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NEW FUNCTIONALITY OF A HOUSE OF MUSIC

NOWA FUNKCJONALNOŚĆ BUDYNKU DLA MUZYKI

Abstract

Concert halls, musical theatres, or operas have always been important facilities in the culture-creating position of a city. Today, these places acquire a new significance. Contemporary houses of music serve not only musicians and music enthusiasts. More and more often, they are becoming places that are accessible every day, strongly affecting the quality of urban life. This is further testified to by the developments completed in recent years: the roof of the Oslo Opera has become attractive public space, the building of the Paris Philharmonic amazes with the variety of offered functions. Today, houses of music possess the attributes of architectural solutions, which create their new functionality. Similar arrangements accompanied the creation of the NOSPR building in Katowice, and significantly influence the character of the new Brno Philharmonic.

Keywords: contemporary architecture, houses for music, functional city, new functionality, public space

Streszczenie

Sal koncertowe, teatry muzyczne czy opery zawsze były obiektami ważnymi dla kulturotwórczej pozycji miasta. Dziś przeznaczenie tych miejsc nabiera nowych znaczeń. Współczesne domy dla muzyki służą nie tylko muzykom i melomanom. Coraz częściej stają się miejscami dostępnymi na co dzień, silnie oddziałującymi na jakość miejskiego życia. Świadczy o tym realizacje ostatnich lat. Dach opery w Oslo stał się atrakcyjną przestrzenią publiczną, budynek Filharmonii Paryskiej zadziwia różnorodnością oferowanych funkcji. Dziś domy dla muzyki posiadają atrybuty architektonicznych rozwiązań, które tworzą ich nową funkcjonalność. Podobne założenia towarzyszyły powstawaniu siedziby NOSPR w Katowicach oraz istotnie wpływają na charakter nowej Filharmonii w Brnie.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura współczesna, domy dla muzyki, miasto funkcjonalne, nowa funkcjonalność, przestrzeń publiczna

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily, houses of music, independently of their basic function which is of course music, are becoming an important part of urban space, providing various ways of spending free time, which have not been experienced in such place before. This concerns both philharmonic buildings which contain concert halls, as well as opera buildings in which music is an integral part of the performance, while the function of music reception by the audience is an important measure of structure quality.

The types of buildings listed are slightly varied in their functional solutions. In a philharmonic concert hall, the main function of the structure is subject to the listening of music,

while the main goal of the designing solution is acoustics and beauty of the hall. In an opera hall, the visual values of the spectacle are as important as the music. The places designated for the audience such as the entrance hall, foyer, or buffet rooms are similar in both types of structures. We may even say that in both types of musical structures the space for music enthusiasts around and outside the hall possesses the traits of public space. In the developments of recent years, this space has acquired more and more significance, and this holds true for both philharmonic and opera buildings.

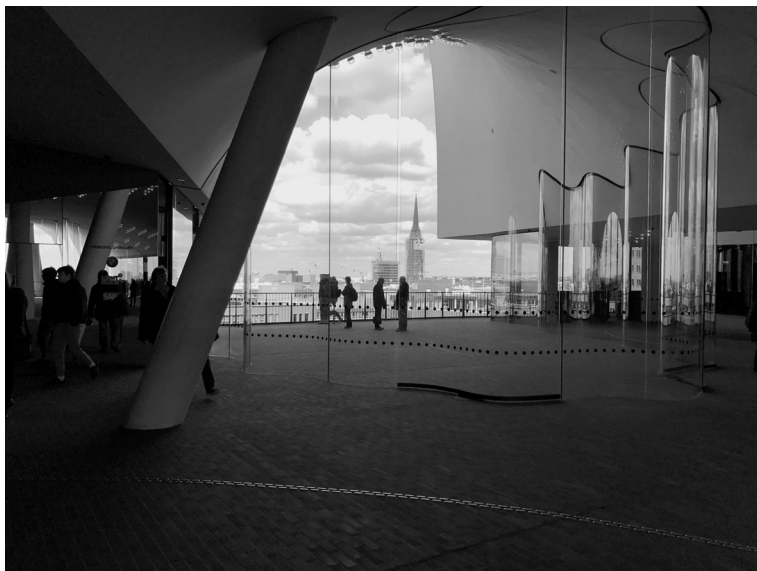
In recent years this space in acquiring the status of public space more and more often becomes a place that attracts visitors. The status and significance of the building of music is a reference to attractiveness *per se*, of the method of architectural shaping in itself and the arrangements of the location. From among numerous European examples of recent years, the most characteristic for the topics discussed here is outstanding structures completed at the beginning of the 21st century: the Oslo Opera, the Paris Philharmonic, and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. In the case of the Opera in the Norwegian capital, we are dealing with the innovative use of roofs as places of frequent location of open-air performances, as well as daily walks of city residents. At the same time, this sculpturally modeled architectural complex has spatially and symbolically changed the character of an entire district. Situated in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, the Buttes-Chaumont, the building of the Paris Philharmonic amazes both with its external form as well as the comfort of internal solutions. Here, the roof is also a continuation of an open space of a park, available to pedestrians. The building of the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, which is exceptional in many ways, was erected on top of a former cocoa warehouse in a harbor. Presently the unusual body which towers over the HafenCity district contains numerous functions, but above all, it constitutes an important center of city life with an exceptional terrace on the 9th level which functions as a city square. The whole complex along with its unique superstructure of a completely different, it would seem *alien*, content for a harbor astounds with its location, but also delights with its architectural beauty.

In undertaking the subject, I will repeat the words of architect Reinier de Graaf: I am aware that most of us architects are *simple theoreticians*... However, this does not diminish the value of our statement. The ever-growing interdependence of various forces, generally coming from economic or socio-political complexity, and also the necessity to adhere to the sometimes-problematic decisions of others causes the designing architect, who is in the middle of a complicated task, to perhaps more easily register this complexity, attempting to share his knowledge with others.¹ Continuing to quote Reinier de Graaf, we can at least partially explain the main reason for this aforementioned complexity

... As a profession architecture embodies a strange paradox. In economic terms, it is a largely reactive discipline, a response to pre-formulated needs. In intellectual terms, it is the opposite: a visionary domain that claims the future. In this capacity, architecture aspires to set the agenda and precede needs. The unfortunate thing for architects is that both conditions are equally true, making architecture a curious form of omniscience practiced in a context of utter dependency.²

¹ The author can present a very personal record because of his designing experience, which consists of approximately 200 designs completed in Konior Studio, which he manages. From among the completed designs, over 50 have been turned into buildings, which received approximately 30 national and international prizes and distinctions.

² R. de Graaf, *Cztery ściany i dach. Złożona natura prostej profesji*, Instytut Architektury–Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, Kraków–Warszawa 2019, p. 14.



Ill. 1. Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. Town square on the 9th floor. Photographer: Tomasz Konior.

In this case, the subject of my deliberations is the thoughts connected with the development of two buildings:

- the NOSPR building in Katowice, completed in 2104,
- the Brno Philharmonic, which is to be completed in 2025.

2. THE NOSPR BUILDING IN KATOWICE (2008–2014)

Katowice, after a period of economic transformation of the eighties and nineties of the 20th century, underwent an even greater change. Right in front of our eyes from an industrial city, it was transformed into a modern, European culture and science center. On the premises of the former “Ferdynand” and later “Katowice” mine, shut down in 1999 in the neighborhood of the University of Silesia and the famous Spodek, the city authorities initiated the creation of the so-called “Culture Zone.” As a result of international competitions, in a wide area of 10 hectares, three structures have been completed up to now. The Silesian Museum, according to the design of Riegler Riewe Architekten from Graz (2007–2012), the building of the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio, designed by the Katowice-based Konior Studio³ (2008–2014), as well as the International Congress Center, according to the design of the Warsaw-based JEMS Architekci (2008–2015).

The NOSPR building was created on the premises of a former wood yard of a mine that was shut down in 1999. This area along with the accompanying public spaces around was named the Silesian Acropolis by the architect Stanisław Niemczyk.⁴

³ N. Juzwa, J. Świerczawski, *Architektura polska we współczesnej innowacyjności*, manuscript, in editing, NIAiU, 2021.

⁴ Stanisław Niemczyk in an interview with Tomasz Konior according to: B. Paturej, P. Kozanecki,



III. 2. NOSPR in Katowice. The circle of the audience during the concert in the Great Concert Hall. Photographer: Tomasz Konior.

The already-famous NOSPR concert hall, hidden inside a concentrically formed plan is barely visible from the outside. *Concealing the great hall – musicians and listeners – inside a frame, which is surrounded by the public space of the building and city* was a thought-idea that proved decisive in the concept of the arrangements. This intention was expressed by the initial sketch which in time was transformed into the form of the final plan of the building. The plan formed on the basis of the principle of right-angle geometry only slightly suggests that the interior hides within an enormous concert hall with 1800 seats. The entrances to the auditorium placed around and at every story lead to a bright, spacious foyer. The modernistic space of the white walls creates contrast for the raw body of the great auditorium made of concrete. The shape and the character of the interiors around the concert hall are characterized by simplicity and moderation. Such characteristics contribute to the complex functionality, attractive for both guests and city residents, who visit the building even when there are no concerts planned. Both in the interiors and the gardens which stretch around the NOSPR building we are dealing with urban activity teeming with life. The Space of the Great Concert Hall continues the tradition of the Berlin Philharmonic designed by Hans Scharoun, in which the stage is surrounded by the audience, thanks to which the viewers can have a closer relationship with the musicians. The specific coziness of the great interior allows for much better participation in the concert than it was possible in a classic concert hall with the audience placed in rows in front of the stage. Here, the audience, spread out on various levels around the stage, is surrounded by dark, slightly bent surfaces of the walls, which highlight the oval shape of the Hall. It becomes an autonomous space evoking the sensation of a magic circle filled with music.⁵ The architectural value of the interior is completed with outstanding visibility of the stage

Tomasz Konior. *Dziecko modernizmu w potrzasku* [in:] Onet.pl, 19.05.2016 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/tomasz-konior-dziecko-modernizmu-w-potrzasku/5devzd> (access: 2.11.2019).

⁵ N. Juzwa, J. Świerawski, *op. cit.*

from every seat in the audience. However, the thing which is a true testimony of its exceptionality is the unique acoustics. The NOSPR Hall received numerous prestigious prizes, out of which the most important is being included on a list of the best concert halls in Europe, which are part of the elite ECHO.⁶

The rooms which accompany the great Concert Hall underline the centripetal concept of the arrangements. The centrally placed concert hall is surrounded by a multi-functional atrium dedicated to the public and an outer ring designated for the musicians. Apart from the chamber hall with 300 seats, as well as numerous rooms for concerts such as rehearsal rooms, wardrobe departments, as well as recording studios, there are functions which are accessible to the public such as bookshop, buffets, playground for children, and finally a very important place for celebrating successful concerts, namely the restaurant. The designers are especially proud of the fact that in a building created around the concert hall with very rigorous functional requirements connected with the intended use of the building, around the basic function, an added value was created in the shape of the continuation of the public space of the city. Hence, the building itself and the various ways it can be used enrich the life of the inhabitants of the great agglomeration.

The architecture of the building shows an asymmetrical, repetitive coarseness of the brick pilasters which are separated by the transparency of glass surfaces. The massive poles bring to mind *Silesian chimneys*, while the loud installations placed inside them, are an added justification for such associations. The simplicity of the building architecture brings out the beauty of the great auditorium, while at the same time contributing to the rationality and the laconic beauty of the atrium which cuts through the passage interior.

The development of the area around the structure completely changed the post-mining landscape. The entrance square with a fountain is a direct connection with the city center. The catwalk right above the road allows for the comfortable movement of both pedestrians and bikers along the whole complex from the Spodek to the University of Silesia. The solution takes advantage of the existing differences in ground level creating a composition that highlights the landscape character of the arrangements.

The green area around NOSPR which is filled with hundreds of trees and plants prompts visitors to use all their senses and feel the *spirit of the place*, extending the time which city residents spend in the garden during all seasons of the year⁷. An added attraction is a Hornbeam Maze, which was inspired by the Plan of the Great Katowice from 1926. The architects understood it as a reference to the history of the place, but it also becomes an allusion to contemporary urbanism. The amphitheater is used for both professional concerts as well as spontaneous fun.

All the three newly-created buildings in the Culture Zone are in a significant way tied to culture. However, their accessibility and wealth of functions cause the whole complex to be used not only for exhibitions, congresses, and concerts but also for various activities, rest,

⁶ The European Concert Hall Organisation, ECHO, is an elite organization that brings together 21 opinion-forming institutions in the field of European classical music. NOSPR joined this group of the most famous concert halls, which includes the Wiener Musikverein and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, in 2019. A condition that must be fulfilled to become a member is receiving an official invitation which NOSPR received from the director of the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, Christoph Lieben-Seutter.

⁷ T. Malkowski, M. Szczelina, *Dotknąć muzyki. Opowieść o powstaniu nowej siedziby NOSPR w Katowicach*, Konior Studio, Katowice 2014.

and recreation. The NOSPR has become a home for the orchestra and along with a multitude of functions outside and around creates a new, attractive city space.

The basis of the thoughts which accompany the designing of subsequent structures of music is the experiences and proven solutions. However, each design is a consequence of numerous local conditions and specific limitations and is inspired by something previously seen and thus leads to different solutions.

The deliberations connected with the designing process lead to an important reflection on the reasons and effects of the creation of user-friendly places which people willingly visit, as well as places which despite great effort and finances often remain empty. There is an invariable need to create space in compliance with the spirit of the time, without any complexes towards the past, without forced originality to be achieved at any cost. Undoubtedly, the limitations which are a result of location, regulations, or budget have an impact on the final form and quality of space. However, as a result of all recognized conditions each time we are dealing with a fascinating design process, and as a result with some unexpected results.

3. THE BRNO PHILHARMONIC (2018–2024), BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The result of a two-stage competition that has been completed is the design of the new philharmonic in Brno, known as Janáčkovo Kulturní Centrum. In order to complete the aforementioned task an international design consortium was established which includes: Konior Studio from Poland, Nagata Acoustics from the USA, as well as the local design studio Atelier Hrusa.⁸

Brno, which is the capital of Moravia, is a city in which history intertwines with the present. A walk through its streets is an inspiration that stimulates the imagination. The urban tissue is created by a conglomerate of various eras, among which the progressive period of pre-war Modernism is well represented. At the heart of the historical tissue, in the neighborhood of the Continental Hotel from the 60s of the 20th century, on the last unoccupied land plot, the new building of the Brno Philharmonic is currently under development. Its construction has been divided into two stages. The first was the creation of an underground parking lot, where according to the new design the future concert hall along with accompanying functions will be created.

The current building of the Brno Philharmonic is located adjacent to the future structure. It is a historical building, the so-called Besedni Dům, one of the most important Neo-Renaissance monuments in the historic downtown Brno. It was built in the years 1870–1873 according to the design of Theophil von Hansen, the creator, among others, of the famous Musikverein. The architect's style is recognizable, especially inside the historical Concert Hall, which is a miniature of the Viennese original. In the future, the former building which will be connected to the new facility via a bridge suspended over the street will become part of the new complex. The outline of the new philharmonic is a continuation of the neighboring buildings creating the frontage of the unfinished quarter.

⁸ The current presentation is a result of the 1st stage of works on the design completed by the international consortium Konior & Spol.

A characteristic feature of the designed body is the gradation of form as well as the *duality of thought and function*. Dualism visible in the structure translates to the designed functionality of the building.



III. 3. Philharmonic in Brno. Structure gradation. Visualisation: Konior Studio archive.

The layered pattern of the building is already visible from the steps leading onto the entrance square and is then continued in the body, penetrating into the building interior. It consistently permeates subsequent levels, suspending itself over the atrium which pierces the building. Its culmination is the conically shaped roof. It fulfills the function of a generally accessible terrace with a view of the panorama of Brno and the Spilberk Hill which towers over the city. The gradation allows not only to move from level to level but also shapes the building's architectural form. The duality of structure is another trait of the structure. The architecture shows the coming together of two spaces:

- transparent, which surrounds the area dedicated to the audience – opening up onto the city, it establishes strong relations with it,
- massive, which closes off the space destined for music.

The duality of form is shown in the integration of contemporary architecture with the historical city tissue. The combination of two diverse structures is a clear differentiation of two contrasting functions enclosed in a form:

- the musical function protected with the massive wall casing isolates the interior from the loud urban surroundings, creating a hermetic space ensuring comfort of work and the ability to concentrate during concerts,
- generally accessible function “closed off” in the transparent structure, thanks to which the border between the building and city space becomes blurred.

The principal element of the concept is the massive body of the concert hall. Its interior is intended for 1300 listeners and in addition, it was shaped to create unlimited possibilities of musical arrangements: from solo performances to monumental concerts with the participation of a full symphonic orchestra, organs, and choirs.

The atmosphere of the concert hall, the characteristic of spaciousness, the finishing of the interior, all comply with the sensation connected with music reception. The acoustic sound is the superior value. This is also the case with the concept of the Brno Philharmonic. The characteristic feature of the building is the dualism which makes the concept clear, defining its intended use while also making the architectural form fit in the city. However, the value of the structure is in the design solutions: in the form and materiality of the concert hall. The key task was to make this immense program fit into the pre-existing, tight context of the urban tissue while maintaining the priority of concert function of the highest quality. The clash of these two architecturally contrasting forms which reflects the specificity of space is clear from the level of the street all the way to the roof.

At present, traditional functionality is accompanied by the quality of solutions which allow in a literal way to make the building of music part of the city space. Thus, the facility seems to be both urban as well as musical. Drawing on experience and available possibilities it even more strongly responds to the needs of users. Both the form and proportions lose nothing of their significance.

4. CONCLUSION

Houses of music that are created in urbanized city space create exceptional locations. Even, if by studying history it can be noticed that they did not always possess exceptional value – the quality was also co-created by music which filled their interiors. Music, similarly to beauty, is an important part of culture but as opposed to beauty it does not possess material features. I will, therefore, define beauty repeating the words of the philosopher and esthete Władysław Tatarkiewicz. He says that beauty

is a positive esthetic property of being resulting from maintaining proportions, harmony, colors, sounds, moderation of utility, perceived by the senses...In metaphysics, beauty is one of the transcendental properties of being expressing its consolidation, transparency, internal proportion, as well as excellence.⁹

It seems that music can be similarly defined.

Designing buildings of music constitutes a particular challenge for the architect, directing his thoughts towards solutions that generally exceed the framework of architecture. The design process connected with the creation of the Brno Philharmonic has become the third joint experience with Yasuhisa Toyota from Nagata Acoustics. He is considered to be the greatest acoustician in the world, and his fame is confirmed by his accomplishments which include the best concert halls of the last decades such as: the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and many others. Every listed design constituted an unprecedented challenge both for the designers and the builders. The first joint experience was the NOSPR concert hall. This cooperation resulted in a specific space praised by the most outstanding representatives of the music world and thousands of music enthusiasts who visit this place. I remember our first meeting in Katowice, when while designing the NOSPR building I had asked Yasuhisa Toyota *how to make a good concert hall?* He said: *You are the architect, invent the place and I will add its sound.*¹⁰ His response

⁹ W. Tatarkiewicz, *O doskonałości*, PWN, Warszawa 1976, pp. 42–56.

¹⁰ Quote from a conversation between the author Tomasz Konior and the acoustician Yasuhisa Toyota.

completely changed my approach to designing from then on. Following joint designs are a continued vote of confidence and provide great satisfaction.

Of course, music is the strongest magnet of these places drawing famous artists and demanding fans. However, the fact of open architecture whose activity is not simply limited to concerts has become a phenomenon that cannot be undervalued. The musical buildings teeming with life independent of concerts allow us to put forth a thesis about their new functionality.

Location is important for both philharmonic buildings as well as operas, reversing this thought we may say that the placement of both types of buildings in space plays a decisive role in the shaping and development of a given place. Generally, it is an impulse to develop the city center or a district, becoming an element of public city space.

For the functioning of a structure, both its placement in the public space as well as its architectural value are important. Of primary importance is:

- the shaping of a structure due to the solution used in the main hall used for concerts and/or musical spectacles, but of equal importance is
- the solution of space found inside the building, outside the concert hall itself as well as the space surrounding it, both inside and outside of the building.

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