

Hearing accessibility takes centre stage at Orange Tree Theatre

Orange Tree Theatre is a 'local theatre with a global reputation'.

Based in Richmond in southwest London, what started out in a pub in the 1970s is now one of the UK's top theatres, staging world-class performances as well as community productions.

In 2024 the theatre secured grant-funding to improve its accessibility for audience members with hearing loss. They contacted us for advice on the technology that would offer audience members the best listening experience..

Our engineers visited the theatre to carry out a survey to decide which of our assistive listening systems would produce the best sound quality in the auditorium.

The survey also included the entrance, where theatre-goers have their tickets scanned, and the bar area.

The theatre has an 'in the round' layout which means the performance takes place on a central stage with seating for the audience around the edges.

Our technical design team reviewed the data from the site survey and recommended a large area hearing loop system for the auditorium, powered by our V34 PRO driver.

They determined the best location for the loop cable would be around the perimeter of the balcony as this would make sure audiences can receive the loop signal no matter where in the theatre they sit. With powerful performance and excellent efficiency, the V34-Pro driver offers excellent speech and music reproduction.

The bar area was fitted with an IL-K200 under-the-counter hearing loop system. The discreet design offers clear sound in an area with a lot of background noise, enabling audiences to order their drinks easily.

The portable IL-PL20-2 was the best solution at the entrance, allowing the loop to be moved to where it is needed.

Our installations come ahead of an extensive project to improve accessibility at the theatre. 'OT Open to Everyone' will begin in 2026 and will improve the experience both front of house and backstage.

Production and Technical Director at the theatre, Phil Bell, said;

"We were very impressed by how helpful, fast and kind the team at Contacta is as well as how successful the induction loop has been since it has been installed. At Orange Tree Theatre, we believe that theatre is for all, and everyone's experience matters."

Theatre-goers have offered similarly positive feedback.

“The new hearing loop is exceptional!” one commented. “I was a little sceptical when the Front of House Manager said it would kick in when the show started, after some bad experiences in the past at theatres in the West End and elsewhere. I was pleasantly surprised by how easily my hearing aids connected with just one click of a button. Even from the balcony seat, I had no problems at all. It greatly enhanced my experience of the two shows I have attended.”