

## La Jolla Music Society’s Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center Opens

By Daniel Beckmann

On April 5, 6, and 7, the La Jolla Music Society celebrated the gala opening of their new home, The Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center. Known as “The Conrad”, we introduced our work on this project in the August, 2015 issue of this news letter. La Jolla is a sea-side community within the city of San Diego, CA, about twenty minutes’ drive north of Downtown. The new performing arts center is designed by Epstein Joslin Architects of Cambridge, MA, together with Nagata Acoustics and Theater Consultants Collaborative. San Diego-based Joseph Wong Design Associates acted as the local executive and architect of record.



- |   |                                       |    |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | The Baker-Baum Concert Hall           | 6  | The Atkinson Room (donor room)                       |
| 2 | The JAI (flexible use space)          | 7  | Glazer Box Office and front-of-house offices         |
| 3 | The Wu Tsai QRT.yrd (courtyard/lobby) | 8  | Una Davis Family Administrative Offices              |
| 4 | The Belanich Terrace                  | 9  | Main entrance and The Brian and Silvija Devine Lobby |
| 5 | Rehearsal rooms                       | 10 | Carolyn's (concessions)                              |

Figure 1: Diagram of the Facility  
(©Epstein Joslin Architects)

The Conrad is composed of two main performance spaces: the 513-seat Baker-Baum Concert Hall and the JAI, a cabaret-style space, which accommodates up to 128 people in various flexible configurations. Between the two spaces is the Wu Tsai Qrt.yrd, which serves as the principal outdoor lobby for the building, making full use of San Diego’s year-round comfortable weather. The offices of the Music Society are also housed in the building, as well as the Atkinson Donor Room.

### The Baker-Baum Concert Hall

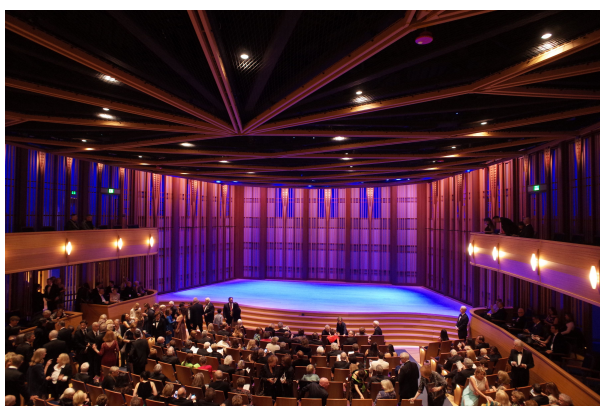


Figure 2

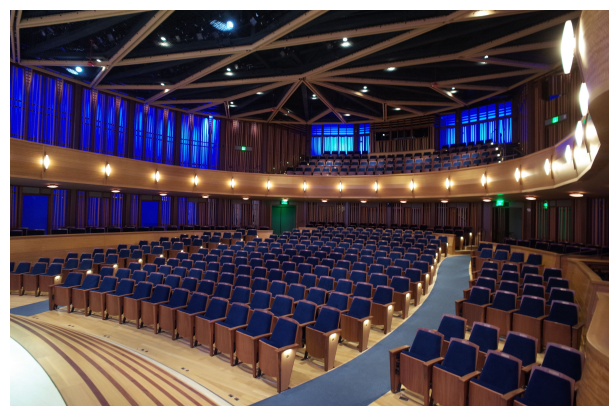


Figure 3

Baker Baum Concert Hall

The Concert Hall is designed to first of all be an excellent venue for the performance of classical chamber music. The Village of La Jolla has a height of 9.1m (30ft) which must be respected for all new buildings, including The Conrad. Even though this resulted in a slightly reduced ceiling height (8.3m, 27ft) compared to our typical designs, we were able to create an excellent space for chamber music by creatively exploring other options together with the architects. To achieve the desired results, we sought to increase the volume of the Concert Hall as much as possible. This meant expanding the acoustic volume of the Concert Hall horizontally rather than vertically, by allocating the maximum possible space on the site to the footprint of the Concert Hall.

The audience is laid out in a compact yet comfortable arrangement at the center of the Concert Hall, shape of which resembles very strongly a horse-shoe. This shape is clearly visible in the acoustically transparent wooden “nest” that wraps around the audience and stage. The main outer volume of the Concert Hall is formed by rough plaster on heavy concrete blocks, and is washed by blue lights. This additional volume, shown in the light grey in the accompanying plan, between the audience and the heavy walls helps expand the space available for the necessary early reflections, and the large volume necessary for richness, or warmth. Behind the wooden nest walls, surrounding the stage on three sides, are the soffits which send supporting reflections directly back to the performers. Large areas of sound absorbing curtains are suspended from the ceiling on rails in this interstitial volume as well, allowing the Concert Hall to be prepared for amplified performances without making any visual changes to the Concert Hall.

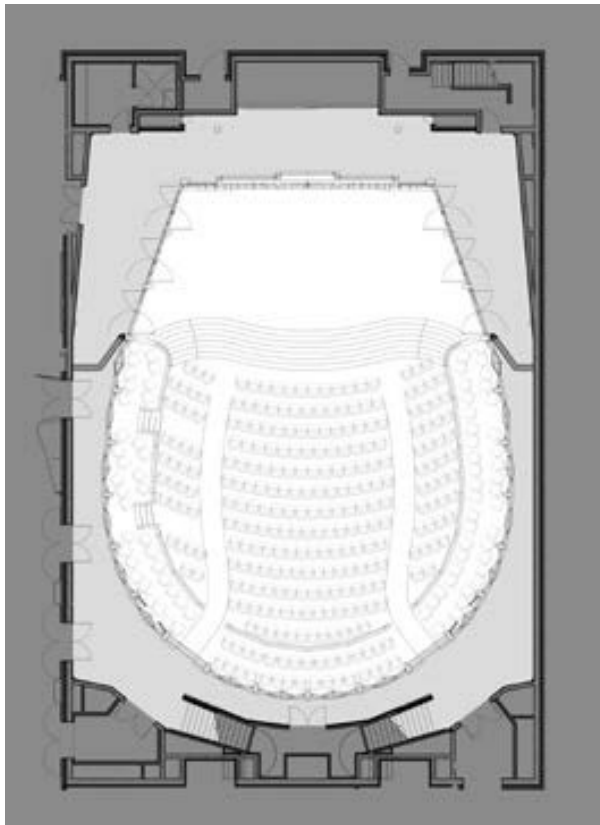


Figure 4: 1F Main Floor Level

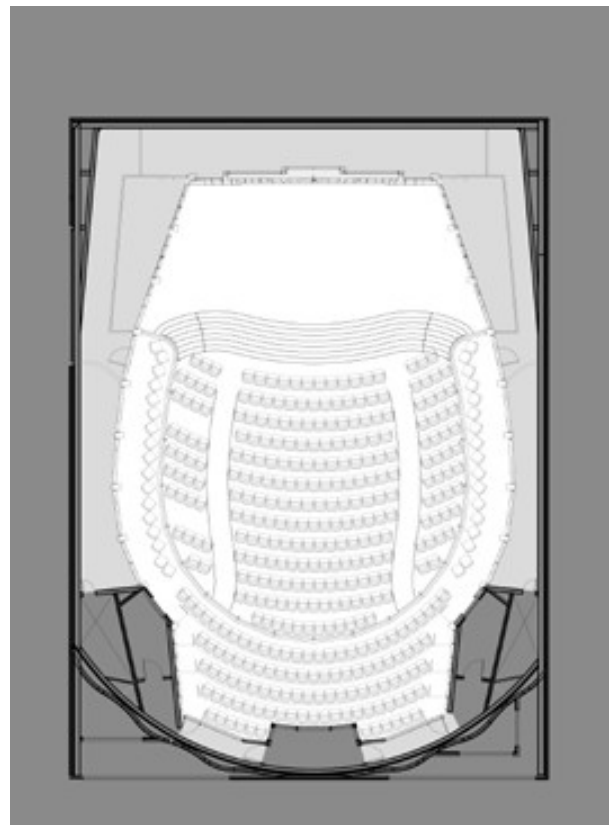


Figure 5: 2F Balcony Level

#### Floor Plans of the Baker-Baum Concert Hall

## The JAI

Across the courtyard from the Concert Hall is the smaller performance space, called The JAI. It is a cabaret-style space and is designed to host many different types of amplified events. In keeping with the cabaret concept, it is usually set with tables and chairs facing the stage, set in front of tall, tree-like windows. In this configuration, The JAI can seat 102 patrons in this configuration. In a more simple configuration with chairs facing the stage laid out in rows, it can hold 128 people.



Figure 6: The JAI

The acoustic design focuses more on amplified performances and events, and is therefore much less reverberant than the Concert Hall. The ceiling is 8.5m (28ft) tall, and is completely covered with absorption. The lowest 2.3m (8ft) of the side walls, and the entire rear wall containing the bar and the control room are also covered with absorption.

## Opening Concerts

On Friday April 5, the first public concert was given after a cocktail party and ceremonial ribbon cutting. The 90-minute concert featured performances by a variety of different artists, most impressively uniting the former music directors of SummerFest music festival annually held since 1986: violinist Cho-Liang Lin, cellist David Finckel, pianist Wu Han and violist Heiichiro Ohyama. The newly-named music director of SummerFest, pianist Inon Barnatan, also performed several solo pieces, together with jookin dancer Lil Buck. The Music Society brought superstar pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet as well as popular violinist Hilary Hahn to play, and ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro and video artist Osman Koc. Finally, together with the Mirò Quartet, the program closed with the first movement of the Mendelssohn Octet. The intimate atmosphere, created by the calm interior and gentle lighting, enhanced the rich, reverberant acoustics of the space. Even from my seat at the center of the balcony, about 18m (60 ft) from the stage, I could feel the presence and power of each instrument. Each voice was clearly identifiable, as if sitting on the stage with the musicians.

During the program, many features of the new hall were showcased, such as the moveable upstage wall for a video tribute to major donor Conrad Prebys, and the color-changing lights washing the outer walls gave a different character to the space for each piece. The encore finale brought string members of the San Diego Youth Symphony to the stage, as well as Jake Shimabukuro and Lil Buck for a very charming rendition of “Over the Rainbow”. On Saturday, April 6, the British singer Seal gave a performance, and on Sunday, April 7, the swing band The Hot Sardines performed in the JAI.

After the opening, the new Conrad will present performances almost every day until June. The Society will begin celebrating its 50th season with the SummerFest music festival in the summer. The Conrad is well worth a visit for

those who find themselves on the West Coast.

The calendar for the new Performing Arts Center can be found at the La Jolla Music Society: <https://ljms.org/events/>