

hord | coplan | macht

THE INTIMATE CONCERT HALL

music + education

ACOUSTICS

developing the dynamic control over one's instrument

ROOM SIZE

play to the room, not the audience

ADJUSTABLE

creating the illusion of a larger or smaller space

As our society discovers the greater positive impact of the arts on the whole person, music education is taking a much-deserved front-row seat.

As a reaction to this resurgence of music education many colleges and universities are improving their music offerings in order to stay competitive. As an institution may look to create spaces specifically for music education and performance, it is necessary to start with a base understanding of the differences between a recital hall, a concert hall and the so-called intimate concert hall. It is also necessary as designers to understand how these spaces differ

in support of the learning and growing musician as opposed to professional civic halls.

The starting point for any conversation relating to music education must be an analysis of what types of educational opportunities are available and what

spaces are required in support of those programs. If a specific program offers only contemporary styles of music—rock, country, hip hop and the like—then specific spaces for practice, performance, recording and post-production are required. As the majority of music programs seek to include a wide variety of music types in creating a musician versed in many styles, both traditional and modern, the offerings must include specific spaces for the performance of that music.

While one might immediately gravitate to the concert hall, there is a specific type of space required for individual and small group performance, the recital hall, that is a necessary component of the performer's development, as well. Both concert and recital halls are theatre spaces with the specific intent of music performance. Both have requirements to support acoustic (non-amplified) and reinforced (amplified) performances, and in both the concert hall and the recital hall the audience and the performer share the same room, meaning there is no separation between house and stage.

recital hall

soloist
small ensemble

concert hall

symphonic music
orchestra

HOUSE/SEAT COUNT

LEGEND

 = 50

RECITAL HALL



CONCERT HALL



INTIMATE CONCERT HALL 300-1000 PEOPLE



Types of Performance Spaces

A recital hall is a space that is generally designed to support soloists and small ensembles. The stage will need to accommodate up to a 50-person chamber orchestra and the house likely will have a seat count in a typical range of 150 to 800. The concert hall, on the other hand, is typically designed for symphonic music, requires a stage able to accommodate anywhere from 70 to 150 musicians with a seat count in the house ranging from 1,100 to 2,000. As universities seek efficiencies with the spaces they provide in support of their

missions, the 'Intimate Concert Hall' is born. This is a space flexible enough to support the soloist all the way up to a 100-piece orchestra. The house seating count can range anywhere from 300 to 1,000. What makes the intimate concert hall unique is the room has the flexibility to support the wide range of acoustic environments, as well as, the ability to adjust the feel of the room size.

Benefits of the Intimate Concert Hall

The main benefit of the Intimate Concert Hall to the education environment is flexibility. The development of a

musician can be traced along a similar path regardless of the instrument, with subtle variations.

The first step is to introduce the student to the "language," the musical notation which is coupled with an understanding of how the chosen instrument achieves the notes. As the student continues to develop, the finer points of creating music are introduced. The growing musician must not only learn to read and play the notes but must also develop the dynamic control of their instrument to play with the appropriate loudness.

While many musicians who that take the next step into college-level education have been exposed to playing in an ensemble, the elementary, intermediate and secondary education facilities often support only one performance space that by necessity are designed to accommodate multiple performance functions. Such spaces are often designed for the performance of theatre and not music. Because of this, the student is often encouraged to play loudly in order to overcome the acoustic inefficiency of the spaces in which they

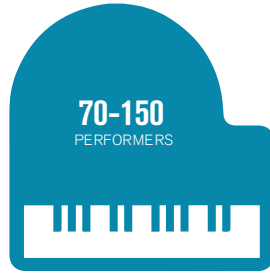


STAGE PERFORMERS

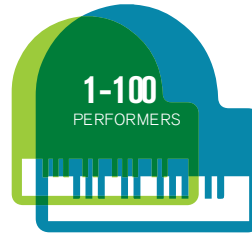
RECITAL HALL



CONCERT HALL



INTIMATE CONCERT HALL



have learned. At higher levels of music education, they must learn finer control of the instrument in the context of a venue designed specifically for music performance. One of the most important aspects of learning to control one's instrument is actually listening to the other members of the ensemble. When performing music in a proscenium-type theatre, or worse, a venue shared with food service or physical education, the acoustics of the space do not support the sound reflections that provide auditory feed back to the musician on the stage. When acoustically well designed, the smaller venue supports the initial aural training of the developing

musician. The proper type of acoustic reflections that aid in training and provide opportunities to perform in smaller ensembles also provide more clarity to each musician as they listen to one another.

There is nothing more demeaning to a new performer than an unexpectedly empty house. Because the Intimate Concert Hall has a smaller seating capacity to go along with the smaller stage, even in the event that there is a poor turnout for a performance, the audience will feel fuller with a smaller house. When 300 people show up to a 1,100-seat venue, there are obviously

a large number of seats that are empty. In addition, the audience is likely more spread out. This forces the performer to play to the room and not the audience. Even if only the audience is comprised of 80 members in a 300-seat house, it will seem that the house is fuller and the audience will be less distributed allowing the musicians to make smaller adjustments to the way they play.

With a smaller house, the audience has a far different experience, as well. Sitting in the further rows and balconies of larger concert halls, the audience member has the opportunity to experience the music performance, but is visually removed. Being thus removed, it becomes very easy to become distracted and to disengage from the performance. Even in the furthest back seats of the Intimate Concert Hall, the audience member has an opportunity to not only experience the auditory portion of the performance, but will also be in a better vantage point to experience the emotion of the performers as they play. They are engaging more of the senses and expanding the experience.



Flexible Design

To make the intimate, and truly any, concert hall successful, the design must incorporate practical, usable adjustability. This variability can encompass room size, acoustics and lighting among a whole host of options. There are many examples of auditoriums that sought size flexibility by using operable partitions and so created rooms on either side of the partition. Changing the physical shape and size of an acoustic space is one of the more difficult means to create

a flexible-use space. In many cases, the best of design intentions do not achieve the desired functionality. An option available in creating the feel of a smaller space that is inherent in an Intimate Concert Hall is to affect the feel of the space by controlling lighting zones. Making the back of the room darker before and during the performance can create the illusion of a smaller space.

Because different performance types benefit from different acoustic

treatments, the most important adjustability that must be incorporated into any concert hall is acoustic flexibility. Whether the project scope is to adjust the physical room size or simply its appearance, the acoustic performance of the room must also be addressed. If not, the disconnection between what the eye sees and what the ear hears can be unnerving for both performer and audience alike.

Creating Acoustical Intimacy

It is important to understand what is necessary to accomplish in adjusting the acoustic performance of a space. Acoustics, while mathematically predictable, are a very subjective matter. What one individual considers good acoustics, another will perceive as dull. There are a host of different elements that contribute to creating acoustical intimacy enveloping a space.





JOHN and GEORGIE KINCAID CONCERT HALL

One of those elements, which we all recognize, is reverberation time: the time it takes the sound to travel along a reflected path—say from the side wall—as measured against the time it takes for that same sound to travel directly from source to receiver. Ironically, in a discussion about the Intimate Concert Hall, a beneficial reverberation time is easier to achieve in seats that are further from the performance than it is for the seats close in. Acoustic treatments, whether through room shaping or materiality, are more of a continuum

across “zones” within the space. At the stage, a livelier area is desired to create better aural feedback for the performers. At the first rows of the house, more dampening is desired to reduce the undesirable reflections and a third strategy for the back of the house to provide for acoustic intimacy is also employed.

Filling the Gap

Arts education is seeing a rise in prominence as we come to understand how important the well-rounded

individual is to our fast-paced society. As primary and secondary school systems search to find ways to keep music programs in their curricula, colleges and universities are similarly seeking ways to support important arts programs. What makes the challenge of a music program so unique lies in the types of performance spaces required. Dedicated spaces that have a single purpose come with a high price tag. Finding ways to minimize the impact through controlling size and increasing flexibility is paramount to success. Finding opportunities to create a performance space that has the flexibility to be used for musical styles ranging from choral to band to orchestra to jazz, as well as vastly different ensemble sizes and instrumentation from soloists with an accompanist up to 100-piece ensembles can offer savings in construction dollars and eventual operating dollars. Further, it can provide immediate benefits for the growing musician. Filling the gap between a recital hall and a concert



THE AUTHOR

Chris' unique pathway to architecture has provided him with a skill set ideally suited for intricate projects and complex renovations. His undergraduate training was in technical theatre production and he is a practicing amateur musician playing piano, guitar and trumpet.

While his experience includes master planning, program planning and ground-up construction, the majority of his career has been spent executing addition and renovation projects. As a building expert, Chris has a passion for excellence in architecture which extends not only to design but also includes its technical execution. This passion drives him to innovative design solutions that are then executed at the highest level creating great places and spaces.

Chris is an active member of the United States Institute of Theatre Technology (USITT) as well as the Theatre Communication Group