



**SOUND ASSOCIATES**  
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## Case Study

# Fairfield Halls expand their audience with alternative content

**A two year project culminated in November 2014 when Fairfield Halls launched their new cinema capabilities. The venue jumped two generations of technology by installing the latest 4k projectors, 7:1 surround sound and access to new content in their main auditorium, together with a new satellite dish on the roof.**

Whilst they have captured loyal audiences with their regular recipe of classical music, rock and pop, they wanted to fill up the dark hours in their weekly schedule by introducing events, embracing programmes from the National Theatre, Royal Opera House (ROH) and live rock performances, and adding new live content to corporate conferences. Based on the soft launch, the plan is already working.

One of the first screenings was the live transmission of the Spandau Ballet event from the Royal Albert Hall on 15th September 2014. This would challenge the new system to its limits, since it required flipping back and forth between a live feed of an interview with the band, the European premiere of their movie *The Soul Boys of the Western World* and a live performance of their greatest hits. It was to be the first time the newly installed equipment had been used in anger. Fortunately, the evening went off without a hitch and the new system had been well and truly christened.

The plan to expand the repertoire and attract new audiences is already yielding fruit, with audiences in the quieter periods up by threefold, and a full house in the dedicated areas for the hard launch – a Gala Screening of Disney's *Frozen Sing-Along* with celebrity guests in attendance. The new seasons of National Theatre and the ROH are proving popular with their traditional audience and the demographic is increasing from the alternative content.

Chris Whybrow, the Halls' Technical Manager, explains the key aims of the cinema update project: "we decided early that we would future proof the capabilities of the Concert Hall to meet everything we wanted to achieve now, and that it did not need expensive extras later."

The tendering process was exhaustive, with six responses being evaluated in a weighted process, and due care being taken to ensure best value for the client's budget. A panel

### Fact file:

**Founded:** 1962

**Main auditorium:** 1800 (2,000 including choir stalls)  
12 metre screen is the largest in the area.

**Key activities:** Community events, Theatre, Plays, Musicals, Opera, Orchestral, Comedy, Rock and Pop.

**Structure:** Not for profit charity with support from Croydon Council.

**Web:** [www.fairfield.co.uk](http://www.fairfield.co.uk)

**Address:** Fairfield Halls,  
Park Lane, Croydon,  
CR9 1DG



View from the Upper Stalls



Fairfield auditorium looking from the stage



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was set up, which came to a unanimous decision in favour of Sound Associates. “They listened”, continues Chris. “We are demanding, have tight budgets, but still want the best quality. In the end our team was confident that Sound Associates could offer the best service and be top in terms of value for money. We had to have a smooth implementation with no closures.”

Chris’s experience of working with the Sound Associates team has been positive. “Their added value was a key reason for choosing them, and the reduction in snagging efforts and the complete elimination of unanticipated variation orders have justified the decision. We remained open throughout the project too. All in all, this was the best experience of a large capital project that I have had.”

Sound Associates Managing Director Graham Lodge added, “We are delighted to have contributed to the success of this project. Fairfield Halls is a prestigious client who was a delight to work with. I am looking forward to more projects like this one, as more and more theatres see the benefits of having similar event cinema capabilities.”

The cinema project is part of a £ multi-million modernisation of Fairfield Halls, to bring the venue fully up to date and align it to the Westfield project due to open in central Croydon in the near future. Fairfield Halls will continue to be the main cultural hub of the area for many years to come, but it already has an advanced event and cinema facility to rival the best.

### Technical content:

Fairfield Halls was a substantial technical challenge for two reasons; its large size and the requirement to remove the screen and speakers to allow for other events such as classical or opera. The Barco DP4K-23B projector with Doremi integrated media block and Showvault fitted the bill as far as usability, brightness and quality were concerned. Datasat’s AP20 was chosen for its Dirac room equalisation, whose sound quality was essential for intelligibility in such a big auditorium. A roll-up screen and triamp speakers (provided by QSC) on custom trolleys were key elements, because everything had to be de-mountable. To enable the Event Cinema facility, the Halls commissioned Sound Associates to install a satellite dish on the roof, with switching so that feeds can be invoked at the push of a button. This facility was used for the Spandau Ballet event.

As a result of this installation, Fairfield Halls team can go from an empty stage to a full blown cinema experience in less than an hour.



Fairfield Halls at night



Fairfield Halls Projector room