

12 November 2020

Theatre continues #GetBehindUs Crowdfunder due to extended closure

Oldham Coliseum Theatre is continuing to fundraise to support its future as it remains closed to the public until early 2021. The theatre was less than two weeks from reopening with a season of covid-safe, socially distanced events when the Government announced that a further nationwide lockdown would commence from Thursday 5 November.

The Coliseum's first ever Crowdfunder has received phenomenal support, reaching its £40,000 target on the day the lockdown began. The theatre is continuing to fundraise and has now stretched this target to £55,000

Launched in September following the postponement of this year's pantomime to 2021, #GetBehindUs asks people to support the Coliseum to help keep the magic of theatre alive and save Christmas in Oldham for generations to come. Having already postponed the pantomime, the theatre also had to cancel its socially distanced Christmas offer, *A Christmas Carol*, as it cannot guarantee that the production would be able to go ahead.

However, in the lead up to Christmas, support from the #GetBehindUs campaign has enabled the Coliseum to produce two panto related offers for schools to help keep some panto magic alive for children in Oldham: Panto Storytelling tour and Panto Box virtual workshop. Further digital offers for public will be announced in due course.

Alex Ludlam from Bright Futures School said: *"Bright Futures School have attended the pantomime at Oldham Coliseum for a number of years now. We have also booked workshops that have taken place both at the theatre and in school. Visiting the theatre to watch a show can be problematic to pupils with autism – they are faced with loud music and sound effects, darkness, sudden noises, variable lighting and new smells. The way that Oldham Coliseum prepared our children and catered to their needs enabled all of the children to not only access the pantomime but thoroughly enjoy the experience. When attending the theatre the children are able to interact with people working in the theatre and meet others from the local community forging links and memories. The workshops give the pupils the freedom to see the world from a new perspective and practice scenarios to help them deal with day to day life. I cannot express how valuable both the workshop and pantomime experiences are for our pupils."*

For 135 years people have visited Oldham's historic theatre to experience the magic of the renowned annual pantomime and year-round programme of award-winning drama, comedy and music. The Coliseum contributes millions to Oldham's economy and has helped to launch the career of many famous faces. The theatre's work in the communities of Oldham offers support to some of the most underprivileged people in the country, works with people with additional needs, offers training, brings the borough's richly diverse population together and helps to build confidence.

In a survey by The Audience Agency 95% of audiences said that the Coliseum is good for Oldham's image and a further 63% said that the Coliseum enhances the sense of community in Oldham.

This year, due to the Coronavirus crisis, the Coliseum has been closed with no ticket income since March.

Su Schofield, Director of Manchester Cabins commented: *"As a business with a history of over 40 years in the town, we believe in the importance of the Coliseum and how it serves its audiences and communities. The theatre does amazing work all year round and the loss of panto this year is a massive blow to both the town and the Coliseum. This is why we are proud to get behind this campaign and help protect local theatre in Oldham."*

Theatres were the first industry to close due to coronavirus, a week ahead of the start of the national lockdown in March. In August the Coliseum announced the postponement of its pantomime, which would usually have welcomed an audience of 35,000 people. Not only is the Coliseum's festive spectacular a fun-filled family tradition for generations of people from across the North West, income from the pantomime supports many of the theatre's activities in the communities of Oldham throughout the year.

Pearson Senior Partner, Richard Eastwood, said: *"It's a pleasure for Pearson Solicitors and Financial Advisers to get involved in the crowdfunding campaign and help secure the future of theatre in Oldham. 2020 has been a tough time for all, but the arts especially as being in front of people is what it's all about. We forget and take for granted the excellent theatre we have on our doorstep, only when the doors close and the auditorium falls silent do we realise what we have lost, hopefully thanks to this campaign that silence will be short lived."*

Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a Registered Charity and its teams have been working closely with the Government and industry body UK Theatre since its closure.

For many years audiences have come to the Coliseum at Christmas to shout 'it's behind you', this year the Coliseum is asking everyone to **Get Behind Us** and help save Christmas in Oldham for generations to come.

Donations are open at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/get-behind-us

- Ends -----

Notes to Editor:

For further press information, please contact Shelly Ramsdale via email at shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk (please note I am currently working from home)

Oldham Coliseum Theatre

The Coliseum is a cultural and educational charity that works with over 150,000 individuals per year.

The Coliseum has a rich history in Greater Manchester dating back to 1885. It provides a wide variety of distinctive theatre performances and participatory activities for people from all communities in Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond. It creates original productions each year which are presented at the Coliseum and on tour. Intrinsic to the town's on-going regeneration, the theatre works with its local communities and young people to develop creative programmes to facilitate learning, engagement and community cohesion.

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