

Press Release

Embargoed until 12.00 BST on 18 October 2023

MANCHESTER'S NEW CULTURAL LANDMARK AVIVA STUDIOS OFFICIALLY OPENS

- The OMA-designed venue, the new permanent home of Factory International, is the UK's largest investment in a national cultural project since the opening of Tate Modern in 2000
- World-leading artists Danny Boyle, Es Devlin, Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy, Michael 'Mikey J' Asante and Sabrina Mahfouz collaborate on opening production *Free Your Mind*, a dramatic reimaging of the classic sci-fi film *The Matrix*
- 2024 programme highlights announced today include Robert Wilson and CocoRosie's adaptation of *The Jungle Book*, Ivan Blackstock's *TRAPLORD* and new works by Laurie Anderson, Maxine Peake and more

Manchester's landmark new cultural venue, Aviva Studios, the permanent home of Factory International, officially opens today (18 October 2023) with the world premiere of *Free Your Mind*, a large-scale immersive performance based on *The Matrix*. Bringing together a world-leading creative team and 50 professional dancers, this dramatic reimaging of the classic 1999 sci-fi film has been designed especially for Aviva Studios and takes place throughout the building's ultra-flexible spaces.

Directed by **Danny Boyle**, *Free Your Mind* brings together the visceral movement of choreographer **Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy** with a powerful score from renowned composer **Michael 'Mikey J' Asante** (co-founders and artistic directors of the Olivier award-winning *Boy Blue*), set design by world-leading artist and designer **Es Devlin** and the work of the acclaimed writer **Sabrina Mahfouz**.

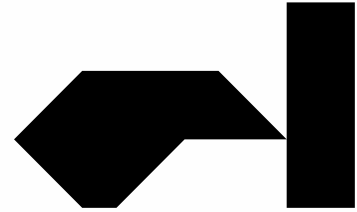
Designed by Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), Aviva Studios is a global destination for arts, music and culture located at the heart of the new St John's neighbourhood in Manchester, a burgeoning city centre hub for creativity and digital innovation. The development is led by Manchester City Council, with backing of £99.05m from HM Government and £7m National Lottery funding from Arts Council England. It is supported by Aviva, the UK's leading Insurance, Wealth and Retirement business, as principal partner to the venue.

The design of the 13,350-square-metre building is based around large, open, flexible spaces that can be constantly reconfigured, enabling artists to create large-scale ambitious works of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world, and providing a canvas to make, explore and experiment. The 21-metre-high Warehouse is the ultimate flexible performance space with capacity for up to 5,000 people standing. It is taller than four double decker buses stacked on top of each other and just under the

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length of a Boeing 747 aeroplane, and can be divided by a movable, full-height acoustic wall. The Hall features a flexible stage and can house an audience of up to 1,603 seated or 2,000 standing. The Warehouse and the Hall can also work together, with the proscenium capable of opening fully into the Warehouse and allowing the stage to run deeper into the building. The design of Aviva Studios has been led by OMA Partner Ellen van Loon and is the practice's first major public project in the UK.

Programmed and operated by Factory International, the organisation behind Manchester International Festival, Aviva Studios will host a year-round programme of original productions and special events across all artforms – from major exhibitions and concerts to intimate performances and immersive experiences.

2024 programme highlights, announced today, include original live performances by world-renowned artists. Visionary director **Robert Wilson** teams up with surreal folk duo **CocoRosie** to retell Kipling's renowned novel *Jungle Book* (March 2024), their fourth theatre collaboration; **Maxine Peake, Sarah Frankcom**, and **Imogen Knight** join forces with **Gazelle Twin** and **Daisy Johnson** to present a feminist theatrical reimagining of John Bowen's *Robin Redbreast* - first broadcast as part of the BBC's Play for Today series in 1970 and widely regarded as a precursor to *The Wicker Man* (*Robin/Red/Breast*, May 2024); award-winning dance artist and cultural innovator **Ivan Michael Blackstock** presents the Olivier award-winning *TRAPLORD* (Sept 2024), a dance performance meditating on life, death and rebirth; and a new music and multi-media theatrical experience by **Laurie Anderson**, *ARK* (Nov 2024) will explore how the world needs to change in order to be saved. Other highlights include a visual feast for the senses by the award-winning **Marshmallow Laser Feast** (July to Aug 2024), a stage spectacle combining Chinese and South Asian dance, data and video from multi-disciplinary artist **Keith Khan** (May 2024) and an interactive symphony by Chinese composer **Huang Ruo** and BBC Philharmonic (June 2024).

Following *Free Your Mind*, Aviva Studios will host *The Welcome* (11-19 Nov 23), a nine-day programme of music, circus, art and fashion developed by Greater Manchester residents – an invitation from local people to celebrate the new cultural space, **Johnny Marr** presents two nights of music with an orchestra made up of northern musicians (7-8 Dec), and a stage adaptation of **Oliver Jeffers'** award-winning book *Lost and Found* (13 Dec 23 – 6 Jan 24) from BAFTA award-winning director **Will Brenton** with music from **Gruff Rhys** of Super Furry Animals will close out the year.

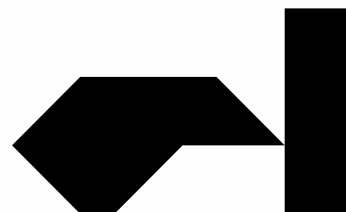
Aviva Studios will also add to the city's thriving music scene, presenting a rich selection of gigs, including in-house concerts and collaborations with local and national promoters. More details of these and other programme will be announced over the coming months.

As one of the most important cultural developments in Europe, Aviva Studios is predicted to add £1.1 billion to the economy of Manchester and the surrounding region over the next decade, creating or

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supporting up to 1,500 direct and indirect jobs and providing skills, training and creative opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Through the Factory Academy, Aviva Studios will become a major training centre for the creative workforce of the future, providing opportunities for careers in creative industries, Manchester's fastest-growing sector, while talent development initiatives will create opportunities for artists from the North of England, particularly those most underrepresented in the sector.

New opportunities, which have just opened for application, include **Artist Takeover**, a new Factory International programme which offers artists from any discipline the chance to experiment in Aviva Studios' flexible spaces, alongside guidance from industry experts; the annual **Factory Fellowship** which gives emerging artists the chance to work and learn alongside international creatives; and **Factory Sounds** which provides opportunities for creatives involved in Greater Manchester's music scene.

Reflecting Factory International's commitment to ensuring access to the widest possible audiences, 5,000 tickets have been made available for *Free Your Mind* at £10 or less as part of an affordable pricing strategy that will see discounted and Aviva £10 tickets for Manchester communities across its year-round programme.

John McGrath, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Factory International, said: "I'm so excited and proud to be welcoming audiences to the official opening of our magnificent new home. At every stage in imagining and building this extraordinary space, we have focused on creating new possibilities – for artists to let their imaginations fly, for citizens of Manchester and the world to meet and dream, and for people of all ages and backgrounds to build skills and gain experience. Our official opening production, the Matrix-inspired *Free Your Mind* has been created especially for this moment by an incredible team, alongside an extraordinary mix of dancers, creatives and local participants, and is uniquely designed to showcase the versatility and ambition of the space. We can't wait to welcome you all to experience it!"

Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of Manchester City Council, said: "Today is a landmark moment for culture not just in Manchester but the North of England and indeed the UK as a whole. This internationally-important venue, extraordinary in its scale and ambition, will open up a world of possibilities for people in this city – inspiring creativity and nurturing careers in the arts. As a major new visitor destination, Aviva Studios will also create and support a great many jobs and add to the vibrancy which makes Manchester such an exciting city. It's a unique venue, a real asset for the future which will stimulate minds and spirits as well as acting as a catalyst to economic growth and opportunities."

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Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England, said: “Aviva Studios is set to make a huge difference to the social, economic and cultural life of people across Greater Manchester and the North, as well as attracting national and international visitors to the city. Manchester International Festival has demonstrated that ambitious projects can stretch our imagination and that there is a need for a space of this size and versatility in Manchester. This extraordinary building will allow Factory International to build on its international reputation for developing and delivering world class artistic activity and will enable young people to forge a career in the arts. None of this would have been possible without the public funding invested in the development nor without the commitment of Manchester City Council and its belief that culture really can transform lives. Congratulations to everyone who has contributed to this landmark achievement.”

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said: “From dance and theatre to concerts and exhibitions, there will be something for everyone at this state-of-the-art new venue, which was made possible through nearly £100 million of government funding. Aviva Studios will maximise the potential of the creative industries in Manchester and beyond, creating opportunities for local talent and bringing more world-class culture to the city. The Government's support for this venue demonstrates our commitment to increasing access to arts and creativity across the country and I look forward to seeing the positive impact it brings to Manchester, both culturally and economically.”

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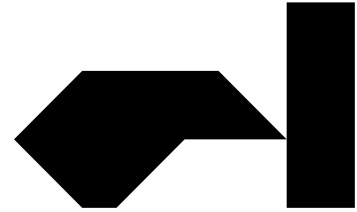
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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Factory International

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, its landmark new home in Manchester, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival every other year.

The design of Aviva Studios is led by Ellen van Loon of the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). Built with flexibility in mind, the building is based around large, open, adaptable spaces that can be constantly reconfigured, enabling artists to develop and create large-scale work of invention and ambition of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world.

A unique canvas to make, explore and experiment, audiences can enjoy the broadest range of art forms from major exhibitions and concerts to intimate performances and immersive experiences. The venue's development is led by Manchester City Council, with backing of £99.05m from HM Government and £7m National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

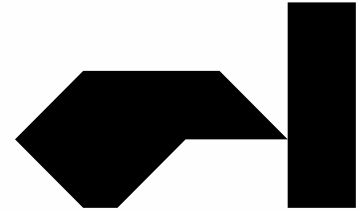
Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

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About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

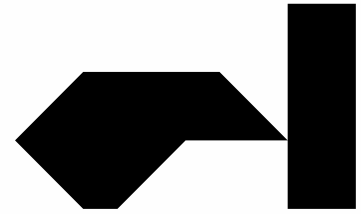
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