ENO will continue to stage Coliseum operas, says ACE

MATTHEW HEMLEY

Arts Council England boss Darren Henley has confirmed that English National Opera will continue to perform "large-scale" productions at the London Coliseum, despite a recent instruction that it relocate outside the capital.

The news was welcomed by ENO, which has been campaigning vigorously since losing national portfolio organisation status last month’s funding round to retain a base in London. However, ENO heavily criticised Henley for failing to provide clarity on recent funding decisions, claiming cuts to organisations had not been carried out "transparently".

The opera company said ACE lacked a strategy around opera to inform its decisions and said this had rung "alarms bells across the country".

Henley confirmed that ENO would retain a presence at the London Coliseum while being drilled by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on December 8 about recent funding decisions, under which ENO was stripped of its funding and instead offered £12 million by ACE to develop a plan to relocate outside of London.

Henley told the committee that, while ENO wanted to see an organisation with a central base outside the capital, the London Coliseum would be "important" to the company’s business plan.

What we would like to do is work with ENO to get to a strong position to make an application for our next national portfolio round in three years’ time, outside of London, but absolutely acknowledging the Coliseum as an important part of the business plan and it being able to present large-scale work on the London stage. In conversations we have been having with ENO since the announcement, we have reiterated that a number of times," he added.

Henley also said Manchester had not been chosen as a possible city for ENO to relocate to under instruction from the government, adding that he was aware of moves in other cities keen to host ENO.

He also highlighted the work of organisations such as Birmingham Royal Ballet and Jasmin Vardimon Company as successful organisations based outside of London that brought work to the capital.

However, ENO said those companies had been given years and proper consultations to realise their out-of-London ambitions fully, claiming the comparisons felt "improper" and that ACE had "still offered no clarity around the process that led to having our NPO status removed".

It added: "The allocating of public funds must be done transparently, fairly and following a logical process. It said fund- ing decisions should be taken "within a strategy informed by data and audience insight" and that it was "deeply concerned that ACE does not have this in place for opera. This continues to ring alarm bells across the country, across other organisations, among audiences and across all political parties."

Prima Facie and @sohoplace among The Stage Awards nominees

JAMIE BODY

Empire Street Productions, the company behind Josie Cocker’s Prima Facie, and @sohoplace, the first new purpose-built West End theatre for 50 years, are among the nominees for The Stage Awards 2023. The awards are in association with Fyres Insurance, with category shortlists and winners chosen by a panel of industry judges.

Harold Pinter Theatre in London, Curve in Leicester and Lyric Theatre Belfast are among six nominations for Theatre of the Year, with Alphabetti Theatre in Newcastle and Little Angel and Omnibus theatres in London vying for Fringe Theatre of the Year.

Joining Empire Street Productions in the Producer of the Year category are Jamie Wilson Productions and Improbable.

@sohoplace is shortlisted for Community Project of the Year, and three for Digital Project of the Year, with the National Theatre’s casting day for Ukrain- ian performers recognised alongside other companies for the International Award.

Other categories include the Innovation Award and Unsung Hero.

Allstate Smith, editor of The Stage, said: "Despite the huge difficulties theatre has faced, these shortlists underline the fact it is bouncing back and that companies of all types continue to create outstanding work for audiences everywhere."

The winners will be announced on January 30, at Theatre Royal Drury Lane.