

## Reflection Paper

### Graduation Studio, House of Music. New and World-class Concert Hall for London.

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The graduation project 'Festivity from City to Seat' conducted under the graduation lab Interiors Building Cities on the theme of Festive City expands upon the notion of designing '*House of Music*', a concert hall at the core of the City of London. The studio raises questions on the type and typology of 'spaces for performances' that have evolved throughout history. It questions the nature of 'celebration' and 'etiquette' in such places as have been observed through the ages and generations of society, and also probes how this 'cultural monument'; that is the concert hall; be treated in today's times. In that respect, I would like to reflect upon the decisions I made during research and design process; the inferences and comparisons and how they have been applied as design considerations for building a contemporary concert hall in London.

The Museum of London is the site which is invested by the competition brief formulated in order to give an architectonic shape to the intentions of the alliance of the London Symphony Orchestra, The Barbican management and the Guildhall School for Music & Drama whose aim is to give London a concert hall that has acoustical qualities equivalent to the famous concert hall all around the world. For its induced modernistic nature, the site is an entangle of roads punctured by outstanding buildings and voids. It is 'per se' a monument to the contradictions of the modern age, the product of several urban re-shapements that are the outcome of dystopic eras, as the WWII has been. The site at the edge of the Barbican Estate by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, known as an iconic masterpiece of British Brutalist architecture in the heart of the City of London; is the ensemble of Museum of London, the Bastion Office Tower and Ironmongers hall. The site according to the competition brief is made available as the Museum of London will be demolished by moving it to a new location in Smithfield Market. The parcel of land on which the Ironmonger hall stands has been incorporated in my project such that the site becomes available for the required footprint of the concert hall and also could do justice with the unfinished or incomplete edge of the Barbican Estate with my project being the closer of the Barbican broken edge and high-walk circuit towards the Saint Paul's and as well the gateway to connect the fragmented public places inside the Barbican Estate.

#### ***Research and design***

The research seminars were parallel to the MSc 3 studio, which asked us to achieve a better understanding about the concert hall and its parameters in relation to the graduation lab's theme of a Festive city through research. Apart from reviewing the functional and anthropological parameters, we also understood the intangibles that is how a visitor perceives the space, its impact on human mind as well as social behavior. The precedent seminar encapsulated the study of Urban London, Theatres in London and contemporary European concert halls.

The study of London and its theaters was necessary, as urban artefacts help to perceive the city in a holistic way. Hence an in-depth perspective of Londoners and the little or huge things that characterized 'festive' for them were encapsulated in the first book of city of London. London walks were explored to have a broad understanding of its different characters, as well as to understand how notions differ with diaspora, cultures and settlements. The walks of the Nash sequence, the exhibition road, the south embankment and the Columbia road to Tate modern were all distinct in nature, of which I found the Nash Sequence most interesting. Secondly, raw essentials of urban space making were acknowledged all over London; and these elements were identified to be incorporated in the architecture of the concert hall to draw people in for 'festivities'. Thirdly, to establish an understanding of how architecture can trigger physical, physiological and psychological well-being for people. This research, thus aimed at analyzing the festivities of London, where experience of shaping one's environment is a fundamental part of a well-lived life.

The nature of concert halls, in terms of physicality and social experience has evolved over time with respect to the society, the nature of people, hall designs, and a general reflection of the era. The streets that acted as foyer spaces previously, eventually have become a part of the building, thereby the concert hall evolving as a public place rather than a theatre. Thus the second and third book aimed to understand the Urban London, London theatres and contemporary European concert halls. The further precedent study included field trips to different concert halls in the Netherlands and Europe to get better understanding of the halls, the outcome of which was a collective booklet as a result of the findings.

A comparison between an International (the Berlin Philharmonie) and a Dutch concert hall (the Muziekgebouw Frits Philips, Eindhoven) was undertaken with intermittent references to various other 'places of musical symphony' from all over the world. This discourse was an attempt to understand and compare two major concert halls that took shape in two different countries as a product of its history, society and socio-cultural norms. The architectural intentions behind the Berlin Philharmonie as a unison of 'people forming a circle around the music' in a post war Germany and as a representation of people's inner most nature in the Muziekgebouw Frits Philips are compelling examples of sensitizing architecture to suit not just a desirable neighborhood, but its larger political and cultural scenario.

### ***Approach and design methodology***

The derived inferences were applied as design considerations and have fed into the general concept, understanding of various phenomena on the urban and mass level that helped in taking informed design decisions and forming a sensitive, responsive design that caters to the needs of our present context and the world stage simultaneously. There are various approaches to the design and intent of a concert hall, architecturally, but this studio delves deeper into concerns of not just architectural design, but social behavior, history, interiors and contextual relevance. The initial concept of the building was envisioned as 'a place of gathering for all'. The idea of making a 'place for the people', 'of the people' and shaped 'by the people' has been attempted in two manners - a) responding sensitively to the existing context b) Re-shaping traditions and patterns of audience behavior.

For the P1 we were asked to perceive a space where we can imagine ourselves listening to a piece of music. The model initiated with an exercise where we listened to two pieces of classical music, in order to gain an inspiration for designing the space. While shaping the place, I considered the movement of people and the shift in light throughout the day to carve out a space casted by handmade mold. This eventually became the theme of my project, whereby spaces of festivity were carved out using movement of people and light as tools. This strategy was implemented at an urban level in a 1:500 model where the solid served as the space required for program and the void indicated the movement in terms of urban connection in response to the Barbican Estate, the Roman Wall and the Saint Paul's. The site also had the opportunity to be developed as a gateway to the Barbican while moving from south bank public buildings to St Paul. It was difficult to reflect on the language of the context on an urban scale, as the Barbican had a strong grid and my approach of concert hall juxtaposed that language. The urban court that was formed served as an extension to the urban street. Even the interiors were planned as the extensions of this urban court. After ample efforts, trial and errors and with the guidance from the tutors, the strategy was achieved at every stage. Of all, the design of façade was a difficult task. But referring to the previous models and inferences from it, the façade design was finally achieved in tune with my design theme. Here the façade is not just the skin of the building, but an extension to the carved out interior spaces, thereby unifying the design.

Henceforth, the design evolved through scale models, where the scale shifted from 1:500 to 1:20. Initially it was difficult to manage the shift in scales, but eventually the results were noteworthy. The 1:20 scale model done in the last quarter after P3, assisted in designing to the minutest detail. The physical models were made to assess and derive the spatial narrative and ambience of the hall. Photography was used as a tool to create visuals and three-dimensional understanding of the building in terms of interiors as well as exteriors. This model built for the scenography was the first time that I'd dealt with this scale through the course of architecture. As the scale reduced, the perception of space was better understood. This jump between the scales assured that the design stayed connected to the main concept throughout the design process.

### **Wider social context**

For me house of music is a public place having qualities and nature of a public building similar to those on the south bank. I believed, the festive character of the Barbican with its public institutions should be the main icon on the route from London eye, passing through Royal festival hall, National theatre, Tate Modern, via Millennium Bridge to Barbican art center and further to the St. Luke's. The character of the House of Music should be iconic to express its public character between the commercial context, but also merge with the broken, unfinished edge of Barbican. To serve this purpose, the proposed facade has been created with precast concrete panels having bushed hammered concrete finish similar to the Barbican but scaled down to act as a decorative element, withstanding the era of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The connected fabric of streets, plazas, shopping complexes, musical and cultural interfaces as a combination for people to explore forms a stimulating social core. Here, rather than disregarding the value of these places of important historical and cultural value, I have tried to connect them in physical, social and urban design terms. What was previously a high-walk in the Museum of London transporting one to the Barbican, has been retained. The sequential journey of the urban street, court and then a further

extension to it act as a 'Gateway to the Barbican', linking the visitor to the high-walks and subsequent terraces and auditorium of the Barbican Centre. In this process, the Roman wall, garden and existing lake have all been attempted to become an indulgent part of one's journey as one experiences this urban 'trail'. These decisions answered major question of how the design would serve to extend the major festive route of London, like the White cross street which has a street food culture or the Columbian road flower market and Brick lane fly market.

With regard to the re-shaping traditions and patterns of social behavior, here, tradition does not imply complete change to what has been observed in decades. It is rather, a subtler intervention in terms of programmatic variations of shows, for eg. of introducing multiple genres of music to attract a wider and more open audience base. It is an attempt to give back to the people by creating a public space that has taken roots from the history but also allows new perspectives and aspirations. As Herbert Von Karajen hoped for the Philharmonie to be a place for all Berliners to meet, so should the design of this concert hall in London be a demonstration of pure intentions, urban processes and a 'third place' for all Londoners, beyond lines of divisions so visible in our society today. The idea is to aspire for the hall to be a reflection of a more humane, considerate and accommodating society and to serve music beyond all purposes.