

## New World Symphony's Home Hall Opens in Miami

By Dr. Yasuhisa Toyota

On January 25, 2011, in Miami, Florida, a new concert hall for the New World Symphony (NWS) held its gala opening celebration and the first night of a series of inaugural concerts. The NWS is the United States' only full-time orchestral academy, where the best-of-the-best of promising young graduates from music universities and conservatories get to spend three years perfecting their artistry before becoming members of professional orchestras.

Officially named "New World Center", the new concert hall building has a 756-seat concert hall that the NWS will use on a daily basis, plus an assortment of

30 coaching rooms, ensemble rooms and technical suites of varying sizes. Architect Frank Gehry (Gehry Partners, LLP) conceived the architectural design, Theatre Projects Consultants (TPC) provided theatre equipment design and specification services, and Nagata Acoustics served as the project's acoustical consultant from the design phase through the completion of the project.

Our readers can find details about this project's programming and basic design in an article I wrote in the Nagata Acoustics February, 2008 newsletter, shortly after the building's architectural design completed. Here I will briefly summarize highlights of the design.

1. The hall combines a stage that accommodates a full-scale orchestra configuration with an audience seating area of 756 seats, a seat count typical of a small scale hall.
2. The audience seating surrounds the orchestra in an arena configuration.
3. Five large white wall surfaces set above the audience seating make it possible to project lighting and other images that can be seen by the entire audience. (The hall has 11 projectors.)
4. A portion of the stage and the orchestra-level seating can be raised or lowered to either stage or seating floor height, maximizing the layout's flexibility.
5. In addition to the main stage, the hall has four small satellite stages interspersed with the audience seating. These stages will be used for programs that include solos or small ensembles performing simultaneously with each other and/or musicians on the main stage, and can also be used for consecutive performances.

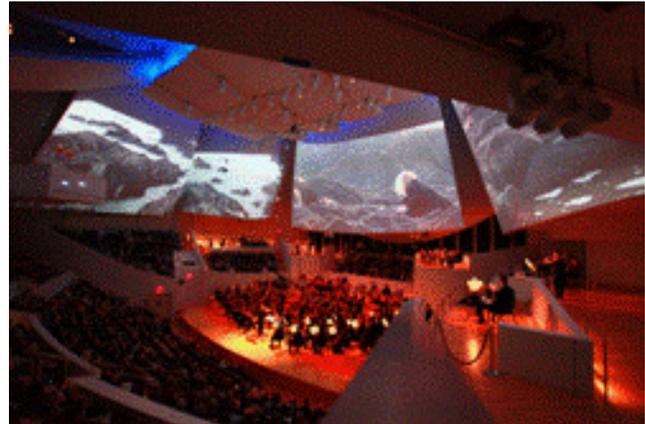


Figure 1: NWS performing world premiere of Polaris: Voyage for Orchestra (music by Thomas Andés and film by Tal Rosner) copyright Rui Dias-Adios

## Performances on Satellite Stages and a Music & Movie Collaboration

The hall's inaugural concerts, under the artistic direction of the NWS founder Maestro Michael Tilson Thomas, spanned three days of ambitious and varied programming that showcased the hall's features and equipment. On the first evening, 11 string, woodwind and brass musicians placed themselves on the small satellite stages located amidst the audience seating to perform the prelude from Bach's Cello Suite No. 2, using an arrangement scored especially for this inaugural concert. The acoustical effect of locating the performers on the small stages gave new meaning to the term "surround sound" and the beauty of the sound that flowed through the hall during this performance truly took my breath away.



Figure 2: New World Center Wallcast™ Copyright Tomas Loewy

Among the works performed on the second day of inaugural events, the world premiere of Thomas Adès' "Polaris: Voyage for Orchestra" was particularly noteworthy because of the movie collaboration that accompanied the music performance. The movie, produced specifically for this collaboration, was projected onto the five large walls above the hall's audience seating. This kind of combined music and visual concert offers one possible evolutionary path for orchestral performances. The combined music and movie collaboration was jointly commissioned by several orchestras, including, among others, the New York Philharmonic. It will be interesting to see how the movie portion of the performance will be implemented in the halls of the other orchestras that commissioned the work.

The third day's inaugural program bore the title "A Schubert Journey". The NWS prepared an extensive sampling of the composer's works, spanning the genres of Lied, piano composition, chamber music, choral works and orchestral pieces. This marathon concert lasted three hours, punctuated by two intermissions. The program made full use of both the main stage and the small, satellite stages as musicians seated on one stage played a portion of a Schubert piece, such as one movement from one of his symphonies, and then another group of musicians, seated on another stage, continued the program with a portion of a different composition. The experimental manner of staging "A Schubert Journey" gave the audience a taste of how the new hall can be used.

## Wagner and Copland Showcase the Acoustical Value of the Hall's High-ceiling Design

This project's key acoustical challenge came from the hall's combination of a small, 756-seat audience seating area with a stage that accommodates large-scale orchestra configurations. We specified an extremely high ceiling height for a hall that seats on the order of 750 persons. Above the stage, the ceiling height soars to 15 m. (49 ft), a height commensurate with the ceiling height of halls that seat on the order of 2,000 persons, such as Los Angeles' Walt Disney Hall.

The acoustical value of implementing such a high ceiling was perhaps most apparent on the second day of concerts, during the performances of Wagner's Overture to the Flying Dutchman and Copland's Symphony No. 3. During both of these works the hall proved that it graciously delivers the rich acoustics of a full orchestra. I found that the hall handles the range of dynamics from pianissimo to fortissimo with ease.

Based on these full-orchestra performances, I'd suggest that the NWS will benefit from becoming more familiar with this new hall. After all, these are young musicians and they gave the impression of performing at full power. They can produce this same sound volume while easing up a bit. Being able to do so should be simply a matter of time as the performers become comfortable in the new hall. With the short duration of just two months from the completion of construction to opening night, the full orchestra had only a few rehearsals before the NWS performed the inaugural concerts. As the NWS continues to practice and use the hall, the orchestra will make it their own. It takes some time for an orchestra, and especially one full of young artists, to perfect the sound in its home hall.

### **Media Attention**

The hall's inaugural concerts drew attention from U.S. east coast mass media outlets, including reporters and music critics from New York and Washington, D.C. Perhaps because Miami, Florida is about as far away from my native Japan as anywhere on the globe, a Japanese mass media presence at the concerts was conspicuously absent.

However, I do know of one Japanese woman who came all the way from Japan for the inaugural concerts. Her name is Hiroe Ushio, and she is a huge fan of Maestro Michael Tilson Thomas. Ms. Ushio publishes a Japanese Web site about Maestro Thomas and his other orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony (SFS). Through her loyal dedication to Maestro Thomas and the SFS, she has established a direct connection with the SFS and she provides Japanese readers with timely and official information about the SFS' activities. This time, she flew to Miami for the hall's inaugural concerts and wrote in detail about the events. As a result, even "half-way around the world" in Japan, classical music lovers can read the full story of the opening concerts of the NWS' New World Center Hall.