

HOUSE OF MUSIC

a reflection

Rozemarijn de Vries
4080130

Msc 4 (2017-2018) | Interiors, Buildings, Cities
Tutors | Daniel Rosbottom, Sam De Vocht, Mauro Parravincini
Board of examiners delegate | Ana Maria Fernandez Maldonado

Simon Rattle has recently returned to the United Kingdom to become the new conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. With his return the debate of the London concert halls rose once again. Although London has several concert halls, such as the Royal Festival Hall, the Royal Albert Hall and the concert hall of the Barbican Centre, they all lack in their acoustic capabilities to be a world-class concert hall. The project *London Centre for Music* was called to life to foresee London of a world-class concert hall that fits the needs of the London Symphony Orchestra in size and acoustical performance and is suited for a cultural metropolis such as London. The Msc 3/4 *Interiors, Buildings, Cities* graduation studio *House of Music* follows this project located on the site of the existing Museum of London.

Conditions for the graduation project were drawn from an analysis of London, the site and its context and by looking into what a contemporary house of music should encompass.

The site is an interesting one as it is located in the City of London, the financial heart of London, and against the strong architectural language of the Barbican estate. After the second World War London was left with heavily bombed areas in need of a complete rebuild. The Barbican estate is one of these projects, a residential complex designed by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon in the 1970s. As it is located in a financial district, there are only office buildings to be found and especially in night time, one would not feel comfortable walking the deserted streets. The Barbican was designed as a safe harbor within this relatively hostile neighborhood. The estate houses a cultural centre containing a concert hall, a theatre, a restaurant and a library, all to be enjoyed by its inhabitants. The complex also harbors two structures which survived the war bombing: a church and a piece of the ancient Roman wall.

From outside the walls the fierceness of the buildings in the strong orthogonal grid are most eminent. Once inside it is clear these blocks main function is not to behold, but to enclose and shape a series of choreographed landscapes. The striking architectural language of the horizontal lines formed by the balconies embrace the different gardens. Though today the entrances to the estate are a challenge to find, this was not the case in the original plans. At the time a plan for a London pedway system was to lift the pedestrians up one level to harbor them from the ongoing traffic, but very little of the plan was actually realized. This left all the main entrances to the complex one level above the street level, emphasizing the closed walls much more than intended. Though closed to the city, once within the safety of its walls the Barbican feels like a utopia.

Going back to the city scale, a festive route can be drawn from the river bank with the Royal Festival Hall and Tate Modern, to Saint Pauls, through the city of London, the Barbican Estate, Cross Street and eventually Saint Lukes. As the context turned out differently than planned, the Barbican and its closed walls have become a barrier on this route, hiding its treasures from the city. The site of the project however gives the possibility of opening the Barbican estate and its qualities up to the city and draw people in and through the Barbican.

Comparing observations visiting different concert halls and opera's, I looked into the effects of formal and informal spaces and functions on the visitors. The formal venues all knew how to sweep their visitors, letting them escape the daily worries through sheer grandeur and astonishment. At the more informal venues though, visitors weren't spending their time wondering around, but actually interacting with each other. They seemed more like a place to meet, than a place to see. Also the functions the building harbors are of influence on the accessibility. Several foyers in London are accessible during the day, offering a place to work, study or meet and are used by inhabitants and tourists alike.

There seems to be a thin line where the level of grandeur leads to a reduction of social interactions, an increase of tourism, and therefor leading to less accessibility for the inhabitants, the people. Since London already has many landmarks and tourist attractions, I see no reason to add yet another venue to be flooded with tourists. A House of Music in my opinion should be a place for the people, for Londoners. On the one hand it should not stand out too much to become a landmark, on the other it should have a clear public and open character as to invite people in.

A building for encounters, for musicians and music lovers to meet, make and learn music, for music performances to be enjoyed and for social meetings and celebrations. Informal, intimate and inviting enough to be accessible for the daily celebrations to take place, like meeting a friend, drinking a cup of coffee, making music with friends, but also offering the more formal, luxurious festive characters for the exceptional evenings out, like visiting a concert. A degree of 'decoration' which gives the building a festive character, but not so overwhelming or extraordinary that the building rises to a tourist machine. Naturally, tourists are welcome, but firstly the building is for the residents of London.

Concluding the main conditions for my graduation project are as following:

- To draw people in and through the Barbican, connecting the different levels of the Barbican to the city.
- To draw a wider community into the spaces where music is performed and into music making in general.
- A festive building where people can meet and celebrate the more informal, daily things, but also the exceptional evenings out.
- A clear public character making it accessible for the inhabitants of London, but not standing out too much to become a landmark.

Through the means of routing, function, construction and materialization and research through design, a process of trial and error, I have tried to answer these conditions.

Routing

When arriving from the south a facade welcomes its visitors and guides them into a choreography of landscapes at the garden level of the Barbican complex. On this level, 6 meters beneath street level, the east entrance to the concert hall is located. The main foyer forms a street, running through the building from the east entrance to the west, connecting the route from the metro station on the west side to the gardens. To draw people in and through the Barbican two other connections are made as well. First by adding two small roads over water, visitors can easily continue their journey on garden level into the Barbican Cultural Centre and, possibly, onto Cross Street. The other route is made on high walk level, 5 meters above street level, connecting two ends of the existing walkway, through the main foyer, along the street from west to east.

Functions

The roman wall is reinstated by extending the existing waterscape and thus flooding the space in front of it. A new piece of social housing forms the backdrop of the wall and functions as an extension of the Barbican residential building, making another new connection to the high walk. Two other entities are placed to embrace and guide the route into the Barbican landscapes. The building along the waterline harbors the educational and music making functions, a place for musicians to meet and music making to be learned and enjoyed. In the most prominent and public volume the concert hall and the chamber music hall are each placed on one side of the main foyer. In and around the volume several informal and easily accessible performance spaces can be found as well. The first being the main foyer itself. The floors around the chamber music hall are accessible during the day, a lounge offering more intimate places to meet, work or study. The floors open themselves up towards the main foyer, embracing the street with balconies, making the foyer into a stage. Another performance place can be found in the existing Barbican estate. Sheltered by the overhanging residential block, a staircase suited for sitting and an open platform is positioned. The volume simply makes a connection on street level through the main foyer for the existing treasure to be profited. Another more informal location lays within the educational hub. A music café offers a stage for open informal music events like open jam sessions or a band performance. Drawing a wider community for music listening as well as music making. The last informal performance spot is situated at the inner landscape against the main volume. The stairs are shaped round, making room and embracing an open area. The combination of the different formal and informal performance places offers the possibility for things like small music festivals to take place. Other placed functions to draw in people into the Barbican and into music are the two restaurants. One placed on the roof with a terrace looking into the gardens, the other placed enclosed by the water, in the middle of the gardens.

Construction and materialization

The concert hall and the chamber music hall are placed like two atonic boxes, surrounded by a structural composition of beams, columns and floors, which is all about tectonics. The exterior shows the façade of this composition and reacts on the horizontal and vertical lines of the Barbican. The concrete material language of the Barbican is applied and translated through different refinements in colour and workings. The adding of a warm pink-red colour to the bottom layer of concrete is accentuated by the red-brown bricks of the Barbican bottom layer, and gives it a more festive character. The use of prefab concrete loadbearing panels opens the possibility of partially polishing. Making the façade into a play of raw concrete surfaces and the slightly luxurious and again festive polished surfaces. The different plays in horizontal and vertical lines and in the more formal and informal materials is also drawn inwards. The two boxes with the concert hall and the chamber music hall are covered with a warm curtain, setting the impression that something lays behind worth uncovering and evoking the human curiosity. The ceilings of the lounge areas around the chamber music hall show the raw concrete structure. Combined with a warm wooden flooring and the festive curtains around the box it gives the area an informal and welcoming character. At the edge of the lounge, polished concrete panels are hanged to form the balconies, giving a luxurious and festive touch to the main foyer. Continuing towards the concert hall a long staircase is accentuated by the vertical lines of the columns and façade. Cold concrete combined with polished surfaces, such as terrazzo and marble, and the light coming in from the top level intrigues its visitors to make the journey up the stairs and into the concert hall. Going inside the concert hall different layers of what seems to be a curtain, shape the interior. The flowing surface hangs over its visitors, striving more and more inward going up. Soon it becomes clear it is not a lightly hanged structure, but a strong mass, providing shelter and intimacy to the listeners. An entity that seems to have been there forever and a structure build around it. From outside the top of the box is shown, covered by curtains translated into concrete panels, as the crown on the building.