



Our Belfast

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THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE

Completed in 1895, the Grand Opera House in Belfast, first opened in the December of that year, becoming the most prestigious entertainment venue in Northern Ireland.

Designed by Frank Matcham, the Opera House is one of 20 surviving Matcham Theatres throughout the UK, which include the Hackney Empire, Tower Ballroom, Blackpool and the London Coliseum. Matcham is synonymous with theatre design even though he never actually qualified as an architect.



A Grand Opera House from Great Victoria Street
B The new extension
C Jessica and camera shy Nuala



Maeve, age 9



Maeve, age 9

With the introduction of television and the popularity of the cinema, the splendour of the Opera House was seen as old-fashioned, but following a renewed interest in Victorian buildings during the 1970's and a campaign by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, the building was both listed and restored.

The Opera House was substantially damaged by bombs targeting the Europa Hotel in both 1991 and 1993 and much had to be extensively rebuilt. However, the auditorium, the jewel of the Opera House (and indeed of any theatre), had little damage and remained mostly intact. The auditorium itself is thought to be the finest example of the oriental style applied to theatre architecture in the UK today.



Both images: Jessica, age 6

“Do you see the drums down there? I'd love to be down there!”

Conrad, age 11

It has hosted many famous names throughout the years including Gracie Fields, James Johnston, Van Morrison and Kenneth Branagh, and in 1963 it hosted the UK debut of Luciano Pavarotti as Lieutenant Pinkerton in a production of Madame Butterfly.

Last year, the Grand Opera House reopened following both restoration and extension to provide many new facilities including a small studio theatre, new dressing rooms and restaurant, which will enable the theatre to not only house many of the larger international touring companies, but also continue as an important entertainment venue within the city.



Background image: Conrad, age 11