



SAFFRON HALL CELEBRATES A DECADE OF TRANSFORMATIVE MUSIC AND ARTS

Saffron Hall – the world-class concert hall in a state secondary school – celebrates 10 years of pioneering arts provision, bringing impactful, high-quality performances to regional audiences, raising aspirations among young people and promoting well-being in the community with a weekend of celebratory events



Weekend of celebratory events, 1 – 3 December 2023

Saffron Hall, a world-class concert hall located within the grounds of Saffron Walden County High School (SWCHS) – built with the largest single private donation to a state school – celebrates its remarkable decade of achievement with a weekend of celebratory events (1-3 December).

In just ten years, Saffron Hall has become a beacon of artistic excellence, community engagement, and innovation, shaping the cultural landscape of Essex and the East of England. It has redefined what a regional arts centre can be and has touched, and sometimes transformed, many thousands of lives as the ripples of its work permeate across the region.

Angela Dixon, CEO of Saffron Hall Trust since 2014, says *“Saffron Hall is a unique and special place. An experiment in which world-class artists and school and community participants regularly perform together in our outstanding Hall and work together in our numerous school and community programmes. When the curtain first went up in 2013 it was unclear if the experiment would work, but since then the calibre of artists performing in the Hall, the number of tickets sold and the thousands of people’s lives we have touched have exceeded all expectations. In Saffron Walden and the surrounding area, quality arts provision is embedded and valued within the community. I believe*

that this innovative scheme is the future of arts provision and in the next ten years we intend to spread what we have learnt across Essex and seek to establish the model nationally.”

Whilst the East of England region receives less arts funding compared to other parts of the UK, and Saffron Hall Trust receives no public funding, its unwavering commitment to quality has bridged the gap, offering amazing performing arts and music to the local community and the entire region. Through broadening its programme, empowering and supporting amateur groups, establishing the region’s largest Saturday music school, reaching primary and secondary schools throughout the area and delivering flagship work for people living with dementia and their carers, Saffron Hall ensures that everyone has a chance to take part, engage, and experience arts and music that move, inspire, and connect.

In addition to the incalculable value of the work of Saffron Hall Trust, a [Social and Economic Impact study](#) also demonstrated that it brings in £1.36million GVA (Gross Value Added) annually to the local economy.

Ten Years of High-Level Arts Provision

When Saffron Hall opened its doors on 30 November 2013 with a season of just 12 concerts, no one could have foreseen the incredible impact it would have. The Hall now boasts a world-class music programme that includes two Resident Orchestras – London Philharmonic Orchestra and Britten Sinfonia – and presents around 125 events a year, spanning classical, fully staged opera, folk, big band, brass band, swing, jazz, genre-defying music as well as dance, pantomime, and spoken word featuring artists such as Joyce DiDonato, Jess Gillam, Courtney Pine and Nicola Benedetti.

Despite a population of over 6 million, the East of England has historically lacked opportunities for audiences to experience quality performing arts and music for themselves. Saffron Hall's mission has been to change that. As the only concert hall in Essex, it has seen exceptional audience growth and last year welcomed over 45,000 audience members. Over the past decade, Saffron Hall has presented over 500 events with major international professional talent, selling nearly a quarter of a million tickets, and reaching nearly 50,000 people through its education programmes.

A Model of Community Arts

Wherever possible Saffron Hall connects visiting artists to its schools and community programmes. Whether that is inviting students to attend an open rehearsal with The Hallé, organising ‘a morning with’ Isata Kanneh-Mason for GCSE students or arranging for Grammy-Award winning vocal group Roomful of Teeth to work with students to create a new work for performance during their main-stage concert, the programme - and the fact that Saffron Hall also serves as the school’s main hall - provides a springboard for creative connections at all levels.

Saffron Hall’s outstanding acoustic and facilities are also accessible to local performers. The Hall has hosted 190 local amateur concerts and has become a place where people are empowered to take part and find their voice. Audiences can enjoy the likes of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, English Touring Opera, Bryn Terfel, Anoushka Shankar, Nigel Kennedy and Ladysmith Black Mambazo, as well as local talent such as Saffron Walden Choral Society, or future stars from its Young Artists series and the Saffron Centre for Young Musicians.

Saffron Hall is not just about hosting outstanding performances; it is about building connections, and it has collaborated with a myriad of brilliant partners, from Britten Sinfonia to Saffron Walden Symphony Orchestra, from the BBC to the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research, from Essex Music Education Hub to English Touring Opera. These partnerships have allowed Saffron Hall

to welcome a wide-ranging and diverse audience, embodying the founding donor's belief that outstanding music and dance should be accessible to all, regardless of background, status, or age.

Nurturing the Future of Music Education

The arts in schools face challenges such as exclusion from the English Baccalaureate, cuts to arts subjects in primary and secondary state schools, and a decline in pupils studying music at GCSE and A-level. The Saffron Hall model places an arts venue of the highest quality at the heart of a state secondary school and the last decade has shown repeatedly the impact that this can have across the school community.

In addition, Saffron Hall Trust's work in supporting music education beyond SWCHS has been exceptional. With engagement from primary school age to young adults, Saffron Hall has reached young people from 54 schools. The 740-capacity Hall regularly hosts performances for audiences of school students – ranging from Cbeebies star Yolanda Brown's Band Jam to the Manchester Collective and National Youth Orchestra, which performed its first ever school concert at the Hall in 2022. In partnership with Essex Music Education Hub, Saffron Hall Trust has also delivered workshops and performances to schools across the region, with artists including A4 brass, Finn Collinson and musicians from Resident Orchestra Britten Sinfonia.

In 2020, the Hall introduced Saffron Sounds, providing resources, workshops and performances for Key Stage 2 students. The most recent iteration, Saffron Sounds - Space, was created in partnership with Jess Gillam and her ensemble and reached over 850 students from 15 schools.

Saffron Hall Trust is also a core partner and home to Saffron Centre for Young Musicians, which meets on the SWCHS site on Saturday mornings. Established in 2015, the Saturday school provides emerging musicians aged 4-18 in the East of England with a unique opportunity to play in an ensemble, participate in workshops and have individual tuition from leading teachers for instruments including woodwind, brass, strings, piano, guitar and percussion as well as lessons in singing, composition, musical history, theory and aural perception. And for those unable to pay, the school offers bursaries.

Together in Sound: Transforming Lives Through Music Therapy

Together in Sound is a pioneering programme that offers free, accessible, and ongoing community-based music therapy to support people living with dementia and their carers. In partnership with the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research at Anglia Ruskin University, Together in Sound brings groups of participants together for weekly sessions of collaborative music making, listening, social time and sharing.

A Vision for the Future

As Saffron Hall marks its 10th anniversary, it celebrates the achievements of the past decade and sets its sights on an even more impactful future. The organisation aims to strengthen its capacity to enable its ground-breaking model to resonate even more widely across Essex and beyond - fostering more talent, expanding artistic collaborations, and developing new partnerships. It remains committed to touching more lives through music and the performing arts, and to inspiring others to look to its unique model as an inspiration for a future which places the arts and creativity at the heart of our communities.

Essex currently has no musical National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) – a category of organisation funded by Arts Council England. Saffron Hall therefore intends to take models of education,

participation and world-class performances across the county, working with partners to ensure that eventually everyone in Essex has access to world-class arts and learning.

Celebrating the Landmark Anniversary

To celebrate its anniversary, Saffron Hall is staging a weekend celebration that encapsulates its work including big names such as Jess Gillam, Iestyn Davies, The English Concert and Britten Sinfonia, Friday Night Jazz – all joined by local talent – as well as a host of events from other local groups during the day on Saturday and Sunday.

Highlights include:

- **Friday 1 December**
 - [Jazz, soul and contemporary music](#) featuring stars of the UK jazz scene - saxophonist **Dan Forshaw** (curator of Saffron Hall's famous Foyer Jazz), vocalist **Juliet Kelly** and pianist **James Beckwith** alongside former students of the Saffron Centre for Young Musicians, now rising stars in their own right.
- **Saturday 2 December**
 - [Handel's Rodelinda](#) with **The English Concert/Harry Bickett** and soloists including **Lucy Crowe, Iestyn Davies** and **Christine Rice**, among others, joined by SWCHS Chamber Choir.
 - [Story time with Cinderella](#) - an interactive story session for children and families.
 - [Come and Sing with London Community Gospel Choir](#) – a singing workshop for people of all ages and abilities.
- **Sunday 3 December**
 - [Relaxed folk performance](#) - this special performance from outstanding contemporary folk-inspired musicians will take a relaxed approach to noise and movement, ideal for those with autism, learning disabilities or dementia.
 - [Jess Gillam and Britten Sinfonia](#). **Jess Gillam**, a favourite with Saffron Hall audiences and a long-time supporter of Saffron Hall Trust's work, joins Resident Orchestra **Britten Sinfonia** for an eclectic programme of contemporary music and traditional favourites.

For further information, please contact Victoria Bevan

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***** A selection of images is available [HERE](#) *****

NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT SAFFRON HALL TRUST AND SAFFRON HALL

Saffron Hall Trust is an arts and education charity based at Saffron Hall, bringing exceptional musical performances to local and regional audiences, raising aspirations among young people and promoting well-being in the community. Saffron Hall, on the site of Saffron Walden County High School, lies at the heart of a unique partnership between Saffron Hall Trust and Saffron Academy Trust – a family of schools who aspire to provide state education of exceptional quality for their communities.

Saffron Hall opened in 2013 with a season of just twelve concerts. Ten years later it boasts a world-class music programme that includes two Resident Orchestras, classical, opera, folk, big band, brass band, swing, jazz, world and genre-defying music. Dance and spoken word have since been added to

the programme. To date, we have presented over 500 events and 190 local amateur concerts, and sold over 245,000 tickets. Since 2015, our schools and community programmes have engaged with nearly 50,000 participants.

THE PROGRAMME

At the heart of our programme is the belief that all are entitled to high-quality performing arts experiences. It is this egalitarian spirit that is endlessly appealing to audience members, artists and participants. Some of the world's finest artists regularly appear on stage with young people and amateur performers or take part in our schools and community programmes. Artists such as Nicola Benedetti, Jess Gillham, Kathryn Tickell and Courtney Pine and ensembles such as Britten Sinfonia, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Youth Jazz Orchestra and Boy Blue Entertainment, are deeply bound to our community, making the performing arts an integral part of life in our area.

Forthcoming events:

October

Tuesday 24 – Saturday 28 Oct

Blood Brothers

Sunday 29 Oct, 4pm

Brighthouse & Rastrick Band

November

Thursday 2 Nov, 7pm

An Evening with Simon Armitage

Friday 3 Nov, 7.30pm

Hallé Orchestra: Brahms Symphony No.4

Saturday 4 Nov, 3pm

Out of this World: A Family Concert

Sunday 5 Nov, 4pm

Arcangelo & Nicolas Altstaedt

Friday 10 Nov, 7.30pm

Gigspanner Big Band & Raynor Winn: Saltlines

Saturday 11 Nov, 7.30pm

Víkingur Ólafsson

Sunday 12 Nov, 4pm

Nigel Kennedy & Oxford Philharmonic

Friday 17 Nov, 7.30pm

YolanDa Brown

Saturday 18 Nov, 7.30pm

Saffron Walden Choral Society – Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius

Friday 24 Nov, 8pm

Foyer Folk: Mishra

Saturday 25 Nov, 7.30pm

The Sixteen: Haydn Nelson Mass

Sunday 26 Nov, 3pm

Saffron Walden Symphony Orchestra

December

Fri 1 December, 8pm

Saffron Hall 10th Birthday: Jazz Celebration with Dan Forshaw Quartet and special guests

Sat 2 December, 7pm

Saffron Hall 10th Birthday: Handel's Rodelinda

Sun 3 December, 7pm

Saffron Hall 10th Birthday: Jess Gillam & Britten Sinfonia

Fri 8 – Sat 9 December, various times

The Nutcracker & I

Sun 10 December, 7pm

Britten Sinfonia - Handel/Mozart: Messiah

Fri 15 December, 7.30pm

BBC Big Band: A Swinging Christmas

Sat 16 December, 7.30pm

Tenebrae at Christmas

Sun 17 December, 3pm

London Philharmonic Orchestra with Saffron Walden Choral Society: A Christmas Celebration

Sat 23 – Sat 30 December

Cinderella

January 2024

Sun 7 January, 4pm

Piotr Anderszewski

Fri 12 January, 7.30pm

A New Year's Celebration

Fri 19 January, 7.30pm

London Community Gospel Choir

Sun 21 January, 4pm

Jonathan Leibovitz, Maciej Kułakowski & Ariel Lanyi