



# BUILDING the FUTURE

**Can the wave of new concert halls  
revitalize urban life while meeting  
the changing needs of orchestras?**

by Rebecca Schmid

The China Philharmonic plans to open a striking new hall in Beijing in January 2018.



Opening this April, La Seine Musicale is located on an island just outside the center of Paris.

From Lucerne to Los Angeles to Shanghai, the 21st century has seen a boom in new concert hall architecture. This season alone in Germany brought the opening of the €789 million Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Boulez Hall at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin, and the Musikforum Ruhr in Bochum. In Paris, La Seine Musicale—a €170 million building designed by Shigeru Ban in the suburbs of western Paris—opens its doors on April 22, just two years after the opening of the Philharmonie de Paris and three years after the inauguration of the Grand Auditorium at Maison de la Radio France.

In China, a country undergoing a rapid period of urban development, the China Philharmonic will move into a translucent space covering 11,600 square meters in

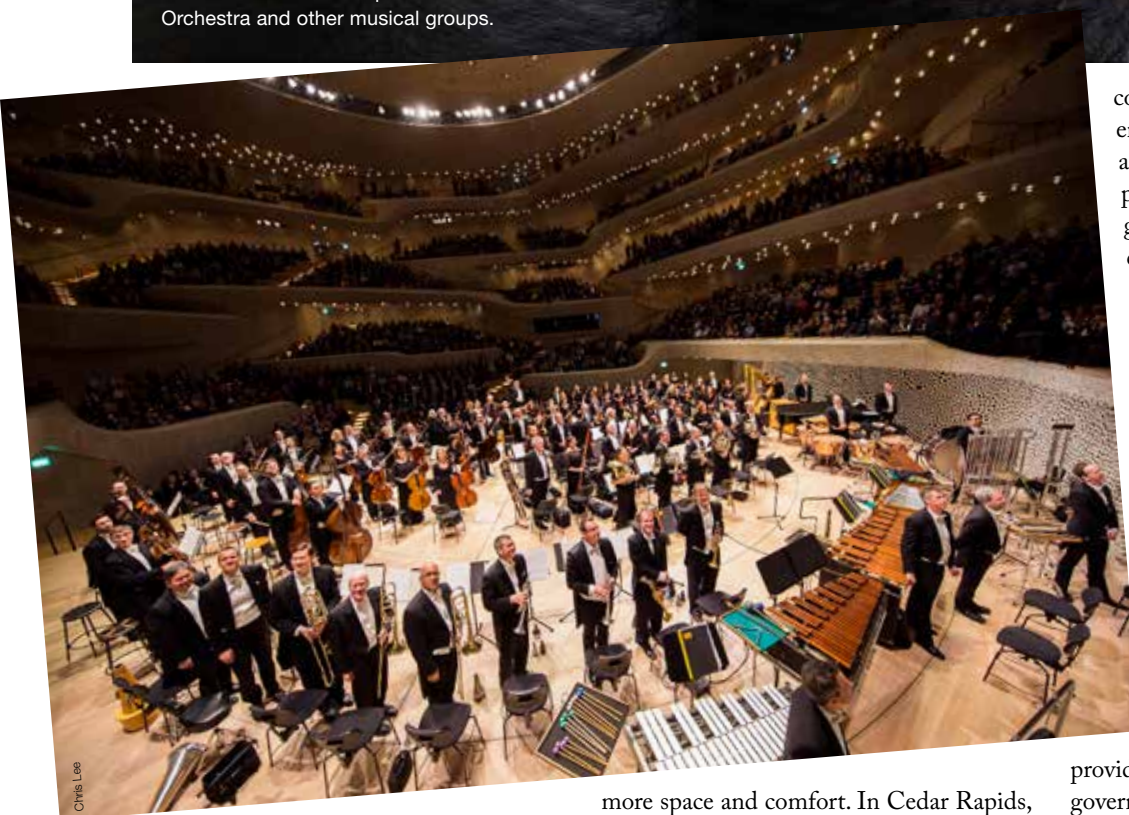
Beijing's central business district in January 2018. When the Detroit Symphony Orchestra embarks on its first China tour this July—to Suzhou, Wuhan, Changsha, Chongqing, and Shanghai—it will perform in halls all built in the last thirteen years.

In the U.S., Lincoln Center's Geffen Hall, home of the New York Philharmonic, is preparing for a \$500 million renovation to reimagine the auditorium, rework its acoustics, and include spaces for education and engagement programs. Cincinnati Music Hall, main hall for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, will reopen this fall following a \$135 million renovation that reduces capacity from over 3,000 to under 2,500, removing some seats and introducing terraced seating on the main floor so that listeners have



The New York Philharmonic performed in Hamburg's new Elbphilharmonie this spring. The hall, built atop a renovated mixed-used warehouse on the city's harbor, is home to the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra and other musical groups.

Chris Lee



Chris Lee

The New York Philharmonic and Music Director Alan Gilbert acknowledge the ovation this April at Hamburg's new Elbphilharmonie, where the audience surrounds the performers.

comfortable seats, improved acoustics, enhanced stage machinery, a lounge, and more. The renovation led to more performances and community engagement—and the orchestra was rechristened Orchestra Iowa to reflect its wider scope. When the Indiana-based Carmel Symphony Orchestra moved into the new Palladium concert hall at the Center for the Performing Arts in 2011, the orchestra reported increased ticket sales, a rise in average attendance per concert, and heightened public awareness and corporate sponsorship.

In 2015, South Carolina's Charleston Symphony Orchestra reopened its main concert venue, the Gaillard Center, after a transformative \$142 million rebuild that updates the concert hall and

provides spaces for public events as well as government offices. Tanglewood, the summer residence of the Boston Symphony, is undergoing a \$30-million update to its grounds that will in 2019 introduce a concert and lecture space with seating for up to 300 as well as rehearsal studios and

more space and comfort. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa—after a 2008 flood did severe damage to the Paramount Theatre, home to the Cedar Rapids Symphony—a \$32-million restoration respected the venue's historic fabric while updating it with wider, more



Steve Crupi

The Las Vegas Philharmonic's Reynolds Hall at the Smith Center for the Performing Arts opened in 2012.

**Architecture historian Victoria Newhouse has noted that high-profile classical music venues “are replacing museums as linchpins of urban expansion and cultural economics.”**

a cafe. High-profile halls, often designed by brand-name “starchitects,” have opened over the last decade in places as different as Nashville; Las Vegas; Kansas City; Sonoma County, California; and Montreal, Canada. The growth spurt is not just in big cities with big money. In northeast Massachusetts, Indian Hill Music, a non-profit

center for music education that includes the professional Orchestra of Indian Hill, has purchased land for a campus that will include studios and classrooms, community venues, and two performance halls. In Hyannis, Cape Cod, plans are afoot for a performing arts center on a 40-acre site, with a commitment from the Cape Cod

Symphony to make the new concert hall its home. Institutions of higher education have joined the fray: Stanford University in 2013 unveiled its Bing Concert Hall with vineyard-style seating, and Brown University in Rhode Island has a scheme for a new performing arts venue underway.

As the architecture historian Victoria Newhouse concludes in her 2012 book *Site and Sound*, “costly, high-profile” classical music venues “are replacing museums as linchpins of urban expansion and tools of global politics and cultural economics” in the twenty-first century. But Newhouse also notes a “puzzling paradox”: the trend occurs “at a time of what appears to be declining attendance and aging audiences, together with the preference of many young people for less formal environments.”

But is it a paradox? Halls from the New World Center in Miami to La Seine Musicale in Paris are intentionally deploying their new facilities to introduce innovative programming and attract new audiences. Some statistics also indicate a healthy en-

Below: The Gaillard Center in Charleston, South Carolina, is home to the Charleston Symphony Orchestra (performing below left). Gaillard reopened after a transformative renovation in 2015.



William Wright



Courtesy of Charleston Symphony Orchestra

The Los Angeles Philharmonic's Walt Disney Concert Hall, opened in 2003, makes a bold statement in the city's skyline and helped create a downtown arts district. The hall's interior (below right) utilizes vineyard-style seating.

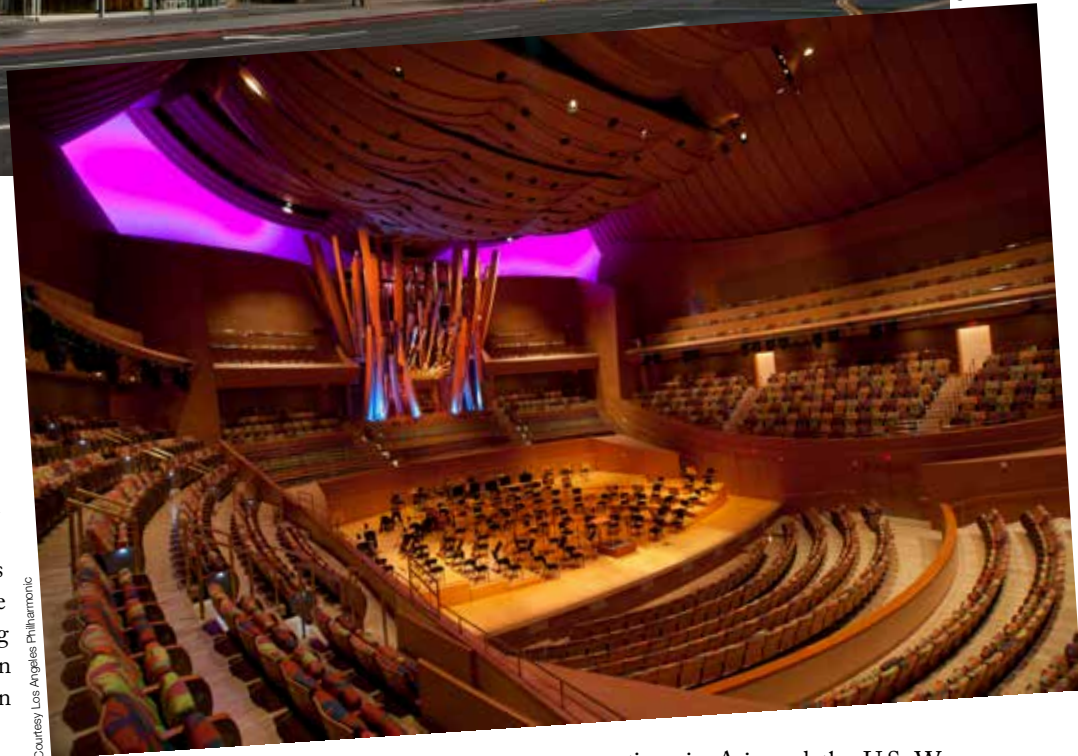


Courtesy Los Angeles Philharmonic

vironment for classical music. Though the League of American Orchestras, in its *Orchestra Facts: 2006-2014* study, noted an audience decline of 10.5 percent between 2000 and 2014, it reported 18 percent growth in the number of subscribing households. The German Orchestra Association in February revealed that the number of classical music events in 2015-16 increased by 10 percent from the previous season, attracting 40 percent more attendance than the country's national soccer league. The Philharmonie de Paris, despite scepticism about filling a hall that seats up to 2,400 people in an outermost city district, currently boasts an attendance rate of 97 percent.

No new hall is a panacea, and no one wants to get stuck with a beautiful, over-budget hall. But thoughtful planning and solid finances can lead to an outstanding performance venue—with top-notch acoustics—that meets the evolving expectations of today's audiences.

"We have an opportunity," says Philharmonie de Paris President Laurent Bayle, "as we did nothing for 50 years to integrate the young generations. But you have to find the right strategy. And a location can



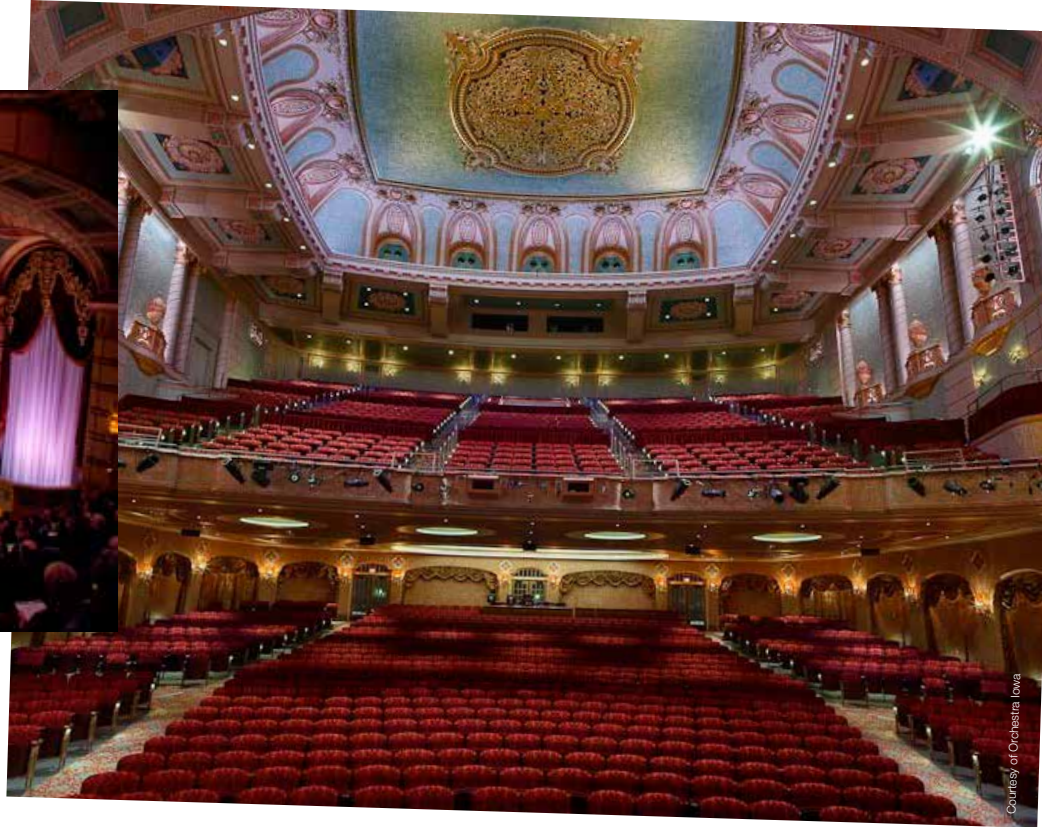
Courtesy Los Angeles Philharmonic

be part of that strategy." Bayle cites high-quality acoustics and the sense of engagement through the main hall's vineyard-style seating; diversification of programming; hands-on activities at the educational center; and reduced ticket prices as a draw for both audiences of the Salle Pleyel—the former residence of the Orchestre de Paris, located in central Paris—and new listeners. "The debate is not just taking place in the old, tired Europe," he says. "There are the

same questions in Asia and the U.S. We are building halls because of the stakes of developing new audiences: of decamping to less privileged neighborhoods, decreasing ticket prices, having spaces to welcome families on the weekend."

### Construction Boom

In the U.S., the opening of new—and newly renovated—concert halls in the last few years has demonstrated how the combination of exciting architecture and vi-



Orchestra Iowa (performing above) makes its home in the Paramount Theatre in Cedar Rapids (right), a 1920s movie palace that was renovated following a 2008 flood. In addition to Orchestra Iowa, the theater hosts concerts, fundraisers, corporate meetings, dance recitals, and a Broadway Series.



During the current renovation and updating of historic Music Hall, home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Assistant Principal Bass Matthew Zory has taken behind-the-scenes photos that capture the construction process. Zory is planning to publish a book of his Music Hall documentation project. Find more of these and other photos on [his Facebook page](#).

sionary artistic programming can revitalize both an orchestra and its urban landscape. The Los Angeles Philharmonic's Disney Hall and the New World Center in Miami Beach—both Frank Gehry buildings with vineyard-style seating—have won attention and audiences that persist past the excitement of the grand opening. Six years after moving into its new home in 2011, the New World Symphony—a post-graduate orchestral academy founded by Michael Tilson Thomas—reports that per-

formances in its 756-seat hall are generally sold-out, with up to 80 percent covered by subscriptions. The New World Center's "Wallcasts"—free concert screenings on the building's facade with high-quality video and surround-sound acoustics—now headline tourism posters under the slogan "It's so Miami." Each Wallcast attracts an average of 2,100 people, who mingle on the lawn of SoundScape Park. A 2014 survey revealed that 30 percent of audience members are under 45 years old and that

34 percent identify themselves as a person of color. One-quarter of attendees had not been to any classical event in the preceding year.

"People in the community have come to trust New World," says Executive Vice President and Provost John Kieser. "The building has allowed us the freedom to



The striking profile of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts (above left), home of the Kansas City Symphony, created a new landmark in the orchestra's hometown. Like many new concert halls, the lobby of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts (above), welcomes visitors with a dramatic urban gathering space. A performance at Helzberg Hall (left), by the Kansas City Symphony.

combining Riesling with Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and Zweigelt with Schubert. An in-house carpenter created small tables for the main hall. Up next is "InsideOut," a collaboration between six fellows and nine video art and film students from the Pratt Institute in New York to create a series of installations in the main hall and as a Wallcast.

La Seine Musicale will similarly be a space in which the Insula Orchestra, founded in 2012, can introduce innovative programming. The hall is part of a redevelopment project on Seguin Island, formerly a manufacturing site of Renault automobiles to the west of Paris. Music Director Laurence Equilbey cites the inclusion of a pit in the 1,150-seat, vineyard-style auditorium as an important feature for her agenda. "The DNA of many projects will be that they are treated visually and scenically," she says. "We will work with directors, sculptors, filmmakers, choreographers." The orchestra specializes in repertoire of the 18th and 19th centuries, performing on period instruments

create programs and experiences where people want to go." Inside the building, alternative formats such as mini-concerts and "Pulse" events—which alternate DJ sets with live orchestral music—attract 42 percent in first-time attendees, according to a 2013 study. Concerts at New World Center include specialized lighting and visuals to set the mood before the concert, exploiting projection surfaces which double as acoustic sails. "The more we can do to make people think differently about the art form, the better off it will be," says Kieser. "The building gives us the capacity to do the experimentation."

The New Audience Fellow Initiative offers New World's musicians an opportunity to develop new concert formats, making them responsible for not just programming but marketing. A "Fiesta Cubana" curated by two hornists brought in artwork from a local contemporary art gallery that lined the lobby and was reproduced as digital images in the main hall, where a concert featured 20th-century Cuban composers and contemporary composer Aurelio de la Vega. In "Heard it through the Grape Vine," a cellist partnered with a local sommelier to explore the sensory connections between wine and music,

while also seeking to explore the latest technology. This season, they collaborate with the Spanish physical-theater troupe La Fura dels Baus on Haydn's *Creation* in a multi-media production in which all singers carry digital tablets. "The [classical] era is fascinating because Europe is bubbling with revolutionary ideas," says Equilbey. "One can easily find resonance with both young people and the audience at large."

Equilbey looks forward to opening the orchestra to a wider audience by cross-referencing with other events at La Seine Musicale, which includes a hall for non-classical music with seating for up to 6,000 people (Bob Dylan sang there on April 20). "We can create synergy with pop, rock, or even electronic programs," says Equilbey. The program "Night and Dreams," exploring the music of Schubert, coincided with a "Night and Rave" in the other hall.

### Reverb and Renewal

Preservation, not just innovation, is key for some institutions. The Cleveland Orchestra in 2000 restored its historic Severance Hall to enhance both interior details and acoustics, bringing the reverbera-

The Nashville Symphony's Laura Turner Hall at Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which opened in 2006, has a shoebox-style auditorium. The exterior of Schermerhorn Symphony Center makes a statement about the orchestra's role in a city with a vibrant musical life.

## In the U.S., the opening of new—and newly renovated—concert halls in the last few years has demonstrated how exciting architecture and visionary artistic programming can revitalize both an orchestra and its urban landscape.

tion time up from 1.6 to 1.8 seconds, the same as Symphony Hall in Boston, considered, along with Vienna's Musikverein, to have some of the world's best acoustics. "A concert hall should first and foremost provide a wonderful aural experience," says Cleveland Orchestra Music Director

Franz Welser-Möst. "There are enough examples of renovations where an excellent acoustic was ruined." Welser-Möst maintains that the vineyard-style hall, which gives the audience a sense of proximity to the stage, has no advantage over the shoebox or horseshoe. "At the Musikverein or Severance Hall, many architects today would say that those sitting at the very back are too far away. But acoustically, it's as if they're right next to the orchestra."

Thanks to targeted initiatives of the orchestra's Center for New Audiences, launched in 2010, more than 20 percent of the Cleveland Orchestra audience is now under 25 years old. "We try to make it an experience from beginning to end," says Welser-Möst. "If you are lucky enough to own such an impressive hall, then it is not so difficult." This May, the orchestra presents Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in a semi-

staging by Yuval Sharon that will hang a transparent box over the orchestra and include projections and choreography. "I've experienced some of the most fascinating performances, both in opera and theater, in spaces which did not have sophisticated machinery," says Welser-Möst.

Architect Jack Diamond, whose firm Diamond Schmitt Architects will preside alongside Heatherwick Studio over the renovation of Geffen Hall in New York, concurs with Welser-Möst that acoustics should be the number-one priority. He calls the shoebox model "tried and true": "You want the right reverberation time so that the last seat in the house has the same density as the first seat in the house. An even distribution of all the frequencies is



Courtesy Nashville Symphony



Courtesy Nashville Symphony



New World Center, the New World Symphony's home in Miami Beach, presents concerts inside and out, via "WallCasts" projected on a wall facing a public park. Inside the center, the orchestra takes advantage of new and emerging technology, including (below center) for a recent concert featuring Stravinsky's *Circus Polka* with digital animation by Emily Henricks.



Emilio Cobarrino



Ru'Dias-Abdis



Courtesy of the Center for the Performing Arts

critical in making a successful hall." In his design of sites such as the Marinsky Theatre and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra's Maison Symphonique, which opened in 2011, Diamond has found the height of the reflective space above musicians to be a critical issue "which is often not well understood. But the most flexible thing is the conductor," he adds. "The responsive conductor can compensate for strengths and weaknesses in a hall in a way that architects frequently cannot."

At Geffen (formerly Avery Fisher) Hall, which in 2019 will undergo its fifth renovation since opening in 1962, New York Philharmonic Music Director Alan Gilbert countered the problematic acoustics by splitting the violins and moving the cellos and double basses to stage right in

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order to create a better balance. Meanwhile, the fortress-like exterior of Lincoln Center, reflecting the standard architectural approach to performing arts centers in the mid-20th century, lacked the inviting air of more modern complexes. Diamond says that all his firm's projects are distinguished by the ability to reconcile exterior and interior. He cites the transparency of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto, completed in 2006, as key to its success: "You see people attending pre-concert events in the aerial amphitheater. You see people in jeans at the bar. That makes it psychologically accessible. And when you're inside, you get new views of the city."

The New World Symphony's Kieser sees a demand for halls whose infrastructures move "beyond the presentation of music in a traditional sense" to include sophis-

The home of the Carmel Symphony Orchestra in Carmel, Indiana, is the Palladium at the Center for the Performing Arts, a striking multi-sided structure.



Photographie\_Patetonic

“It sends a signal to people that classical music is not only a museum program but is important to us today.” Having attracted one million visitors to its public foyer with panoramic views of the city last February, the Elbphilharmonie announced that it had already become one of Germany’s top tourist draws. The city hopes to overtake Bayreuth, Berlin, and Dresden as the country’s number-one music destination by 2025. But as Lieben-Seutter admits, “the biggest question is what happens after three years—if it is just initial curiosity, or if the house is so well-positioned that we can count on such a big audience.” **S**

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Jean Bultheu

The exterior of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra’s Maison Symphonique (top) makes a point of being open and accessible to city life. Above, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Kent Nagano take a bow at Maison Symphonique.

licated lighting and cross-pollination with other art forms such as video, dance, and drama. He considers more intimate venues such as National Sawdust in Brooklyn, a repurposed factory that focuses on small-ensemble concerts of new music, or the San Francisco Symphony’s SoundBox, a converted rehearsal space in its main hall that hosts multimedia orchestral concerts with a lounge-like atmosphere, to be adventurous.

While the Musikverein in Vienna and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam are

still considered the acoustic gold standard, much 20th-century and contemporary repertoire is arguably more at home in modern halls with a transparent, less resonant sound design. The city of Hamburg now has the luxury of dividing programming between the Laieszhalle, a traditional, shoebox hall opened in 1908, and the recently opened Elbphilharmonie, where the acoustics are so clear that you can hear a pin drop. “It is a good idea to build a new hall because it gives value to the content,” says Intendant Christoph Lieben-Seutter.

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