ENO confirms it will relocate to Greater Manchester by 2029

MATTHEW HEMLEY

English National Opera is to relocate its headquarters to Greater Manchester, after the area was chosen from a shortlist of three that the opera company had been weighing up following instructions to move out of the capital.

However, rather than being based in one building in the north, ENO is expected to work with a number of partners to develop work at a variety of venues, such as the Lowry in Salford and Ariva Studios.

According to ENO, the move will allow it to focus on the “development of new innovations in opera, with ambitious creative collaborations in performance, public health and the development of local talent” in partnership with local organisations and venues.

Greater Manchester was selected following what The Stage understands was a lengthy process, in which ENO considered an initial list of five, including Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool and Nottingham, which was then whittled down to three. Greater Manchester was chosen following a process that included ENO considering the range of partnerships with existing arts organisations on offer in the city region.

It is expected to transition to its new business model over the next two years, and said it would be firmly embedded in the area by 2029.

However, ENO will continue to operate and own the London Coliseum – its current home – where it is expected to maintain a programme of work. The move effectively means ENO will operate from two locations.

The first round of its artistic plans in the area will be announced next year. By 2029, ENO said it would deliver performances, well-being and learning activities in the city region.

ENO interim chief executive Jenny Mollica said: “This announcement marks an important and defining moment for our remarkable company. This future direction will see us continue to expand our role as a national institution – supporting our mission to create work with and for even more audiences across the country, alongside our annual season at the London Coliseum.”

She added: “We have been struck by an emerging vision for the future of ENO and operatic work in the Greater Manchester city region, defined by a shared ambition to open up new possibilities for opera in people’s lives. We look forward to embarking on new adventures with partners, artists and audiences as we create a range of operatic repertoire at a local, national and international scale.”

The news comes after ENO was told it would need to move out of London in the last funding round from Arts Council England, under then culture secretary Nadine Dorries’ instructions.

Earlier this year, ENO was granted an additional three years to develop plans for the move – having initially been told it had to be relocated by 2026 – in a U-turn by ACE, which awarded ENO £24 million to support its plans. The £1.24 million was on top of £13.46 million ACE granted it for 2023-24.

ACE chief executive Darren Henley said the announcement marked “the culmination of months of hard work by ENO”.

“ENO’s new base means excellent opera performances for new audiences and new ways for young people here to experience and participate in opera,” he said.

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