



## MARKING FIFTY YEARS WITH A CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY

**May 2018**

On 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018, 1,800 guests - comprised of members of the public, members of The Arts Society and leading figures from the arts world – will attend The Arts Society’s *Celebration of the Arts* at Westminster Abbey. The commemorative service will be an opportunity for the Society to thank members and volunteers who are at the heart of the organisation. *“It will be a day we say ‘this is who we are and why the arts matter more than ever’,”* says Chief Executive, Florian Schweizer.

The service will contain readings by acclaimed actor and theatre director, **Simon Callow** and singer/songwriter and broadcaster, **Cerys Matthews**. It will also feature performances of new compositions by London based jazz troupe, **Kansas Smitty's feat. Mike Garry**, and composer **Matthew Sheeran**. The address will be given by one of The Arts Society’s Accredited Lecturers and former Bishop of St Albans, the **Rt Revd Christopher Herbert**.

The Westminster Abbey service is a highlight of 2018 for the Society, which this year celebrates its golden anniversary. The Arts Society is marking its fiftieth year with a series of events that embrace one overriding theme; enriching lives through the arts.

This ethos dates back to the very beginning of the organisation, when in the 1960s, a group of forward thinking young women, eager to be educated about the arts, set up the first Society. The Arts Society approaches its fiftieth year with the same spirit of these early pioneers, with the ambition of opening up enjoyment of the arts to all.

The Arts Society is perhaps most recognised for its little black book of nearly 400 outstanding accredited lecturers who speak on whole host of topics relating to the arts. Over the last 50 years, however, the activities of the local Societies have grown to

encompass grant giving, volunteering in historic houses, museums, galleries, archives and gardens, making comprehensive records of the country's churches and organising arts projects for the youngest, oldest and most vulnerable in their communities – making significant impact at a local level.

This much beloved organisation, now with a membership of over 90,000 across 385 local Societies in the UK and overseas, has become part of the very fabric of the UK, playing a major role in keeping our arts and heritage alive for future generations.

Lloyd Grossman, President of The Arts Society, comments:

*“The Arts Society is both extraordinary and indispensable – not only for its work in arts and heritage education and conservation – but also for the sense of happiness and well-being it has brought to so many over the past fifty years.*

*Over five decades, its members have quietly contributed their time (through volunteering) and funds (through grant giving), to ensure the upkeep and safeguarding of our country's most treasured arts and heritage – for which we owe them a huge amount of appreciation.”*

During 2018, the organisation, which until May 2017 was known as the National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS), will acknowledge and celebrate its first fifty years as NADFAS, whilst looking ahead to the next chapter as The Arts Society.

The year kicked off with a major exhibition *Rhythm & Reaction; The Age of Jazz in Britain* at Two Temple Place, a magnificent Neo-Gothic mansion on London's Victoria Embankment (from 27 January – 22 April 2017). Produced in partnership with The Bulldog Trust, the exhibition marked 100 years since jazz reached Britain and brought together painting, prints, cartoons, textiles and ceramics, moving film, instruments and the all-important jazz sound to explicitly examine the influence of jazz on British art, design and wider society.

Following the Westminster Abbey event, The Arts Society will hold its 50<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting. Attendees will be treated to a performance by Arts Society grant recipients; luthier Alex Bishop playing his own handmade guitar and ballet dancer, Rishan Benjamin and fellow students from the Central School of Ballet.

At the AGM, Chief Executive, Florian Schweizer will announce a new grants scheme that will be launched in the autumn, which will award an extra £50,000 before the end of the jubilee year.

Other anniversary activities and initiatives include;

- A series of lectures in NewcastleGateshead as part of the Great Exhibition of the North's *Inspired By* programme this summer.

- Over the course of the jubilee year, the Society's Chief Executive has committed to complete fifty ten-kilometre runs, which will highlight The Arts Society's activities taking place at grass roots level and raise money for its charitable projects. His itinerary will cover locations around the UK and abroad to reflect the diverse communities and landscapes local Societies operate in, as well as the artistic and heritage connections in these areas. Along the way he will take in important sites such as Shakespeare's Birthplace, the Angel of the North, the potteries in Stoke-on-Trent, The Scallop in Aldeburgh, Conwy Castle, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and The Rock of Gibraltar.
- Local Societies will also be holding their own celebratory events; many are taking part in *ArtsFest* – a rare opportunity for the Society's members to show off their artistic talents, and over the weekend of 22-23 September 2018, Societies will partner with museums, galleries and heritage sites across the UK and abroad to offer unique events for members of the public. These events will highlight the treasures in their collections, as well as The Arts Society's volunteers and the wonderful work they do.

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#### EDITORS' NOTES:

The Arts Society is a leading arts education charity with a global network of 385 local Societies, which bring people together through a shared curiosity for the arts. Its events provide welcoming places – locally, nationally and globally – for everyone to hear expert lecturers share their specialist knowledge about the arts.

With 90,000+ members who contribute to and preserve our artistic heritage through volunteering and grants, The Arts Society works to create a better, healthier and more connected society. [www.theartsociety.org](http://www.theartsociety.org)

#### CONTACT:

For further press information please contact:  
Isabel Cooper / Press & Communications Manager  
[isabel@theartsociety.org](mailto:isabel@theartsociety.org) / +44 (0)20 3206 9322