

New city music venue NX Newcastle to create 100 new jobs in £1.75m project

A London music group is set to create 100 jobs as it transforms the former O2 Academy in Newcastle into a new music venue.

The venue on Westgate Road – which originally opened as a cinema in the 1920s – is undergoing a £1.75m overhaul to become NX Newcastle, the latest venture by London based Electric Group.

It will reopen in October following the makeover, which will add new mezzanine platforms to improve the flow of movement throughout the space.

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Electric Group has already transformed legendary 80s and 90s club The Fridge in Brixton into Electric Brixton and transformed Bristol's SWX, and says it is aiming to create a more intimate experience both for artists and Newcastle gig-goers.

Co-founder and CEO Dominic Madden said: "By slightly reducing the capacity of the main room and adding standing mezzanine staircases on either side, as well as an additional mezzanine platform at the front of the circle, we'll improve the line of sight between musicians and the audience, bringing music fans closer to artists so there can be a greater sense of connection between them."



l-r Electric Group's promotion manager Ben Townley and head of music Mike Weller at the newly renamed NX Newcastle as work begins on a £1.75m refurbishment

(Image: Dawn McNamara Photography)

"We're hugely excited to provide a 21st century venue for the city that nurtures emerging creative talent as well as forming a major stop on the international tours of the highest calibre; today's biggest music acts and DJs."

All staff at NX will also be trained as part of Shout Up!, the Newcastle City Council-backed scheme to eliminate sexual harassment from Newcastle's night-time economy.

Mike Weller, Electric Group's head of music, added: "Front and centre we'll be programming a series of daytime events to complement gigs, and on club nights we'll be open till 4am. There'll be incredible music experiences for absolutely everyone to enjoy, and we look forward to confirming upcoming acts in the summer."

Both Mr Weller and Mr Madden have close ties with the North East, with family nearby, and each have spent a lot of time in Newcastle working up plans for NX Newcastle, saying it has been a development that has been years in the making. Once improvements are complete, the new-look space will accommodate 2,095 people on club nights, and 1,600 during live music gigs.

Open from 7pm to 11pm most nights, the owners hope NX Newcastle will emulate the success of the group's flagship venue, Electric Brixton, which attracts around 350,000 visitors a year.

Mr Madden added: "Electric Group is proud of our venues, our people, and the communities in which we have deep roots. We hope to long continue to make a valuable contribution to the culture of Newcastle with the introduction of NX."

The imposing building on Westgate Road dates back to 1927 when it started life as a cinema before becoming a ballroom and later a bingo hall. Following a major refit by Academy Music Group it reopened as a gig and club venue with two halls in 1995, welcoming the likes of Adele, Groove Armada, the Prodigy, Paloma Faith and Rita Ora.

The Electric Group snapped up the premier music venue after the building was put on the market in 2015 with a guide price of £625,000 by Newcastle City Council to make savings after announcing swathing cuts to funding.

At the time there was just six years left on the lease, paving the way for Electric Group's grand plans when tenants Academy Music Group moved out earlier this year to focus on its Grade II listed venue, Newcastle City Hall, which is also undergoing major refurbishment work ahead of a programme of concerts this year including Florence + The Machine, Paul Weller, Dionne Warwick and The Prodigy.

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