

## **BIG SUPPORT FOR THREATENED THEATRE**

Staff at Exeter Northcott report that they have been "overwhelmed and thrilled" by expressions of support from the public following the announcement from Arts Council South West that it proposed to withdraw all funding from the professional producing theatre in 2009.

The theatre heard the news on the eve of re-opening after a year of closure during which it underwent a £2.1 million redevelopment, work which was part funded by Arts Council South West with an additional grant of £100,000.

Andy Sinclair, Press & PR Manager, said: "1,350 customers have so far signed a pledge of support to the theatre, and we have received more than 300 e-mails since bringing Arts Council South West's proposal to the attention of our audience and the wider public."

He continued: "An open group was set up on social networking website Facebook last week, and already has over 2,300 members. It is very gratifying to see the messages of support and surprise at the Arts Council's proposal, and also the lively threads of debate about arts funding in general that are taking place between the groups mainly young members. We also have a website at [www.saveexeternorthcott.com](http://www.saveexeternorthcott.com) where links to some very interesting local, regional and national coverage in the newspapers and broadcast media can be found."

"Some people have asked us what Arts Council South West means when it refers to "concerns" that it has that the theatre has not met. These fall into four main areas, those of Artistic Policy, Governance, the Capital Redevelopment Project and Staff Structure. We are happy to say that all of these issues have been addressed, or are in an advanced stage of being addressed. Because of this we would ask people please to keep writing - with confidence - to us and also to Nick Capaldi Director of Arts Council South West and also to Christopher Frayling, Chair of Arts Council England in London, and to Ben Bradshaw, Minister for the South West, who has been very supportive of our cause. Please do contact the theatre if you would like more information on this."

In other good news the theatre reported that booking for the new and diverse spring season of productions and events has been "very brisk", and that the current production - the family pantomime Cinderella - has currently sold almost 200 more seats than Dick Whittington finished on in 2005 and, with 4 weeks and 37 performances still to go, only needs to sell 526 seats to overtake the final audience numbers for Aladdin in 2006.