

Saffron Hall

SAFFRON HALL TURNS FIVE

Saffron Hall – the world-class concert hall at the heart of a state secondary school – celebrates its Fifth Birthday with a special Gala Dinner encapsulating its work on 1 December



In just five years Saffron Hall has created a ground-breaking model of world-class performing arts and educational provision at the heart of its community

When Saffron Hall opened five years ago it made headlines, not just for its great acoustic and state of the art facilities but for the way it was funded.

One single local resident donated over £10m to build the 740-seat, state-of-the art concert hall, the largest ever private donation to a British state school. He was motivated by his dismay at the level of musical and cultural education in state schools generally and the reluctance in the UK for individuals to donate to the state sector. Crucial to the vision was to bring inspiring world-class facilities to a region, outside London, which had no comparable high-quality arts provision.

By creating a new model of arts philanthropy, the donor hoped to start a debate about individual charitable giving in state schools, as well as providing a world-class facility at a state school that would impact on all areas of the school's activities and those of many primary and other secondary schools in the region.

Saffron Hall has proved that making and listening to music is a powerful way for communities to connect and engage in shared activities. These have ranged from regular visits to the Hall from leading international orchestras and soloists, performances by local amateur groups (including Saffron Opera Group's epic Wagner *Ring Cycle*) and a ground-breaking community and education programme that involves all age groups and demographics from under 5s to those with dementia and their carers.

As part of its fifth birthday celebrations, Saffron Hall is holding a Gala Dinner on 1 December 2018 that reflects the range of its activities. Featuring star violinist Nicola Benedetti, a regular performer and leader of educational initiatives at the Hall, the evening is an expression of how vital a change the Hall has made to its community. Nicola will perform at the dinner with members of Britten Sinfonia, Saffron Hall's Resident Orchestra.

Also performing at the dinner will be a special choir formed for the occasion, led by Dominic Peckham. It will include children and staff from Saffron Walden County High School; children from Saffron Centre for Young Musicians – a Saturday music school (run by Saffron Hall in partnership with Guildhall School of Music, Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden County High School and Essex Music Education Hub) for talented young musicians from the region; members of leading amateur performance groups including Saffron Opera Group, Saffron Walden Choral Society, Grant Chorale, Saffron Building Society Choir, as well as staff and volunteers from Saffron Hall.

Angela Dixon, Chief Executive of Saffron since 2014, says:

“With the on-going debate about the decline of music and arts education in schools and the lack of funding to support the arts generally, we are proving that there is a third way. Saffron Hall is a pioneering model and an experiment that is succeeding. We are proving that having an international-standard concert hall and a world class programme in the heart of a secondary school is a sustainable model of arts provision, can enrich and enhance lives and is what a venue should be doing in the 21st century. We look forward to building on our success in the coming years and seeing more world-class venues truly at the heart of their communities.”

Saffron Hall's community and education programme has given over 20,000 young people from 55 local schools the chance to discover, explore and hone their love for music and the performing arts, as well as investing in training for over 100 educators, helping to increase their skills and confidence in teaching the creative subjects.

Caroline Derbyshire, Executive Headteacher of Saffron Walden County High School, comments:

“For me, as Headteacher of Saffron Walden County High School, Saffron Hall is an asset that gives and gives. The facility adds to the cultural capital of every child in our community. Visiting artists offer masterclasses and workshops to our students and engage with children in collaborative dance, jazz, singing, drama and classical music activities. The inspirational performance space lifts our own shows and concerts to a professional level. Saffron Hall is unique because it provides exposure to and experience of high culture for all children within a comprehensive, socially inclusive school setting.”

Together in Sound, Saffron Hall's flagship music therapy programme co-created with the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research at Anglia Ruskin University, enables those with dementia to engage meaningfully and positively with the world, helping to combat loneliness and providing patients and their carers with a supportive community. Enhancing the lives of hundreds of local people, the programme focuses on joint music-making and listening with a goal of supporting communication, relationships, and increasing quality of life through a collaborative group process. Weekly group sessions are led by music therapists and visiting professional musicians from Saffron Hall and give the opportunity to sing, play and listen to live music together, for ten weeks, which ends with an informal sharing and celebration with friends and family.

Now established as a major UK destination for world-class orchestras and soloists, relationships have been built with key international artists and ensembles who not only give concerts but also work with the local community. As part of its 2018 Associate Ensemble residency, the Hallé is performing two evening concerts as well as working side-by-side and giving an open rehearsal with over 200 local school children, giving a concert for children and families and a working session with talented young musicians from the region. English Touring Opera perform their triple-bill of 17th-century works by Purcell, Carissimi and Gesualdo and will include three local choirs in their performance when they return for Bach's St Matthew Passion in November.

Britten Sinfonia, which performed the opening concert at the hall in November 2013, has been Resident Orchestra since 2016. Counter-tenor Iestyn Davies is Artist in Residence for four concerts across the season; return appearances are also planned from a range of internationally renowned classical artists and ensembles. There are also a host of world-class jazz and folk events from the likes of David McAlmont, Stacey Kent, Orphy Robinson, Lau and Kansas Smitty's House Band.

Full details of the Fifth Birthday season and the Gala Dinner are available at Saffronhall.com.