

A New Start for the Disney Concert Hall Project (Los Angeles)

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Nagata Acoustics Inc. is the acoustical consultant for Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles. We are, of course, especially glad that the project is now moving forward again this year. Previously, the project was plagued with fiscal woes that drew all activity to a screeching halt. Some outside observers even questioned whether the hall would ever be completed.

History of the Project

A full decade ago, in 1988, the Disney Concert Hall project committee invited a number of architects and acousticians to present their ideas for a new home for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. As a result of that competition, the U.S. architect Frank O. Gehry, a local Santa Monica resident, was selected as the hall's architect. Nagata Acoustics was chosen as the acoustical consultant. But, as the design planning for the hall progressed, it became clear that the cost of the hall would well exceed the scale of the project's original budget. In the autumn of 1994, midway through the architect's preparation of the hall's Construction Documents, a "freeze" order was put on the entire project. At that point in time, the on-site construction of a six-level underground parking garage (with a 2,500 vehicle capacity) had not only been completed, but was already fully operational.

Disney Concert Hall's Raison d'Étre

The Disney Concert Hall project is the brain-child of the late Lillian Disney, Walt Disney's widow and a dedicated patron of the arts during her long lifetime of 98 years. Mrs. Disney initially donated \$50 million for the construction of the 2,400-seat concert hall, which, upon completion, would become part of the Music Center of the Los Angeles County in downtown Los Angeles. A primary function of the new hall is to be the home hall of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The site of Disney Concert hall is located directly across from Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, where the Los Angeles Philharmonic currently holds its regular season performances.



Figure 1: Interior Model of Disney Concert Hall

Disney Corporation, Others, and a Revived Economy Add Support

Since autumn 1994, when the freeze was put in place, the project's supporters persistently worked to raise the necessary funds to resume development of Disney Concert Hall. As the U.S. economy strengthened, donations grew. Then, in December 1997, Disney Corporation decided to infuse \$25 million into the project. (Prior to this corporate donation, all contributions bearing the Disney name had come been from the Disney family.) Suddenly, all lights were green again and the Disney Hall project is now happily moving forward at a rapid pace.

Presently, every effort is being concentrated on completion of the Construction Documents. Groundbreaking is scheduled for March 1999. Construction of the hall is expected to last approximately three years. If all goes as planned, therefore, Disney Concert Hall's completion and opening will take place in 2002.

A Perspective from Outside the United States

Four years ago, when Nagata Acoustics was told that the project had been frozen, we were quite literally dumfounded. This turn of events would have been totally beyond the realm of possibility in Japan. Here, when a project is begun, the budget is set, and then it becomes the responsibility of the architect and general contractor to complete the project within the allotted budget and time schedule. In Japan, the assumptions that the budget and timeline will be met pass for plain common sense.

By contrast, in the United States, at a point when the budget is still somewhere between a rough estimate of the available funds and a final figure, the design of the project moves forward and, a give-and-take process unfolds in which the budget becomes finalized as the design also reaches its final form. Depending on the project, if there is consensus on surpassing an initial budget, the founders and supporters of a U.S. project will work very hard to raise the extra money needed to realize the architectural design they want built. Consequently, in the United States, and in Europe as well, we frequently hear of projects being temporarily put on hold because of a lack of funds to implement the project's design. In recent memory, concert halls in Philadelphia and Bremen (in Germany), as well as the Cardiff Opera House in the U.K., come to mind as projects that were put on hold because of funding problems. The construction of the Sydney Opera House is also known to have surpassed its original budget in terms of both the time and money required for its completion.

With so many examples of projects in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, in which costs overran budgets and completion dates went beyond schedules, perhaps Japan's typically on-budget, on-schedule project completions are the ones that should cause surprise! When the budget and completion deadline for a Japanese project are reasonable, everything flows smoothly. But we also encounter situations where the sponsor, often a governmental body, makes seemingly impossible demands to restrain costs or set an early completion date. There are also too many situations in which the budget and timeline are set without sufficient study and input from experts, and then the architect, acoustician, and contractor all must somehow meet the unreasonable expectations.

In Japan, where a firm budget and schedule rule, halls are completed and opened for use according to their original plans. In the United States and elsewhere, priority is given to deciding exactly what will be built, even if the result is that a project may not be completed until many years after it was originally needed or desired. Is one of these

methods better than the other? Perhaps it all depends on those ubiquitous factors of who, what, when, where, and why.