

Historic theatre undergoes lockdown refurbishment

THE country's oldest surviving original theatre marked a huge milestone as it emerged from lockdown with major improvements to its historic auditorium.

The 230-year-old Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond is one of the most important buildings of its time in Britain. Built in 1788 by Samuel Butler, its three tiered auditorium is also renowned for its hard seating and problematic views.

Over the lockdown and thanks to a £375,000 donation from the Hamish Ogston Foundation, the theatre carried out an ambitious overhaul, providing comfortable new seating and improved views of the stage.

The courtyard-style auditorium has also been completely re-decorated, new stage and auditorium lighting has been installed, and a mural depicting a lively Georgian audience is a new feature behind the boxes. A new heating and ventilation system has also been installed, replacing old boilers in the Grade I listed building.

Mr Ogston attended the official reopening along with Richmond MP and Chancellor Rishi Sunak, and

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By Janet Gleeson

Lord Crathorne, whose mother Lady Nancy Crathorne was the driving force behind the original re-opening of the theatre in 1963.

"We are hugely grateful to Hamish Ogston whose foundation gave us the substantial grant that enabled us to complete much of our celebrated auditorium project," said Mac Bryant, chairman of The Georgian Theatre Royal Trust. "In addition, Rishi Sunak's staff furlough scheme and other Government initiatives have enabled us to retain our dedicated staff team and meet the day-to-day running costs of the theatre during the closure period.

"It is thanks to them both and everyone else that has supported and donated to the theatre throughout the pandemic that we are now able to welcome audiences back and look forward to a glorious season of live entertainment," he added.

Starting the autumn season with a recital was international pianist



From left, Rishi Sunak, Mac Bryant, Hamish Ogston, Lord Crathorne and Albert Lau at the official reopening

Albert Lau who also played selected pieces at the opening event, performing on the theatre's recently restored Steinway grand piano.

Mr Sunak said: "I am delighted the Government's economic support packages helped this special venue weather the last 18 months and

provided the opportunity to bring about the impressive improvements to the auditorium. This is a glorious re-awakening of a unique theatre which is not only renowned nationally and internationally but loved locally. I have already booked my family's tickets for this year's panto."