

# Two Last Nights! Show Business in Georgian Britain

20 September 2019 - 5 January 2020

---



---

***Two Last Nights! Show Business in Georgian Britain*** is a how-to guide to going to a show in the eighteenth-century. Displayed throughout the whole Museum, this interactive exhibition will delve into the mechanics of theatre and concert going in eighteenth and nineteenth century England. With more than 100 objects on display, visitors will discover the surprising similarities and astonishing differences between theatre and festival-going then and now, including advertising, ticket sales, audience behaviour and dress code.

Going to a show flourished as a popular pastime in the eighteenth century and as a result, the entertainment industry saw rapid expansion: many theatres were built and music festivals began in both London and the provinces. These growing forms of entertainment contributed to the vast range of audience experiences we know today.

Audiences will get a fascinating glimpse of behind-the-scenes roles, from theatre managers, set designers and scenery-painters, to the refreshment sellers and ticket collectors. Discover how leading artists of the day, including Hogarth, Hayman and Lambert, crossed over into the world of show business as set designers and scenery painters.

Samuel Alken after  
Thomas Rowlandson,  
*Audience Scene* c1800  
© Gerald Coke  
Handel Foundation

The exhibition will explore key venues in London and the provinces, from the theatres of Drury Lane, Covent Garden and Richmond, to the

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and the Foundling Hospital Chapel, as well as the provincial music festivals of other major cities in Britain.

### **Georgian Theatre**

Highlights in this section include caricatures and drawings of Georgian audience members, who came to see and be seen. Specially designed fans detailed the seating arrangements in some theatres and opera houses: they helped the owners spot the rich and famous in the audience. One such opera fan in the exhibition is printed with the names of the occupants of the boxes for the 1800 season at the King's Theatre.

Original advertising, programmes and tickets will be displayed alongside information about how Georgian audiences purchased tickets and will detail the development of the modern-day 'box office'. Exhibition visitors will discover how ladies managed to avoid queuing for the toilets; how lighting levels determined the audience's choice of dress; the arrangements made for servants, such as the specially designed 'pigeon holes'; and systems for carriage parking.

Also on view will be a model of Britain's oldest working theatre and a 1785 set model from the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

### **Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens**

An important highlight of the exhibition will be an original eighteenth-century supper box painting, *Devil to Pay*, by Francis Hayman (1708-1776) which depicts the famous actress Kitty Clive. The painting, which hung in a supper box at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens from the 1730s, will be on public show for the first time in more than 200 years.

### **Foundling Museum Chapel**

Two Last Nights! will reveal the importance of the Foundling Hospital Chapel as a music venue in Georgian Britain. George Frideric Handel was a fervent supporter of the Foundling Hospital and from 1749 he gave an annual benefit concert, raising thousands of pounds for the Hospital. It was only after the *Messiah* performances in the Chapel that the work became popular and established itself in the British musical canon. Visitors will be able to explore images, manuscripts and tickets from the Museum's remarkable Gerald Coke Handel Collection, which has over 12,000 objects.

### **Music Festivals**

During the summer season, the chattering classes left the pungent city for their country houses, leading to the development of music festivals

outside London. Visitors will be able to discover how performers capitalised on the summer season and logistical complexities of staging a music festival, including the transport of staging, singers and instruments between venues, travelling only by horse and cart.

#### **Press enquiries**

Sophie Lealan, Brunswick Arts

+44 (0)20 7936 7801 / [foundling@brunswickgroup.com](mailto:foundling@brunswickgroup.com)

---

#### **Notes to editors**

**The Foundling Museum** explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of exhibitions and events celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 275 years. The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of his Messiah. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way in which the arts can support philanthropy.

**Coram** has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas. [coram.org.uk](http://coram.org.uk)

**Katharine Hogg** is Librarian of the Gerald Coke Handel Collection an internationally important collection of material relating to composer George Frideric Handel and his contemporaries, which is part of the Foundling Museum collection. Katharine was recently elected President of the UK & Ireland branch of International Association for Music Libraries (IAML). Katharine was previously Head Librarian at the Royal Academy of Music. She contributes to publications and broadcasts on library digitisation, music librarianship and Handel scholarship, and has curated several exhibitions at the Foundling Museum.

#### **Visitor Information**

The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ

+44 (0)20 7841 3600 / [foundlingmuseum.org.uk](http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk)

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 10:00-17:00, Sunday 11:00-17:00, Monday closed

Admission: Adults £13.20 with donation, Concessions £9.90 with donation.

Free for 21 & under, Foundling Friends & National Art Pass holders