

P4 Reflection

Graduation Studio 2017-18
House of Music

Interiors, Buildings and Cities

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The topic of our graduation project is "House of Music", which is derived from the competition for the new concert hall right attached to the Barbican Estate, where the Museum of London currently occupied. The competition started from the return of Sir Simon Rattle in the London Symphony Orchestra, and he said that a new world-class concert hall was very much needed, as the London Symphony Orchestra's current venue, the Barbican, was not able to accommodate about a fifth of the entire orchestral repertoire. Therefore, there are two main concerns in the design task, a concert hall that has a world-class quality and the relationship between the new project and the surrounding site condition. Alongside with the two main concerns in the design task, there are some more issues that worth paying attention to in a project of such scale and such importance.

In the research seminar with Irene Cieraad, I was questioning the relationship between the role of a concert hall and the shifting music preferences in the contemporary background and how they are influencing each other. In the studies and researches on omnivorousness and music consumption in public and private spheres, it is obvious that education, accessibility and also the embedded social function are the most important factors that affect people's decision on their preferable music genres and whether to attend concerts or not. And looking back to the history of music hall formation and development, it wouldn't be surprising for us to discover that music hall, as an important typology of urban institutions in the modern society, originated from the taverns and coffee houses of 18th century London where men met to eat, drink and do business, and in the next century, it found its own way of transformation into the venue for the elites' activities. If the omnivore has indeed emerged and gradually displaced the elitist in recent decades, and if the omnivorousness shown in public and private spheres is diversified, the question we should ask ourselves while designing the new concert house would be what kind of social and political characters and statements should be embedded and expressed in the project through its architectural expression.

In order to get familiar with the typology of music venues and be able to locate our project in the historical context and development of the music venues, a series of precedents are looked at and studied in details in the research workshop with Mark Pimlott at the beginning of the graduation project. Getting to know the historical backgrounds and their translations into the architectural organization in different projects, a dichotomy of the social and political position of the concert hall as a public institution is emerged. On the one hand, the conventional idea of attending classical concerts being a kind of elite activities, in a way diminishes the publicness and inclusiveness of the concert hall as a public institution and the comparatively high costs and high background knowledge requirement to appreciate classical music challenges its role of being a festive infrastructure of the city due to its exclusiveness. While on the other hand, the idea that attending concerts is about interests and education instead of an activity dedicated to certain social classes, challenges the conventional attitude towards concert hall in the new era of modern

society, which emphasizes on democracy, equality and liberty.

Based on the findings and thoughts from the seminar and workshop, the idea of a music house with low-threshold and high-tolerance has become the crucial and central point in the whole project. It will not only be the place where elites gather and socialize, but rather a place facilitates different types of music performances, different groups, different experiences and values, and a place where musical education is promoted and spread from.

In the process of translating the ideas and thoughts into my design project, I have introduced the courtyards as the element to negotiate the level of publicness and permeability of the project and they act as the junctions of different functions. Therefore a research about the courtyards in the Italian palazzi was done to investigate its urban functions and architectural proportions. In my project, the courtyards work as the buffer space between the urban city around it and the interior of the project, allowing people from the outside going through the complex without getting inside and people from the inside observing the outside. In such a way, people of different groups would be brought together and encounter various events hosted in the complex.

In terms of the relationship with the Barbican, the courtyards in the new complex could be also read as the continuation of the residents' gardens that are enclosed by the residential blocks. The volume of the concert hall completes the third side of sports field at the south side of the Barbican Estate, while the Mountjoy House becomes the forth façade of the courtyard in the new complex, which creates a new entrance to the Barbican complex, and it connects the bridge which is currently a dead end to the wider urban city context.

The public spaces inside the project, such as the foyer spaces and the resting areas, intends to be open to the public not only during the performances, but also at other periods during the day. The complex is not only intended for the musicians and the audiences to the concerts, but also for the public in the city. By exposing the music school, different music venues and different music related activities in the complex to the general public, the potential interests would be raised, and they could have the chance to get to know and understand more about the world of music. And it could also provide the possibilities of the communication of different genres of music. By opening the building to the public, the complex will not only be festive during the performance period, but also be active at the other time.

In terms of the interior of the concert hall, it is also designed as an internal courtyard in relationship to the three external courtyards. It aims to give the audience an experience of going through different kinds of courtyards in the whole process of approaching into the complex and finally ends inside the hall. Besides, I think a more simple form for the auditorium seems to be a more appropriate answer

to my research questions. It suggests a more friendly and inclusive atmosphere in the hall and helps to lead the focus of the audiences to the orchestra.

In the materialization of the project, the project is divided into 3 parts, brick in the bottom part, concrete in the upper part and wood in the courtyards and the concert hall. The division of the lower and upper parts follows the materialization in the Barbican complex, as in the Barbican the highwalk is considered as the "ground", and everything below it is in brick, while those above it is in concrete. In my project, a third material is introduced as an emphasis and also a distinguish element to the courtyards. And in a way, while the concrete recalls the 60s when the Barbican is built, the wood might represent the new trend of the contemporary era.

In the process of the whole graduation studio, the tradition of thinking through making in the studio of Interior, Buildings, Cities has been widely applied in each of our assignment. Personally, I found it an effective way of communication to express the ideas for the design with the tutors and also in the presentations, although it is sometimes time consuming. In the process of making a model, especially the large scale ones, it has forced us to think about the details in the design, such as how the connection of different elements and different spaces works, and what its material should be in terms of formulating the desired atmosphere.

By designing a project of such large scale and in such complicated urban context, I have learnt a lot about how to deal with the relationships among different site conditions and the requirements of the new complex, and how to shape the project at different scales thinking about different focuses.

As a public institution, the project of such kind should have the capability to not only serve the target groups, but also find its own way to engage a larger and wider group of the public. Even though architecture is not always effective in negotiating some social and political issues in a project, I do believe that the care for the public is the very crucial in a design project and it would find its way back to the city. Through the whole process of thinking and designing, the question in the urban institutions of such kind seems to be how such a venue that is dedicated to classical music could benefit not only the music lovers, but also the people in the city, since it is not only a place for music, but also an important element in the culture of the whole city. For a normal citizen who might not have the interest to go to a concert or a resident who lives in the Barbican apartments, what does this new complex mean to them? This is the question that I have asked myself the most in the process. And in a way, I think architecture is not the answer to the discussion, but the beginning of the discussion.

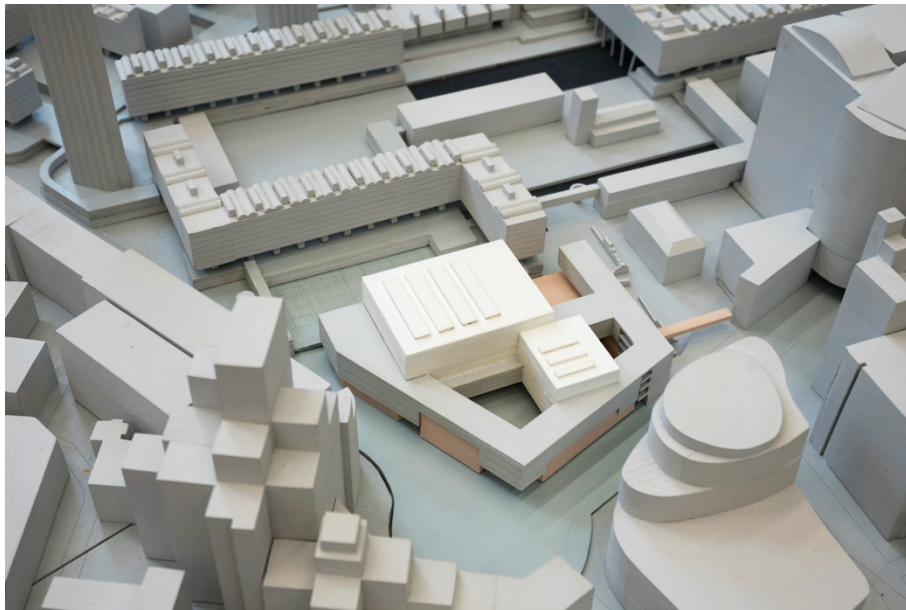


Photo of the 1:500 mass model of the design in the context