

The Center for Shanghai Symphony Orchestra with Concert Halls Project

By Dr. Yasuhisa Toyota

Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, which was founded in 1879 and has the distinction of being the oldest orchestra in Asia, celebrates its 130th anniversary this year. Even when compared with the most venerable orchestras in Europe and the United States, only the Vienna Philharmonic, founded in 1842, is older. The Shanghai Symphony Orchestra has a longer history than the Berlin Philharmonic (founded in 1882), the Amsterdam Concertgebouw (founded in 1888), the Boston Symphony Orchestra (founded in 1881) or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (founded in 1891). In Japan, the establishment of the first orchestra came much later, in 1926, with the establishment of the New Symphony Orchestra (which later became the NHK Symphony Orchestra).

Shanghai Symphony Orchestra performs its regular subscription concerts at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, completed in 1998. However, for its daily practice and rehearsal sessions, the orchestra uses an old, wood-framed structure that belongs to it exclusively, but that provides a poor acoustical environment inappropriate to the needs and performance level of the orchestra.

To address the situation of the orchestra's current practice and rehearsal facilities, in June, 2008, the City of Shanghai decided to fund the design and construction of a rehearsal hall dedicated exclusively to use by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Immediately thereafter, the city proceeded to put its decision into action by holding a design competition to select the project architect. Local Shanghai architects, Japanese and U.S. firms participated in the design competition, which resulted in the project being awarded to Japan's Arata Isozaki & Associates.

From the inception of this project, the project's two sponsors, the City of Shanghai and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, retained Nagata Acoustics as their acoustical consultant. In this capacity, we served as acoustical advisor during the design competition stage and are continuing our acoustical consulting responsibilities through the design and construction management phases of the project.

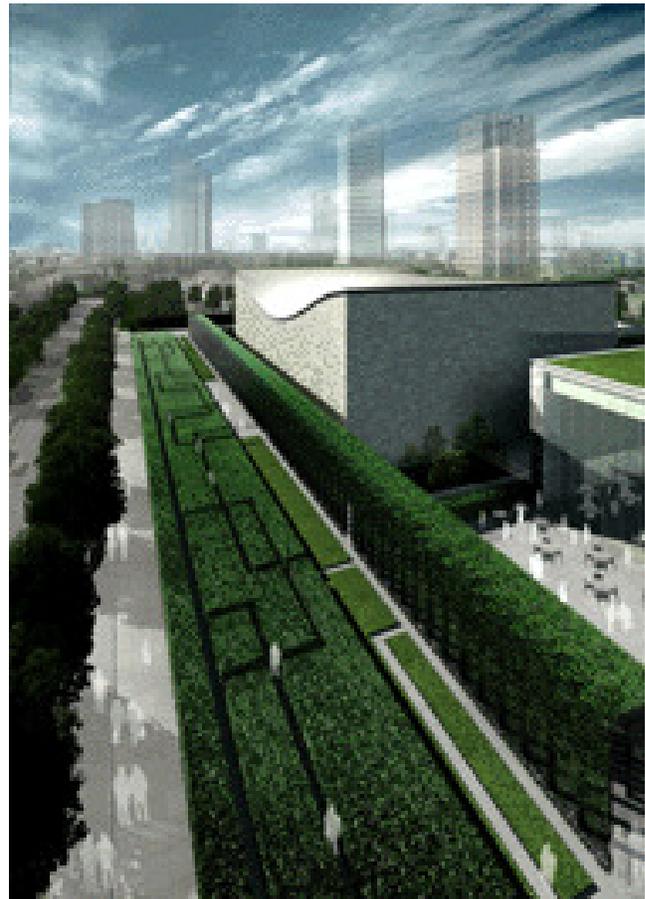


Figure 1: Exterior Perspective Drawing

The new rehearsal hall's planned location places it conveniently in a central part of the city, next to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which is also known for its long and laudable history. From the start of this project, the design approach has been to enable the rehearsal hall to also be used for small scale concerts. Initially, the design aimed to provide seating for an audience of about 800 to 900, but as the design progressed, the scale became increased to 1,200 seats. The accompanying exterior and interior perspective drawings reflect the 1,200 seat design.

Currently, the project has completed the schematic design phase (equivalent to Japan's basic design phase plus a portion of the design development). We will now begin development of the detailed designs while, in the meantime, construction of the building foundation started in this August, 2009 at the construction site. Construction of the structure is planned to be completed before Expo 2010.



Figure 2: Interior Perspective Drawing