House for young people: the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund, the Kirby Laing Foundation, Arts Council England, London Marathon Charitable Trust, the Christina Smith Foundation and The City of London Corporation's charitable funder, City Bridge Trust.

National Youth Theatre is a pioneering youth arts charity which has nurtured the talent of hundreds of thousands of young creative people over the past 65 years. Since the 2020 lockdown the charity has supported over 20,000 young people, reached over 10 million online audience members and engaged over 400 freelance artists. In 2021 the charity will tour major venues and iconic sites around the UK with young talent centre stage, launch a new inclusive practice collective bringing in-school drama to hundreds of disabled young people and employing 60 creative 18-24-year-olds on universal credit and open a transformed accessible Creative Production House for Young People in north London. The charity's alumni includes some of the world's most celebrated acting talent, award-winning backstage talent working globally at leading theatres, stadiums and events. It also includes cultural leaders Rob Hastie (Artistic Director Sheffield Theatres), Lynette Linton (Artistic Director Bush Theatre), Gbolahan Obisesan (Artistic Director Brixton House), Bryony Shanahan (Artistic Director Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester), Michelle Terry (Artistic Director Globe Theatre) and Matthew Warchus (Artistic Director Old Vic Theatre) .

[For more, see \[www.nyt.org.uk\]\(http://www.nyt.org.uk\)](http://www.nyt.org.uk)

Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund

The Good Growth Fund is London Mayor Sadiq Khan's £70 million regeneration programme to support growth and community development in London. Working with the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP), the fund supports innovative, best practice regeneration activities, that enable: Londoners to actively participate in their local community and have a say in how their city is shaped

Delivery of co-ordinated place-based strategies that welcome growth in a way that works with the physical character of London's many places Diverse and accessible local economies – from our high streets and town centres to industrial areas – to realise their full potential and making London a place of opportunity for all.

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**[Go to www.nyt.org.uk/hollowayroad](http://www.nyt.org.uk/hollowayroad)
[to find out more](#)**

 [@NYTofGB](https://twitter.com/NYTofGB)

 [NationalYouthTheatre](https://www.instagram.com/NationalYouthTheatre)

 [NationalYouthTheatre](https://www.facebook.com/NationalYouthTheatre)

 [@NationalYouthTheatre](https://www.youtube.com/NationalYouthTheatre)

www.nyt.org.uk



**national[®]
youth
theatre**