

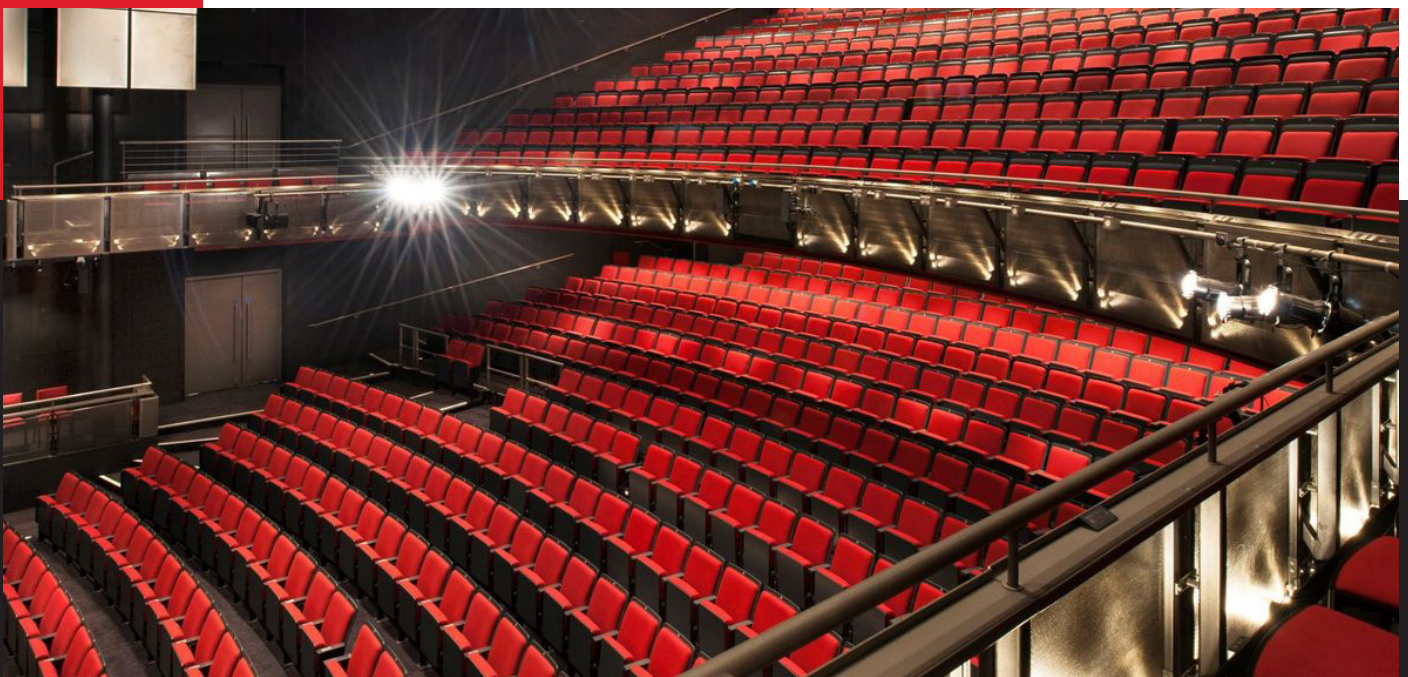


Case Study:

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE PROTEST ACTION



PRINCIPAL
SECURITY CONSULTANTS Ltd





The Client



Principal Security Consultants Ltd

Project

Security Services for Theatre during
Protests and Demonstrations

Location

Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, UK

Dates

March 2024 – September 2024

The Background

Sadler's Wells Theatre is an iconic performing arts venue located in London and is one of the oldest entertainment venues in the capital having welcomed audiences there since 1683. Known as birthplace of the English Ballet Company, Birmingham Royal Ballet and English National Opera the site was transformed into a purpose-built dance theatre in the 1990's with the theatre becoming the forefront of the global dance world.

In the 2024, the theatre became the target of a series of protests due to its grass roots dance programmes, giving dance lessons and scholarships to prestigious dance schools to under privileged, yet talented dancers. While the programmes were not controversial, their sponsors Barclays Bank were due to their involvement in financing Israeli defence companies involved in the war in Gaza.

Protesters had been targeting Barclays Bank facilities in London, however, where their attacks were largely thwarted due to the bank large security budget... they moved their attention to the theatre as it was high profile enough to gain media attention for their cause, yet the theatre had never been targeted in such a way and had weak security protocols the protestors could exploit.

The first attacks on the theatre were protestors rushing the stage at high profile performances and throwing red paint on themselves and the performers to signify blood. Protests at the theatre continued to escalate, with demonstrators gathering outside the theatre, disrupting performances, blocking entrances, and creating a tense atmosphere for performers, staff and patrons.

The theatre needed a comprehensive security strategy to ensure the safety of everyone involved while allowing performances to continue as scheduled.



The Challenges

The primary security concerns for Sadler's Wells Theatre included:

Crowd Management: Protests outside the theatre led to large crowds gathering, some of which engaged in disruptive behaviour that could impact theatre operations, endanger patrons, and damage the venue's reputation.

Physical Safety: Protestors occasionally attempted to breach security barriers, and there were concerns about potential physical confrontations between protestors and theatre patrons, performers, or staff members.

Threat of Property Damage: The theatre was at risk of vandalism, including graffiti or damage to the building's exterior or equipment, given the heightened tensions and the aggressive nature of some protests.

Negative Public Perception: Protests could cause disruptions to performances, creating a negative experience for audiences and possibly influencing ticket sales and the theatre's public image.

Legal and Compliance Issues: The theatre had to comply with local laws regarding freedom of speech and assembly, while also ensuring the safety and security of everyone on the premises.

The Solutions

Tailored Security Services

To address these challenges, Sadler's Wells Theatre engaged a professional security service provider to implement a tailored security plan that focused on preventing disruptions, maintaining a safe environment, and ensuring the continuation of theatre operations.

► Risk Assessment and Strategic Planning

The first step was conducting a thorough risk assessment to understand the nature of the protests, the demographics of the protestors, and potential threats. This assessment helped design a security plan specific to the theatre's needs, including the volume of visitors, protest dynamics, and risk levels.

- **Protest Locations:** The security team analysed protest sites, considering areas around the main theatre entrance, backstage areas, and loading docks.
- **Incident Scenarios:** Potential scenarios were evaluated, such as clashes between protestors and theatre-goers, attempts to block the theatre's entrances, or property damage to the venue.

► Enhanced Crowd Control and Access Management

The security service implemented a robust crowd management strategy to minimise the impact of protests on theatre operations and ensure the safety of patrons and staff.

- **Perimeter Security:** Security personnel were deployed around the perimeter of the theatre, including key entrances and exits. Physical barriers, such as barriers and fences, were erected to prevent protestors from blocking the entrances and to ensure safe movement of people in and out of the building.
- **Access Control:** Entry points were monitored by security guards, with metal detectors and bag checks introduced to prevent protestors from bringing in harmful items (such as paint, signs, or other materials that could lead to property damage).



- ▶ **Crowd Monitoring:** Security teams used handheld radios and closed-circuit surveillance cameras to monitor protestor movement and detect early signs of trouble. Coordination with local law enforcement was set up to ensure quick responses in case of escalations.

- ▶ **De-escalation Tactics**

Security personnel were trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation tactics to ensure that any interaction with protestors remained peaceful and controlled.

- ▶ **Dialogue and Communication:** Some protestors were more open to dialogue than others. Trained security staff served as mediators, offering to communicate with protest leaders to de-escalate tensions and encourage peaceful demonstrations away from the venue entrances.
- ▶ **Visible Security Presence:** A strong, but non-confrontational, security presence was maintained. This communicated to both patrons and protestors that the theatre was taking steps to ensure safety without being overly aggressive.

- ▶ **On-Site and Covert Surveillance**

A combination of on-site personnel and a covert surveillance team provided by us, ensured comprehensive monitoring of the situation both inside and outside the theatre.

- ▶ **5. Security at Key Points**

Particular attention was given to critical areas within and around the theatre where protests were most likely to escalate.

- ▶ **Theatre Entrances:** Security personnel stood guard at all entrances, ensuring smooth access for patrons while keeping protestors at a safe distance. Only ticket-holding patrons were allowed to enter through secure checkpoints.

- ▶ **Backstage Areas:** Security protocols ensured that protestors could not breach backstage areas where actors and crew were preparing for the show. This was vital to protecting performers and production teams from any confrontations.
- ▶ **VIP Protection:** High-profile figures, including actors, directors, and invited dignitaries, were given additional protection by specialized security staff. VIP access was controlled and monitored to avoid any security risks.

A covert team was displayed outside of the venue, focusing on possible staging areas, where protestors would organise themselves away from the venue before making their way to the site. Covert officers were deployed along all pedestrian routes to the site, and had intel of known or troublesome protestors, so their presence could be reported to control well before they arrived on site. This gave on-site security time to prepare and lock-down vulnerable areas before protestors arrived.

▶ **Legal and Compliance Support**

The security team worked closely with the venue's legal advisors, local law authorities and emergency services advisors to ensure that all actions taken complied with public assembly laws while maintaining the safety of the venue and individuals.

- ▶ **Engagement with Authorities:** Coordination with the Metropolitan Police ensured that a balanced approach was taken toward managing the protests. The local neighbourhood police team provided support for large protest events and handled any necessary crowd dispersal if the protests turned violent.
- ▶ **Public Safety Measures:** Clear signage was placed on the premises indicating the theatre's stance on peaceful protests and the legal boundaries for assembly. The security team ensured these guidelines were respected while preserving the theatre's right to operate uninterrupted.

The Execution

The implementation of the security strategy was carried out smoothly, ensuring that the protests were managed effectively without compromising the theatre's operations. Key outcomes included:

- ▶ **No Disruptions to Performances:** All scheduled performances took place as planned, with no cancellations or major delays. Patrons were able to enter and exit the venue safely, and the protests did not interfere with the artistic content.
- ▶ **Controlled Protests:** While protests continued outside, they were managed with minimal incidents. In some cases, protestors chose to conduct their demonstrations peacefully at a designated distance from the theatre, with security officers facilitating their movement to avoid confrontations.
- ▶ **Minimised Property Damage:** The theatre building remained undamaged, and no incidents of vandalism or destruction occurred. The proactive security measures ensured that any potential threats to the property were neutralized before they could escalate.
- ▶ **Positive Public Response:** Despite the external tensions, patrons and staff reported feeling safe and supported. The theatre's reputation for handling the protests with professionalism and care was praised by both the public and media.

The Outcome

The theatre successfully navigated the challenge of protests without experiencing significant disruptions or security breaches. The tailored security services contributed to the following outcomes:

- ▶ **Zero Major Security Incidents:** No violent clashes occurred, and no property was damaged during the protests.
- ▶ **Uninterrupted Operations:** All performances proceeded as scheduled, with patrons able to attend without fear of disruption or harm.
- ▶ **Effective Risk Mitigation:** The combination of physical security measures, covert surveillance, and trained personnel helped mitigate risks and prevent escalation.



The Lessons Learned

Proactive Planning and Flexibility: A flexible, responsive security plan that could adapt to the changing dynamics of the protests was crucial. Continuous risk assessment and adjustment were key to managing the situation.

Protestor Engagement: Engaging with protest leaders and maintaining an open line of communication helped de-escalate tensions and avoid unnecessary confrontations.

Coordination with Authorities: Close cooperation with emergency services and legal advisors ensured that security measures remained within legal bounds and were effective in maintaining public order.

The Conclusion

The security services provided for the Sadler's Well Theatre during the protest period were instrumental in ensuring both the safety of staff and patrons and the continuity of operations. By implementing a comprehensive and adaptable security strategy, the theatre was able to protect its employees and facilities while allowing peaceful protests to occur without major disruption. This case highlights the importance of strategic planning, professional security management, and effective communication in handling protest-related challenges in public venues.





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This work was undertaken by Total Security and Cleaning Services Ltd, who changed their name to GuardTec Security and Patrol UK Ltd from January 2026.