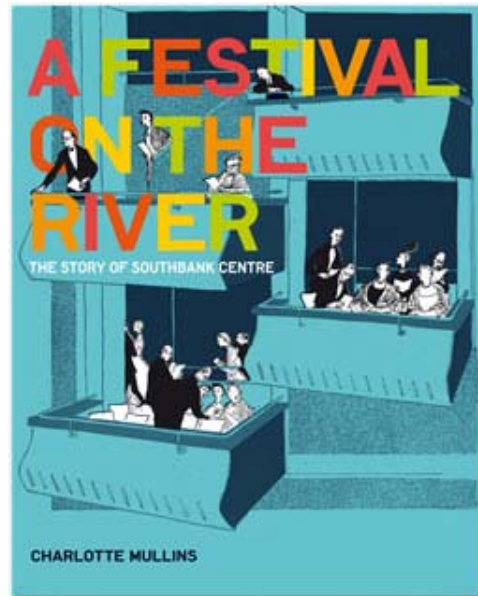


A FESTIVAL ON THE RIVER: THE STORY OF SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Introduction

What does Southbank Centre mean to you? It is certainly more than the sum of its buildings – the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Hayward. It stretches from the London Eye to BFI Southbank (formerly the National Film Theatre) and includes a flagpole, a book market, cafés and restaurants, fountains and free foyer entertainment. But, most importantly, it is home to memories. Millions of memories. People who now live on the other side of the world met and fell in love on its terraces; dancers and musicians have begun their careers on its stages. Journalists have had their first break in its galleries – and bathrooms – and performers have got lost in the underground car parks trying to find the artists' entrances. Three thousand people sang The Clash's "London Calling" at the end of its Bollywood extravaganza "Escapade" in 2002, and 220,000 participants



became temporary members of the Philharmonia thanks to PLAY.orchestra in 2006. Conductors and daleks have raced through its service tunnels, pensioners have danced on its roofs and Labour Party ministers have sung along to D:Ream's "Things Can Only Get Better" outside the Royal Festival Hall at the 1997 general election victory party.

As a venue, Southbank Centre has played host to many of the biggest names in classical music, from Otto Klemperer to Sir Simon Rattle, Maria Callas to Angela Gheorghiu. But it also attracts exemplary performers from all genres of music, dance and art, and past stars have included Louis Armstrong, Lou Reed, Radiohead, Bridget Riley, Dame Shirley Bassey, Fats Domino, Akram Khan and Patti Smith. (Many of those who have performed at Southbank Centre have contributed memories to this book.) Dame Edith Sitwell and Jean Cocteau narrated scores on stage, Mo Mowlam read from her memoirs and Bret Easton Ellis from his novels. Performers have danced along its terraces and Evelyn Glennie has used it as a giant percussion instrument. The gamelan has entertained outside as wayang and Kathak shows have unfolded in the halls.

Southbank Centre as it stands today grew out of the Festival of Britain's flagship exhibition, held on the south bank of the Thames in 1951. The Royal Festival Hall was designed and built within three years to ensure it opened at the same time. After years of bombing and rationing, the South Bank Exhibition was an unprecedented extravaganza, filled with new technology, art, design and colour. Eight-and-a-half million people arrived by train, tram, bus, car and on foot to experience it. But all too soon the exhibition was over. The flags were taken down and the fountains switched off. One by one the pavilions were dismantled until the Royal Festival Hall stood alone. Even the temporary pedestrian Bailey bridge that linked the site to the north bank was taken away. The south bank's proximity to central London was forgotten, and the hall had to fight to survive.

The Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room were built alongside the Royal Festival Hall in 1967, and the Hayward opened in 1968. There were now more reasons to visit the south bank, but the new network of pedestrian walkways that surrounded the halls and gallery were windswept and alienating. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s the buildings looked in on themselves, embracing neither their riverside location nor their proximity to

each other. Only with the Greater London Council's ambitious open foyer programme of 1983 did Southbank Centre start to come alive. The Royal Festival Hall's foyers began to open during the day, with live music presented in the bar and exhibitions on the ballroom floor. In the 1980s the site started to be thought of as one place, with performances and events happening beyond the safe-havens of auditoria and galleries. But during the 1990s a period of retrenchment set in, with budgets cut and morale at a low ebb.

In 2002, a new chairman, Lord Hollick, was appointed, shortly followed by a new chief executive, Michael Lynch. (Artistic director Jude Kelly started in September 2005.) They realized they had to ensure the fragmented site was connected back together again and rejuvenated. The Rick Mather masterplan for Southbank Centre, put in place by former chairman Elliott Bernerd, allowed work to be carried out incrementally when funds became available, and slowly things began to take shape. The Hayward's new foyer opened in 2003 and, to coincide with the opening of the Golden Jubilee pedestrian bridges that now flank Hungerford bridge, the Festival Stairs were added. While the final preparations were made to refurbish the Royal Festival Hall, shops and restaurants were built under the hall facing the river, timed to open just as the hall closed for two years. Staff members were relocated to Southbank Centre Building, a new purpose-built office block alongside the railway tracks, the first new structure on site for 38 years. Former offices, which had been squirreled away in makeshift spaces all over the Royal Festival Hall, were removed, freeing up 35 per cent of extra public space. Southbank Centre continues to develop, and plans are being discussed for Jubilee Gardens, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, the Hayward and the Belvedere Road Southbank Centre car park.

The 2005–07 Royal Festival Hall refurbishment required significant funding – £91m in total. Unusually, for a public arts centre, the majority of this money did not come from the government but was a straight split between public and private funding. The revenue from the new restaurants and franchises beneath the Royal Festival Hall and Southbank Centre Building contributed to the refurbishment, as did the money from the new 25-year lease taken out by the London Eye (which stands on Southbank Centre land). Major donors also came on board, as did more than 18,000 individual donors who dedicated seats in the auditorium or sent cheques to help towards the fundraising campaign. Every single donor who gave money to the campaign (up to 1 January 2007) is listed alphabetically in this book, starting on the cover and running along each page.

The reason so many people contributed to the fundraising campaign, it seems, is their great affection for the Royal Festival Hall and Southbank Centre. This book builds on the memories of many of those who have donated and who have registered their recollections as part of "Love the Festival Hall", an ongoing database of living history. One such contributor, Rachel Curtis, explains why she chose to dedicate a seat in the auditorium:

My husband always admired the architecture of the south bank, especially the Royal Festival Hall. He remained interested in the renovation of Southbank Centre despite us living in Southampton. When we visited London we would always go to the Royal Festival Hall to relax, eat, enjoy the music and admire the magnificent landscape of London. When he was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 37 we were devastated, but he always maintained his enjoyment of architecture and music. When he died in 2004, I decided a fitting memorial would be to purchase a seat in his memory. He will now be able to hear as much music as he likes in the splendid surroundings of the Royal Festival Hall. I visit when I can and remember with fondness our special and happy times spent on the south bank. As soon as it reopens, I hope to attend a concert with friends. We are going to buy his seat and leave it empty and hope he is with us.

This book is for everyone who has similarly fond memories lodged within Southbank Centre's buildings and terraces, shops and restaurants, bathrooms and service tunnels, viewing platforms and gardens.