

PRESS RELEASE
Thursday 23 February 2023



Major gift and donation to help V&A secure David Bowie's archive for the nation:

Over 80,000 items spanning six decades of the cultural icon's career to be made available to the public for the first time



Today, the V&A announces it will secure the archive of **David Bowie** for the nation – revealing the creative processes of one of the most pioneering and influential figures in the history of live and recorded music, film, fashion and beyond. From 2025, the archive will be made available to the public, from fans to school children and researchers, through the creation of **The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts** at V&A East Storehouse, in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The acquisition and creation of

The Centre has been made possible thanks to the David Bowie Estate and a generous donation of £10m from the Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group.

Encompassing more than 80,000 items, the archive traces Bowie's creative processes as a musical innovator, cultural icon, and advocate for self-expression and reinvention from his early career in the 1960s to his death in 2016. Alongside the creation of the new Centre, the gift will support the ongoing conservation, research, and study of the archive.

Dr Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, said: *"David Bowie was one of the greatest musicians and performers of all time. The V&A is thrilled to become custodians of his incredible archive, and to be able to open it up for the public. Bowie's radical innovations across music, theatre, film, fashion, and style – from Berlin to Tokyo to London – continue to influence design and visual culture and inspire creatives from Janelle Monáe to Lady Gaga to Tilda Swinton and Raf Simons. Our new collections centre, V&A East Storehouse, is the ideal place to put Bowie's work in dialogue with the V&A's collection spanning 5,000 years of art, design, and performance. My deepest thanks go to the David Bowie Estate, Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group for helping make this a reality and for providing a new sourcebook for the Bowies of tomorrow."*

Spanning Bowie's career, the archive features handwritten lyrics, letters, sheet music, original costumes, fashion, photography, film, music videos, set designs, Bowie's own instruments, album artwork and awards. It also includes more intimate writings, thought processes and unrealised projects, the majority of which have never been seen in public before.

Highlights include stage costumes such as Bowie's breakthrough *Ziggy Stardust* ensembles designed by Freddie Burretti (1972), Kansai Yamamoto's flamboyant creations for the *Aladdin Sane* tour (1973) and the Union Jack coat designed by Bowie and Alexander McQueen for the *Earthling* album cover (1997). The archive also includes handwritten lyrics for songs including *Fame* (1975), *"Heroes"* (1977) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1980), as well as examples of the "cut up"

method of writing introduced to Bowie by the writer William Burroughs. Additionally, the archive holds a series of intimate notebooks from every era of Bowie's life and career.

The archive also includes a photo collage of film stills from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1975-76), directed by Nicolas Roeg and featuring Bowie, and over 70,000 photographs, prints, negatives, large format transparencies, slides and contact sheets taken by some of the 20th century's leading photographers from Terry O'Neill to Brian Duffy and Helmut Newton. Among other highlights are instruments, amps, and other equipment, including Brian Eno's EMS Synthesizer from Bowie's seminal *Low* (1977) and "Heroes" albums and a Stylophone – a gift from Marc Bolan in the late 1960's, used on Bowie's seminal *Space Oddity* recording.

Sir Leonard Blavatnik, Founder and Chairman of Access Industries, and the Blavatnik Family Foundation, said: *"We are very proud to support the V&A and allow for the creation of this irreplaceable archive to preserve and showcase David Bowie's iconic career. His influence on music and popular culture throughout the world cannot be overstated."*

Max Lousada, CEO, Recorded Music, Warner Music Group, said: *"As the stewards of David Bowie's extraordinary music catalogue, we're delighted to expand our relationship with his estate through this partnership with the V&A. This archive promises to be an unparalleled display of individual artistic brilliance, invention, and transformation. Bowie's influence only grows in stature over time, and this will be an enduring celebration of his profound legacy."*

A spokesperson from the David Bowie Estate, said: *"With David's life's work becoming part of the UK's national collections, he takes his rightful place amongst many other cultural icons and artistic geniuses. The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts – and the behind the scenes access that V&A East Storehouse offers – will mean David's work can be shared with the public in ways that haven't been possible before, and we're so pleased to be working closely with the V&A to continue to commemorate David's enduring cultural influence."*

Nile Rodgers, said: *"I believe everyone will agree with me when I say that when I look back at the last 60 years of post-Beatles music that if only one artist could be in the V&A it should be David Bowie. He didn't just make art, he was art!"*

Tilda Swinton, one of David Bowie's friends and collaborators, said: *"In 2013, the V&A's David Bowie Is... exhibition gave us unquestionable evidence that Bowie is a spectacular example of an artist, who not only made unique and phenomenal work, but who has an influence and inspiration far beyond that work itself. Ten years later, the continuing regenerative nature of his spirit grows ever further in popular resonance and cultural reach down through younger generations. In acquiring his archive for posterity, the V&A will now be able to offer access to David Bowie's history – and the portal it represents – not only to practicing artists from all fields, but to every last one of us, and for the foreseeable future. This is a truly great piece of news, which deserves the sincerest gratitude and congratulations to all those involved who have made it possible."*

V&A East Storehouse will be a new type of museum experience designed within and around the V&A's stored collections. Taking visitors behind the scenes, it will enable unprecedented access to the nation's collections, in a new purpose-built home for over 250,000 objects, 350,000 books and 1,000 archives. V&A East Storehouse brings together conservation labs,

working stores, research and reading rooms with galleries, display and performance spaces and creative studios – brought together through an extensive public network centred around the Collections Hall, to create a unique experience for visitors. At The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts at V&A East Storehouse, from 2025, fans will be able to get up-close and gain new insights into Bowie's creative process like never before.

The David Bowie Archive joins the V&A's Theatre & Performance collections, which includes the archives of influential individuals and organisations, from **Vivien Leigh** to **Peter Brook**, **Akram Khan Dance Company**, **The Royal Court Theatre** and **Glastonbury Festival**. The acquisition follows the V&A's ground-breaking 2013 exhibition, *David Bowie Is...*, which marked the first time a museum had been given unprecedented access to the David Bowie Archive. The exhibition was seen by over two million people around the world as part of its international tour, becoming one of the V&A's most popular exhibitions of all time.

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For further PRESS information about The David Bowie Archive and the V&A, please contact Laura Mitchell on l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk / 020 3949 4509 and Phoebe Moore on p.moore@vam.ac.uk / 020 7942 2495 (not for publication).

A selection of press images and T&Cs are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Image Credit: Striped bodysuit for the *Aladdin Sane* tour, 1973. Design by Kansai Yamamoto. Photograph by Masayoshi Sukita © Sukita

About V&A East

One of the UK's most significant new museum projects, V&A East celebrates global creativity and builds on the V&A's long-standing heritage in east London and founding mission to make the arts accessible to all. Currently under construction in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, V&A East encompasses two new sites – V&A East Storehouse at Here East and V&A East Museum on the Stratford Waterfront.

V&A East is committed to creating opportunities for young people and fostering the next generation of creatives. Across its two sites, it will celebrate making, highlight under-represented movements and perspectives, and support the creation of new work. V&A East is part of East Bank, the Mayor of London's Olympic legacy project to create a new arts, innovation, and education hub in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.
vam.ac.uk/east

About the V&A's Theatre and Performance collection

Designated the UK's National Collection of Performing Arts, the V&A's Theatre and Performance collection is dedicated to the history, design, and practice of the performing arts, both live and recorded, with a focus on drama, dance, music, opera, popular entertainment, and film. Founded in 1924 by Gabrielle Enthoven, the collection is one of the oldest and most significant in the world.

About the Blavatnik Family Foundation

The Blavatnik Family Foundation supports world-renowned educational, scientific, cultural, and charitable institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and across the globe. Led by Sir Leonard Blavatnik, founder and chairman of Access Industries, the Foundation advances and promotes innovation, discovery, and creativity to benefit the whole of society. Over the past decade, the Foundation has contributed more than \$1 billion to over 250 organisations.

About Warner Music Group

With a legacy extending back over 200 years, Warner Music Group (WMG) today brings together artists, songwriters, and entrepreneurs that are moving entertainment culture across the globe. Operating in more than 70 countries through a network of affiliates and licensees, WMG's Recorded Music division includes renowned labels such as 300 Entertainment, Asylum, Atlantic, Big Beat, Canvasback, Elektra, Erato, First Night, Fueled by Ramen, Nonesuch, Parlophone, Reprise, Rhino, Roadrunner, Sire, Spinnin', Warner Records, Warner Classics, and Warner Music Nashville. WMG's music publishing arm, Warner Chappell Music, has a catalog of over one million copyrights spanning every musical genre, from the standards of the Great American Songbook to the biggest hits of the 21st century. Warner Music Group is also home to ADA, the independent artist and label services company – as well as next gen artist services division WMX, which includes consumer brands such as Songkick, the live music app; EMP, the merchandise e-tailer; UPROXX, the youth culture destination; and HipHopDX, the hip-hop music news site. In addition, WMG counts storytelling powerhouse Warner Music Entertainment and social media content creator IMGN among its many brands. Follow WMG on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).