

large, permanent outdoor rooms with canvas roofs edged with guttering. These tented structures are warmed with gas heaters and they are fenced around to stop customers running off without paying. There are on-going complaints that they look untidy and block views of the outstanding architecture of the square.

A debate on the look and management of outdoor catering in the Piazza is taking place as part of the updating of the Covent Garden Area Trust's Environmental Study of Central Covent Garden (first published in 1997). Together with Westminster City Council, English Heritage and freeholders Scottish Widows, the Trust has commissioned Peter Heath of WS Atkins to produce a second version of its useful handbook of guidelines. Two public meetings have already been held this year and everyone with responsibility for buildings within the Piazza area is being consulted.

If you feel strongly about the style of al fresco dining in the Piazza or would like to know more about the Covent Garden Area Trust, contact Leana Pooley, Trust Administrator on 020 7497 9245 or by e-mail to [admin@cgareatrust.org.uk](mailto:admin@cgareatrust.org.uk)

*Leana Pooley*

## Save London's Theatres Campaign

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The Save London's Theatres Campaign has had another busy year campaigning to preserve London's

unique stock of theatres.

Theatres provide work not only for performers, backstage and front of house staff, but for surrounding cafes, restaurants and pubs where the people who come to see the shows form a sizeable part of their clientele. If a theatre closes it affects the local population and none more so than the Covent Garden residents. This was one of our concerns over the – hopefully temporary – closure of the Shaftesbury where the theatre managers, the Theatre of Comedy, ran into trouble with Camden Council over the allegedly unacceptable sound levels of the drumming in the African show "Umoja". The show was forced to close, although it will re-open later at the Queens, because residents in adjoining flats complained. The Theatre of Comedy had spent nearly a quarter of a million on sound proofing and is currently spending even more to put things right. They are about to take their case to the courts to try to bring this situation to a satisfactory conclusion and see an end to this sword of Damocles constantly hanging over their heads. It would be very sad indeed if this wonderful theatre, which the Campaign saved from demolition in 1973, were to close permanently.

The rumoured conversion of the Hippodrome into flats and/or retail outlets is another cause for concern. Although no longer a live theatre, it would be quite possible to re-convert to its former use. Originally, this wonderfully central venue was built for use as a circus and water spectacle venue but later mounted many great musical shows. The writer's very first visit to a West End theatre was to the Hippodrome on New Year's Eve, 1947

to see the revue "Starlight Roof". The leading lady, Pat Kirkwood, was indisposed but the bill included comedian Vic Oliver and a little girl of 12 with long fair hair, who came running down the central aisle with a white fur coat round her shoulders to amaze the audience with her powerful soprano voice. Her name was Julie Andrews!

Westminster City Council have not yet received any formal application for change of use for the Hippodrome but we would urge CGCA members to write as soon as possible (with a copy to Save London's Theatres Campaign at Guild House, Upper St. Martin's Lane, WC2H 9EG) to Mr Richard Craig, Principal Planning Officer, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP, requesting information and the right to be consulted.

We have been assured that, contrary to rumour, the Arts Theatre is not threatened in any way at present, and will continue to stage exciting and challenging new plays.

SLTC's long campaign to save the Westminster Theatre has been unexpectedly given new hope. Lord Falconer at the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, has agreed to our request to "call in" the decision to demolish the Westminster, and the final decision on its fate will be made following the full Public Inquiry in the summer. It is very rare for the DTLR to grant such a request and has put new heart into all of us.

Finally, we are attempting to get the Duchess Theatre listed. This lovely