Sunderland’s Brand New £18M Venue Announces Programme

Monday 27 September, 2021

THE Fire Station in Sunderland is delighted to announce the opening of its brand-new Auditorium on 10 December and has today unveiled Firestarters - its red-hot launch programme of shows and performances.

The opening of The Fire Station’s auditorium is a pivotal moment in Sunderland’s cultural renaissance, bringing acclaimed national and international artists to the city as well as providing a platform for local and emerging artists to shine.

Tickets are now on sale for the stunning new £18m venue’s opening programme which will run from December this year to next June and features more than 40 artists and performers – with yet more to be announced.

Kathryn Tickell and The Darkening will ignite Firestarters when they will be joined by special guest The Lake Poets for The Fire Station auditorium’s opening gig on Friday 10 December. This unique collaboration will bring the shamanic sounds of ancient Northumbria into the 21st century through the state-of-the-art venue, located at the heart of Sunderland’s resurgent cultural quarter.

Next up, the region’s chamber orchestra Royal Northern Sinfonia, featuring their new leader Maria Wloszczowska, will perform a candle-lit Christmas concert on Sunday 12 December, followed by British queen of soul and gospel Mica Paris on Wednesday 15 December.

Friday 17 December, will see the main event to officially open The Fire Station, when Mercury Music Prize nominees Field Music will present The Firestarters Revue, with a sensational line-up of guests including rising stars Martha Hill, Reali-T, Faye Fantarrow alongside Sunderland icons Barry Hyde and Ross Millard (The Futureheads) and Frankie Francis. Other performers for this very special housewarming for The Fire Station will be announced.

The Christmas season will come to a close with a party to end all parties with North East funk icons Smoove & Turrell on Sunday 19 December, fresh from their chart-topping seventh studio album, Stratos Bleu. The event will also include special guests the Voices of Virtue Gospel Choir, MC Kay Greyson and the Origin Crew dancers.

New Year’s notable highlights include a solo show from vital folk-troubadour Richard Dawson on Saturday 22 January, UK country stars The Shires playing an intimate acoustic show on Thursday 27 January, Amy Winehouse: A Celebration of her Life and Work with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra on Thursday 10 February and a performance by The Transatlantic Ensemble of Fleetwood Mac’s Rumours on Friday 18 February.

March sees This is The Kit, the indie musical project of Ivor Novello nominated singer-songwriter Kate Stables perform on Thursday 10 March and a highly anticipated show by former Maccabees frontman Orlando Weeks on the back of his new album on Sunday 13 March, as well as a visit by the legendary China Crisis on Friday 18 March, celebrating their 40th anniversary.

With Teesside’s finest Young’uns on Saturday 16 April, The Hot Club of Cowtown bringing their hot jazz and western swing to Sunderland on Wednesday 20 April, two-time Grammy nominated singer-songwriter Beth Nielsen Chapman on Friday 22 April and Britain’s oldest boy band The Fisherman’s Friends on Saturday 9 April, there is something for everyone.

As well as the music programme, theatre goers can look forward to ‘Human’ by dynamic, disabled-led circus/theatre company Extraordinary Bodies on Saturday 14 May and a production of Ibsen’s landmark play, ‘A Doll's House’ by Elysium Theatre Company on Tuesday 17 February. Dance enthusiasts can enjoy ‘The Monocle’, a newly commissioned piece by Rendez-Vous Dance Company, set in a 1930’s Parisian nightclub and with shades of Cabaret on 19 February, as well as ‘Speakeasy’, a thrilling dance spectacle from Southpaw which combines vintage and contemporary dance from breakdance to Lindyhop on Friday 8 April. For comedy fans, Mock the Week and Live at the Apollo sell-out sensation Gary Delaney brings his unique brand of humour on Saturday 26 March. There will also be plenty of opportunities for local residents to take part in community performances at The Fire Station – watch out for more details soon!

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Firestarters will end in the summer of 2022 with a special one-off acoustic acapella show by Sunderland's home-grown success story The Futureheads on Saturday 11 June. Look out for more additions to the line-up.

Tamsin Austin, Director of The Fire Station, said:

"It is so exciting to have a brand-new home for music and performing arts in the heart of Sunderland! We can't wait to welcome people into what we hope will become a thriving community hub for audiences and for artists at The Fire Station. We are so very grateful to Paul Callaghan and all at the MAC Trust for their vision, passion, and determination to deliver this incredible new building for the city and to Arts Council England, Sunderland City Council and national and regional Trusts and Foundations, for all their support. We can't wait to see you all in December!"

The Fire Station is an exciting new performance venue in the heart of Sunderland city centre. The Fire Station's new, state-of-the-art auditorium will programme up to 300 events a year – in music, theatre, comedy and dance. It can host up to 550 people seated or up to 800 people standing, bringing acclaimed national and international artists to Sunderland, as well as showcasing emerging and established local performers. The Fire Station is operated by Sunderland Culture on behalf of Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust.

Kathryn Tickell, the first artist to perform in the auditorium, said:

"So excited! A North East gig…and in Sunderland's brilliant new venue! It's such a big moment and it's going to be a very special night."

The Lake Poets said:

"Anyone who knows me or my music will understand how much I love and adore the history, heritage and people of my hometown. It's what inspires me and my writing and it's what makes me want to create. I'm so honoured to be the first act to play my hometown's amazing new venue, and I couldn't ask for a greater bill to be on. I'm so excited and I hope to see you there."

David Brewis, of Field Music, added:

"The cultural life of this city is something which is very close to our hearts, so we're extremely excited and proud to be able to contribute to the opening of this fabulous new venue along with an amazing cross-section of the region's musical talent."

Barry Hyde, of The Futureheads and The Peacock, said:

"I am uber-excited to be sharing the stage with such highly skilled and respected musical maestros as part of a special event at a very special venue! Sunderland has been crying out for a music venue of this size for many years and finally it has arrived. We have a vibrant music scene in the city, with some great promoters, musical artists and venues but for me the auditorium has completed the picture and I'm sure we will see acts in our fine city continue to go from strength to strength for years to come!"

Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture, said:

"We can't wait to be able to open the doors and start welcoming audiences to performances at The Fire Station. This beautiful new venue will be a fantastic addition to the city's cultural life and we are hugely grateful to our partners the MAC Trust for their vision, ambition and determination in realising this project for Sunderland."

Funding for the £7m first phase of The Fire Station, the redevelopment of an Edwardian building into a bar and restaurant, studios and heritage exhibition, came from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Sunderland City Council and the Sunderland MAC Trust. The Fire Station's auditorium was developed as phase 2 thanks to a £6.25m award from Arts Council England's Capital: Large Grants programme, funded by the National Lottery, a £1.38m grant from the government's Cultural Capital Kickstart Fund, and further support from Sunderland City Council, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust, the Foyle Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, and Backstage Trust.

The Firestarters opening programme is commissioned by Sunderland Music Arts and Culture Trust and supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Paul Callaghan, Chair of the Music, Arts and Culture Trust, the charity that led the building of the auditorium said:

“Wow, what a line-up to open this exceptional venue. We are extremely excited by the quality and variety of the performers who want to play in Sunderland. I’m particularly pleased that Field Music are bringing their friends to play in what promises to be a celebration of our city’s amazing music scene. The auditorium will not only feature established musicians, it will also be the springboard to stardom for our own aspiring talent.”

The Fire Station, which was officially opened by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2017, houses The Engine Room bar and bistro, a heritage exhibition, and studios specially designed to accommodate creative writing and drama workshops for children and young people delivered by Live Theatre, and participatory workshops in all forms of dance from Dance City.

For more information about all events and to buy tickets head to www.thefirestation.org.uk or follow @FireStationSun.

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