



Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears performed at the Georgian Theatre Royal

Piano will take centre stage at historic theatre's first night

When the curtain goes up on the opening night of The Georgian Theatre Royal's Autumn Season on Friday, September 3, all eyes will be on international pianist Albert Lau – playing on a newly restored Steinway grand piano – who will be delivering the first professional performance since the pandemic closed the historic Richmond venue's doors back in March 2020

THE show is finally set to go on at Richmond's Georgian Theatre Royal, which will open its doors for its first professional performance in 18 months.

Pianist Albert Lau will share the stage with another star – the theatre's magnificent Steinway grand piano, making a first appearance following its recent restoration.

The Steinway's restoration is just one of several exciting projects to have taken place behind the scenes at The Georgian Theatre Royal during the long months of lockdown.

These include the installation of new comfortable seating and a state-of-the-art heating and ventilation system which will vastly improve the audience experience and enable the circulation of 100 per cent fresh air into the 18th-century auditorium.

"Lockdown and the subsequent cessation of live performances seemed like a great opportunity to send the piano away for a bit of TLC," said the theatre's manager, Clare Allen. "We knew it would be a lengthy process so it was a good time to have it out of action."

Tasked with the job of bringing the Steinway – Model C for those in the know – up to top concert standard was the Piano Workshop based in Kirkbymoorside, near

Pickering. Here the instrument was stripped down to its component parts, and then re-built and re-strung.

Its cabinet has also been re-sprayed to a contemporary high-gloss concert piano finish.

Aidan Delacey-Simms, a specialist in Steinway restoration at the workshop, said: "Steinways are the Rolls Royce of pianos and this is a beautiful instrument with a fantastic sound."

"As well as giving the piano a complete overhaul, we have used the best available replacement parts such as modern hammer-

heads and strings, which are even better than the originals. It has been a pleasure to work on such a prestigious instrument, which now plays to an exceptional standard."

The Steinway was originally bought by the theatre in 1965 for the princely sum of £1,500. It was part-funded using a donation of £1,000 from Lady Barlow, also known as the acclaimed actress Margaret Rawlings.

Lady Nancy Crathorne – who championed the initial restoration of the theatre – described the event at the time: "Margaret Raw-

lings came to the theatre and immediately fell in love with it. She then asked me if there was anything we needed. So I said, rather desperately, a Steinway. She then gave us a cheque for £1,000. It was terribly generous and has made a great deal of difference already. Now we can aim for the best pianists because we have an instrument that gives absolute joy to them."

Lady Crathorne was correct in her aspirations and in the following decades, many famous people have played the Steinway.

A great coup was one of the 20th

century's best-known composers Benjamin Britten in May 1967, who played alongside the tenor Peter Pears.

Albert Lau, who will be taking the bows at the opening concert on September 3, is also fast making a name for himself on the international circuit. It is fitting that he is also a Young Steinway Artist. Albert said: "I am very excited to be performing at the Georgian. It should be a very special atmosphere." The concert is on Friday, September 3 at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £16, from www.georgiantheatreroyal.co.uk or on 01748-825252.



International pianist Albert Lau

