

This year started with the choice to enter the 'competition' to design a new state of the art concert hall for the London Symphony Orchestra. Simon Rattle returned to London to become the new conductor of the LSO, but in his opinion all the London halls are lacking in quality to be suitable for all the plays from the LSO. With this information our graduation process started.

In a lot of graduation studios at the architecture department students develop their own design brief after doing research on a specific topic. In our case it was the other way around, we started the process and we already knew that we were designing a state of the art concert hall. Because of this our research could already be specified on concert halls and its users, to learn about the precedents and develop our knowledge on this topic.

In the research workshop we got the chance to work with an anthropologist and learn via literature about the users of concert halls, focussed on classical music. Focussed on classical concerts we were asked to develop more knowledge on a personally chosen topic. After some reading I was struck by the number of elderly people visiting classical concerts and the decrease of the younger audience in England (Bonita Kolb, 2000). Reason for this was that younger people didn't feel comfortable in the classical setting, it was a new world where they didn't feel at ease. The idea of 'making people feel comfortable' followed me through the whole process. Other part of the research workshop was more specified on the design brief; we knew we had to design a concert hall for classical music at the location of the current Museum of London. So this research was about the city and its history but also about precedents of concert halls. Getting to know London and its history taught me a lot and gave some anchor points to use later in the design. London but maybe especially our site has a rich history that is of great importance to understand well before you are able to make a suitable design. The site is part of the Barbican complex, it meets the old remaining parts of the Roman Wall, it replaces the existing Museum of London and it also lays in the middle of The City of London. All these points could become leading points which will derive into a suitable design for this location.

A classical concert hall is also so specific that it is impossible to invent it by yourself, fortunately it has been build many times before in history so a great lesson could be learned from this. Cases of historical halls and modern halls, but also cases of halls that work well and halls that don't are very useful to be able to design a state of the art concert hall. We were asked to visit multiple halls in Europe and these visits shape have sharpened your own view on different halls.

The theme of the interiors chair is "The Festive City" this year, this is not only about temporarily festivities in a city but it is also about the permanent everyday activities that could make people feel festive. I think a concert hall already is part of the festive city without even

being extremely special. The act of going to a classical concert is something people live up to, they go with expectations and exiting feelings of going out for a night. But I think we as designers get the chance to give this evening something extra. It is part of our responsibility to make a House of Music that works best for listening to music but also to gives this little bit extra that people will remember. To make your ordinary night out a bit more extraordinary by creating unique architecture that impresses people.

To get to this design there are off course several paths that could be chosen, following the 'interiors' path we were asked to make a lot of models and to develop your 'thinking through making'. Personally I'm really in favour of making models to help you in your thinking and designing, this is also part of the reason why I choose for the interiors chair. I see why the models could be helpful but I also enjoy the making of models. Specifically, for the concert hall as a rather big and complex building there are a lot of scales and possibilities to make different models, going from city to seat you can imagine all the layers that require thinking. Because of this complexity a model could simplify the task and bring it back to its basics, in this way you leave a lot of unnecessary stuff out and come to the essential parts. This year we all together had a big collection of models that made an impressive and learning full body of work. Looking at these models in chronological order gives a clear image of the process. So looking back at these models teaches me a great lesson to keep my final design close to the ideas that I had from the beginning, so the essentials survive.

Getting closer to the final design you can better judge the capabilities of your design, what are the qualities and where might it been lacking. Looking at the social context the project makes quite a statement in the city. It is saving part of the existing site so this will always remember people to the history of the place, it is not a tabula rasa but there has been activity before. And in my opinion demolishing the existing is a loss of culture that could never be retrieved again. So the parts that remain are valuable and will tell the history of the location.

Also, our site is at the crossing of two cultural routes, one is created by the wish of The City of London to create a cultural mile that should bring more people into The City of London. The direction of this 'cultural mile' runs from east to west with our site more or less in the middle. The second route starts at the South embankment of London, crossing the Thames at the millennium bridge, passing St Paul's and via our site further north to the Barbican and even Hackney. The focus of this route is more south to north, with our site in the middle where these two routes cross. So the concert hall forms a connecting point between the two routes, for this it should be easy accessible for people to be guided along their route.

The City of London has a history of private ownership of all the ground, the ground is fully build with mostly banks and offices to make the most profit for the owners. The design takes the possibility to make a piece of public ground and give it back to the people of the city instead of completely filling the plot with building. A square arises, and this is also the connecting point between the routes and will be an opening in the dense City of London.

So the hall tries to be a friendly place where people will feel comfortable to be and spent their time. They should feel invited to enter and to discover the new House of Music, and continue discovering the rest of the cultural richness London has to offer.

Kolb, B.M., You call this fun? Reactions of young first-time attendees to a classical concert. MEIEA Journal, 2000. 1(1): p. 13-23.